O3 - Policy Recommendations

Professional skills' development for recognition and validation of informal and nonformal competences learning of migrants and refugees & labour market inclusion

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Programma integra
Introduction

I. The REC project

"REC – Professional skills’ development for recognition and validation of informal and non-formal competences learning of migrants and refugees & labour market inclusion" is a European project aimed at promoting the labour market inclusion of migrants and refugees by focusing on recognition and validation of skills acquired in informal or non-formal contexts.

To this end, REC aimed at creating common and standardized professional competences of VET practitioners and stakeholders in line with EU standards. Furthermore, REC intends to improve and share tools and practice that can make visible and validated experience, talent and informal and non-formal competences of migrants and refugees.

The project is co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme 2018, Activity Key 2, Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of best practices.

II. The REC Policy Recommendations

This document contains a list of 10 Policy Recommendations, developed by the Programma integra and validated by the whole partnership at transnational level through specific focus groups involving stakeholders from Italy, Spain, Germany, Greece, Belgium and France, and declined for 3 different target groups:

❖ decision makers
❖ sector practitioners (trainers, guidance experts, intercultural mediators, counsellors, etc.)
❖ general public

Policy recommendations intend to enable competent national or regional authorities to align their systems with a EU-validated model (the REC model) focused on a specific target and based on EU standards (ESCO - EQAVET). The choice of including also general public as target of the Policy recommendations is intended to widen the knowledge of citizens about the important role played by the EU system of recognition of competencies and skills (especially transversal/non-formal) for a better integration in the labour market, in particular for disadvantaged categories (such as long term unemployed or migrants/ refugees).

The coordination of this task is in charge of Programma integra with the contribution of all the REC partners.

III. Glossary

ESCO is the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. ESCO is part of the Europe 2020 strategy. The ESCO classification identifies and categorises skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant for the EU labour market and education and training¹.

¹ For more information on ESCO: https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal?resetLanguage=true&newLanguage=en
**EQAVET - European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training** is a European wide framework to support quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET). EQAVET emerged from the 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council, which invited Member States to use indicative descriptors and indicators to strengthen the quality of VET provision\(^2\).

**ECVET - European credit system for vocational education and training** allows learners to accumulate, transfer and use their learning in units as these units are achieved. This enables building a qualification at learners’ own pace from learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, in their own country and abroad. The system is based on units of learning outcomes as part of qualifications that can be assessed and validated\(^3\).

**EUROPASS** is a set of five documents to present competences and qualifications. The new Europass includes an innovative digital e-portafolio complementing the traditional Europass CV\(^4\).

**EQF - European Qualifications Framework** is a common European reference framework whose purpose is to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems. The core of the EQF is its eight reference levels defined in terms of learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills and autonomy-responsibility. Learning outcomes express what individuals know, understand and are able to do at the end of a learning process. Countries develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) to implement the EQF\(^5\).

**Qualification** is an official record (certificate, diploma) of achievement which recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination; and/or the requirements for an individual to enter, or progress within an occupation.

**Formal Learning:** educational systems exist to promote formal learning, which follows a syllabus and is intentional in the sense that learning is the goal of all the activities learners engage in. Learning outcomes are measured by tests and other forms of assessment. Adult migrants engage in formal learning when they take a course in the language of their host community. If the course is based on an analysis of their needs, it will follow a syllabus that specifies the communicative repertoire to be achieved by successful learners. The nature and

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\(^2\) For more information on EQAVET: [https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1536&langId=en](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1536&langId=en)


\(^4\) For more information on Europass: [https://europa.eu/europass/en](https://europa.eu/europass/en)

scope of that repertoire should be reflected in whatever forms of assessment accompany the course.

Non-formal Learning takes place outside formal learning environments but within some kind of organisational framework. It arises from the learner’s conscious decision to master a particular activity, skill or area of knowledge and is thus the result of intentional effort. But it need not follow a formal syllabus or be governed by external accreditation and assessment. Adult migrants engage in non-formal language learning when they participate in organised activities that combine the learning and use of their target language with the acquisition of a particular skill or complex of knowledge.

Informal Learning takes place outside schools and colleges and arises from the learner’s involvement in activities that are not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind. Informal learning is involuntary and an inescapable part of daily life; for that reason, it is sometimes called experiential learning. Learning that is formal or non-formal is partly intentional and partly incidental: when we consciously pursue any learning target we cannot help learning things that are not part of that target. Informal learning, however, is exclusively incidental.

Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the pillars of any lifelong learning policy. Consequently, many countries have developed a national system for RVA. Using RVA for integration of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning into national, regional and global qualifications frameworks is of the utmost importance. Integration into Qualifications Frameworks (QF) will help ensure participants’ access to education institutions and workplaces.
Territorial Contexts

I. Local contexts of the REC project: framework

**Italy**: the starting point for addressing the policy recommendation are the Dlgs 13/2013 and the DI 30 June 2015, defining standard requirements on recognition of non-formal competences. In particular, the Legislative Decree No. 13/2013 implements Law No. 92/2012 and defines the minimum standards of the National Skills Certification System. The Interministerial Decree of 30 June 2015 subsequently established the National Reference Framework of Regional Qualifications and Related Competences, which defines a framework of common references for the operation of services for the identification, validation and certification of competences and implements the construction of the National Directory of Education and Training Qualifications (provided for by Legislative Decree 13/2013).

**Spain**: the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications serves as an objective reference for this procedure, since it lists the vocational qualifications to be recognised and accredited, identified in the productive system on the basis of the skills required to practice the profession. In order to facilitate knowledge of this procedure and its requirements, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport provides all stakeholders with the IT tool ACREDITA through the TodoFP web portal.

**Greece**: there is currently no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning. However, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive national certification system of non–formal education, as perceived by Greek Law.

**Germany**: Missing or incomplete written evidence of qualification presents a difficult situation. With the Federal Recognition Act (BQFG) from 2012 Germany entitles bearers of foreign qualifications to an examination of their competences. This law covers only professions within the field of responsibility of the federal government. There are many professions – for example teachers, educators, engineers, architects, social workers – where the administrative regions or “Länder” are responsible.
**France:** Validation of Prior Learning (VAE) is a French procedure that can lead to the award of all or part of professional qualifications at all levels, without the need for formal training. The development of VAE has been concomitant with the restructuring of the certification system in France, with the establishment of a single national directory of professional qualifications (Registre National Certifications Professionnelles).

The qualifications obtained via VAE are the same as those awarded in the context of initial or continuing training or apprenticeship. This validation is based on the knowledge and skills acquired through a person’s experience in various contexts.

The State (via the Ministry concerned by the targeted certification) verifies the eligibility of candidates for VAE, i.e. the duration of the candidates’ experience and the relevance of the activities carried out in relation to the targeted qualification. Thus, any person, regardless of age, nationality, status and level of training, who can prove at least one year’s experience directly related to the qualification in question, can apply for VAE.

**Belgium:** the skills validation system in French-speaking Belgium was set up in the context of policies promoting lifelong learning at the Federal level in the early 2000s. All the governments of the French-speaking part of the country (la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire francophone de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale) have set up a system for validating skills. The second track, called the valorisation of acquired experience (or VAE), is a procedure that allows access to higher education - at the university, in a high school, in an art school or in an “promotion sociale” - without the required title.

II. Local contexts of the REC project: framework: questionnaires findings

Under the IO3-A1 - Definition of the methodological framework for the realization of the Policy Recommendations, the partnership developed a questionnaire with the following aims:

- to gather feedback on the REC toolkit produced by the REC project
- to provide recommendations/suggestions/inputs on the system of validation of competences and on the different tools used in the EU countries

REC partnership engaged local stakeholders in each country, and had started to involve them sharing the questionnaire. All the partners translated the materials developed in their national languages.
95 questionnaires were completed between May and June 2021.

Stakeholders involved come from: VET entities (27.8%), No profit organizations (48.5%), Public offices/departments (11.3%). 62% of the participants declare to know the validation system in their territorial area, while 60.8% think that the validation system works well.

The practitioners in charge in that system are:

To become practitioners the qualifications needed are:
The most effective tools for identifying, documenting and evaluating informal and non-formal competences are: interviews, practical evaluation, verification of knowledge and experience, group orientation, awareness sessions.

According to 51.5% of the stakeholders, an improvement of the tools is needed.

Furthermore, the replies to the question about ‘experience with the validation procedure’ were very interesting. Below are some of the responses (we summed up positive and negative examples):

- I had a positive experience with a classroom of migrants who otherwise would not have been able to access the mediator qualification course;
- I was able to have my secondary humanities diploma validated by the French community in order to pursue my higher studies. Despite the slowness of the system, I was able to register and begin my studies while waiting for the answer which arrived much later;
- There are not many positive things to validate non-formal learning and competences;
- Recognition is truly rewarding and a powerful mobilization tool. It is really a relevant approach in our societies which tend, more and more, to value skills over titles. In the context of immigration, it is also very appropriate.
- When a person is comfortable with writing and is able to take up their experience in a clear and complete manner, this is easy for the person as well as for the professional who accompanies him.
- It is like playing Ping-Pong. You are constantly referred to different actors who in turn send you somewhere else.
- With the toolkit rec, it allowed me to question the cross-cutting skills and for some who had no professional experience, it reassured them and made them aware in themselves.
- I was able to have my secondary humanities diploma validated by the French community in order to pursue my higher studies. Despite the slowness of the system, I was able to register and begin my studies while waiting for the answer which arrived much later.
- The experience is useful when the refugees want to be integrated, but in many cases they feel that the information needed is too intrusive and personal.

After the analysis of the last questions of the questionnaire, it appeared that the validation system should take into account (more than now) the needs of a public with a low command of the language. Some stakeholders suggested the elimination, as far as possible, of possible barriers between citizens and the administration, because there are difficulties in access to these processes for the most disadvantaged groups, and the cooperation of the public administration with NGOs/entities that are closer to these groups is essential.

It is important that the deadlines for accreditation/validation shouldn’t be so long, and it’s necessary to review the competencies in a practical manner, not only taking formal competencies into account.
Policy Recommendations

1. Create opportunities for refugees and migrants to follow a suitable professional training in a sector in order to allow them to re-qualify and adapt their skills and experiences according to the receiving country’s labour market requirements. Member States and training providers should promote that approach by:
   ● providing or prioritizing skills that are effectively "marketable"/useful in the local labour market
   ● establishing protocols/agreements to help beneficiaries finish compulsory education;
   ● starting training courses already in the reception phase; when the person looks for a job it is already late;
   ● provide training courses that are not ghettoising, e.g. if they are free, aimed at all economically weak groups, not just refugees; or if they include an Italian course, aimed at all foreigners, not just refugees.

2. Reduce the complexity of the recognition process and promote the coordination amongst different actors involved in the process. In this context, training providers should have equipped environments for having not only verbal but also evidence-based assessment. It could be useful to provide for standardised collaboration, plan a collaboration process amongst training providers and with professionals/chambers of industry, commerce, crafts, etc. (world of work) that already have that kind of "equipped environments". Public policies are needed to support and finance this.
   ➢ For instance through the creation of a one-stop shop to simplify procedures for accessing the VAE, standardization of processes and practices, transmission of information. They could also include:
     ● information material to make the one-stop-shop not only easy to approach but also to intercept (to have the right to access is not enough, I must also know that I have that right);
     ● tutorship service i.e. a tutor who follows the beneficiary’s entire path.

3. Increased awareness of the recognition system and its outcomes among migrants, employers and the relevant public and private social sector is necessary to reduce information barriers which may hamper job-skills matching for third-country nationals in their receiving countries’ labour markets.
   ➢ The more the tools for transparency and validation of competencies are known and "understood" (awareness) the more useful they are, because when they are understood i.e. beneficiaries are aware about them and their importance, beneficiaries themselves are more motivated and determined to have these documents and follow the necessary paths.
   ➢ Practitioners could summarize identified skills to quickly connect them to minimum necessary and essential basic skills and then move on to appropriate recognition of prior learning; employers could thus identify these basic skills and complete the range of skills to be acquired on-site at their sites.
At European and national level, many documents, procedures, etc. have been developed (also within the projects financed by the EC or by the EC itself), but few people know about them, they are not disseminated and made known to those who should use them (e.g. public operators dealing with migrants inclusion), therefore they remain an end in themselves, they are not used. To find a way to make institutions and operators aware of the tools being developed, including by the EC and vice versa (top-down and bottom-up).

4. Early recognition of “foreign qualifications” should be encouraged, even embedding the assessment of foreign credentials and competences in introduction paths and programmes. To recognize as quickly and as accurately as possible the skills of the persons is crucial to allow them to reintegrate their deep identity.

5. Encourage collections and analysis of data. The limited availability of statistical information on recognition outcomes is an issue which has been highlighted in European countries. In order to get a clear picture of the relative role that recognition may play for jobs-skill matching in the EU, improvement is needed in the area of data collection and analysis of the effects for immigrants, in terms of labour market insertion, of having their qualifications and competences earned in third countries recognized in destination countries. This collection of data and information could make it possible to know whether the system is working properly, how many people are using the validation system, in which sector, and whether they eventually managed to enter the labour system.

6. Mitigate barriers to attract refugees and migrants, especially young people and women, into higher education, evaluating their potential and talent and offering facilitated and supporting paths in the initial period. The prioritization of the education of children and young people cannot be disputed.

7. Develop a mechanism that facilitates access to suitable training and education for refugees and migrants. Pre-requisite is the knowledge of the language, and then Members States/national governments should ensure that languages courses are sufficiently available, adequate and affordable to enable refugees and migrants to reach the level necessary to access further training or education.

For instance, it should be foreseen:
● institutional systematisation of language teaching starting from pre-literacy or A1 level up to B2 level;
● training the public system teachers on how to teach Italian to foreigners;
● "dowries" for training courses such as those for unemployed people.

8. National systems and governments should consider taking into account the specific needs of migrants in the validation of competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning. This kind of approach could bear an additional positive impact on the labour market integration perspectives of migrants through detecting and recognizing the value of additional skills and qualities both of already-residing and newcomer migrants. It further facilitates job mobility and the matching between migrants’ skills and labour market needs, with a view to addressing skill gaps. It is important to get a reliable, realistic and achievable inventory of the steps to be taken and / or the workstations on which the person can quickly project themselves.

9. Offer refugees and migrants soft skills sessions, especially intercultural and communication skills, to facilitate the access for education training and the local labour market. This could be a significant factor for a better adaptation into society. Knowing the codes and customs of the host country is obviously essential for any successful integration. A mirror approach is recommended for the host country (practitioners dealing with migrants).

10. Train professionals to deal with migrants/refugees/newcomers. In particular, the arrival of newcomers and their particular needs and challenges have meant additional complications for our professionals. Europe should aim to equip professionals in a way that they can understand the difficulties and barriers implied by a standard validation process for newcomers and be ready to adapt to each individual’s situation. The final objective is to have professionals that have tools and resources to deal with any type of candidate, whatever his/her background and situation might be.
Final remarks

- At European and national level, many documents, procedures, etc. have been developed on the validation of informal and non-formal competences of migrants and refugees (also in the framework of projects funded and/or developed by the EC) but few people know about them, they have not been sufficiently disseminated and made known to those who should use them (e.g. migrant inclusion practitioners). Therefore, these tools and procedures are often not used.

To find a way to make operators and professionals aware of the tools that are being developed at European level.

- The more transparency and competence validation tools are known and "understood" (awareness) also by the beneficiaries themselves, the more useful they are.

When beneficiaries are aware of them and of their importance, they are more motivated and determined to have these documents and to follow the necessary paths.

- Transparency (to let emerge) and validation of competences, also acquired in informal and non-formal environments, increase the person's self-esteem and therefore the effectiveness of job placement, as well as providing a different message to the world of work and changing the paradigm on migrants and competences.