

# VINCE VPL Award 2019

## Best Cases collected

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Authors of the papers included in this extract: Carme ROYO, Aleksandra PANEK, Luísa DORNELLAS, Helder TOUÇAS, Daniel OLIVEIRA, Vanessa VERÍSSIMO, Fausta SCARDIGNO.

Editorial Board: Carme Royo, Christopher Reid

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***What is VNIL?***

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL) is a powerful tool to give a second chance to citizens. It takes into account the competences and skills acquired by an individual during learning periods (while studying and working) and helps the candidate to validate them in order to progress towards further studies or higher/different work opportunities. The VNIL processes are carried out in individual sessions, in which the validation professional or facilitator helps the candidate to put into context all his/her background, highlighting the value of the candidate's experience. The work is done in tandem with the objective to help the candidate to move forward in his/her career.

If this tool is used with newcomers, who are trying to settle down in Europe, VNIL becomes an essential instrument to support these candidates and their integration.

However, not all the VNIL professionals have the knowledge and preparation to help non-standard candidates, and this is essentially because there is no formal training available for validation professionals.

***What is VINCE?***

VINCE<sup>1</sup> is a Erasmus+ KA3 project that has developed tools to help VNIL professionals to attend the needs and characteristics of non-standard VNIL candidates. It includes:

- a set of guidelines with FAQs made by newcomers
- a set of country profiles to know how validation is regulated in 33 countries/regions in Europe
- a generic course for validation professionals (to be better equipped for non-standard candidates)
- a set of Policy Recommendations, to encourage policy makers to implement changes in the current legal frameworks

***Why have we published this booklet?***

As part of the work done by VINCE, the project has collected 58 different case studies and carried out interviews with professionals and candidates. The last ten case studies were collected as part of a special call for the VINCE VNIL Award 2019. The three finalists for this award were invited to present their work at the Final Symposium of VINCE in Barcelona, 14 November 2019 and to write full papers, which have now been included in the eJournal of LLL 2019<sup>2</sup> published by [eucen](http://eucen.eu). The papers from the presentation of VINCE and from the three above-mentioned cases have been extracted from the eJournal of LLL and form this booklet focusing on validation. We hope you find it interesting and useful.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vince.eucen.eu>

<sup>2</sup> <https://eucenstudies.eucen.eu/ejournal/aveiro-barcelona2019/>



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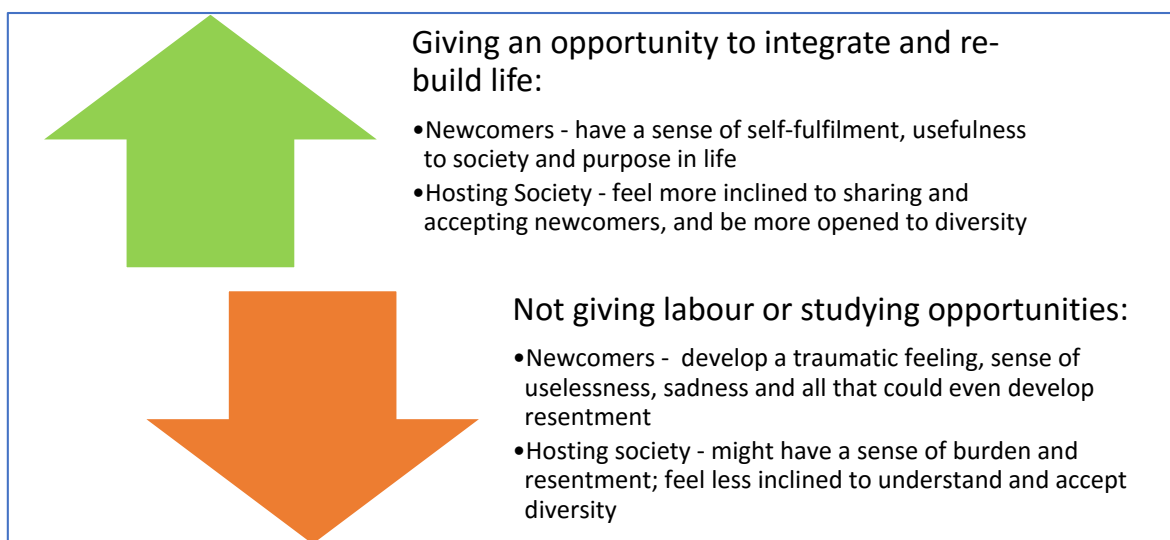
## TOOLS THAT HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE – THE VINCE PROJECT

**Carme ROYO, eucen, Belgium**  
**on behalf of the VINCE consortium**

### INTRODUCTION

Europe has seen in recent years how the number of newcomers and refugees who want to settle in our countries has increased. These individuals, generally escaping from wars or critical life conditions, are looking for a new life and opportunities for themselves and their families. Amongst the numerous challenges that they face, the lack of credentials and legal permissions to stay in Europe, make their access to labour market or the possibility to continue studying almost impossible. As a consequence, their integration into the hosting societies slows down and creates dissatisfaction and frustration both for the newcomers and for the European nationals (who might perceive the newcomers as a burden - see *Figure 1* below). Although newcomers are often educated and skilled, their competences may not be recognised in the host society either because their documents are missing or because their national qualifications are not totally comparable to those awarded in Europe.

Taking this real situation into consideration and knowing that the newcomers will have to be helped at some point by European professionals until they find a suitable job or career path, the VINCE project aimed to give to higher education (HE) staff - especially those professionals working in the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL) - a set of tools to deal with the extra difficulties of assessing migrants and refugees enrolled as candidates in a validation processes in Europe.



*Figure 1 Giving or not opportunities affects newcomers and European citizens. C Royo, eucen, 2019.*

The VINCE project, funded under the Key Activity 3 funding programme “*Support for Policy Reform – Social inclusion through Education, Training and Youth*” (Call EACEA-05-2016), run for three years and was integrated by 13 partners from 11 different European countries. The consortium included NGOs, Associations, HEIs and VET providers.

## **WHY IS 'VALIDATION OF NON FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING' AN INTEGRATING TOOL?**

VNIL is a powerful tool for social inclusion that gives a second chance to individuals. This alternative route into higher education could help those who have been denied the opportunity to enter further studies for a variety of social, political, legal or economic reasons, or those who have had to stop their studies and abandon their homes/countries. The VNIL processes ensure that candidates are recognised for what they have learned during their working life or, their life experiences more generally. It helps candidates to identify, analyse and evaluate what they have learned from experience, relate it to formal studies and construct a claim to have their acquired knowledge recognised. In summary, VNIL is about being fair and giving credit to an individual's self-growth regardless of the candidate's origin or background.

VINCE shows how the VNIL can be used and can be useful as well, enhancing relations between HEIs and newcomers particularly, and increasing trust between the staff from HEIs in general and these new arrivals who know little or nothing about the education system in their hosting country and/or the institution that accepts to recognise their previous studies or skills. In addition, the individualised processes of VNIL is ideal for newcomers, allowing them to receive the attention and help they need.

VINCE has generated a transfer of knowledge about Europe, the welcoming country, the education system and the specific institution dealing with the new arrivals, and has brought an improved reflection among the members of staff of HEIs using the project outputs about the situation and feelings of displaced people.

The VINCE products can make newcomers better understood and helped. The final objective is to give tools to the EU countries' professionals to understand the skills and knowledge of new arrivals so newcomers are equipped with at least the basic validation that allows them to enter the working environment and feel better integrated and more useful to their families and to the arrival country. Our professionals, therefore, must be recognised for their work - their existing skills and experience should be acknowledged but they need to be helped to prepare themselves properly for "different" types of VNIL candidates, so training is imperative.

Formal legislation and regulations at European, national and institutional levels should be enabled, especially if a system of validation is expected to be harmonised throughout Europe.

## **LEARNING FROM THE IMPACT OF VALIDATION IN THE NEWCOMERS' LIFE**

VINCE has collected a number of testimonies from students who had undergone (or were in the process of completing) a validation process. The two testimonials below are a small sample that show how validation/recognition processes can change the newcomers' life<sup>1</sup>:

- a) *Before I was constantly wondering if I was as valuable in Norway as I was in Iraq. The thought of going back to my homeland was always present. I applied for all kinds of jobs, from garbage collector to social worker. I wrote about 400 work applications without receiving a proper answer. When I thought about studying, I thought that I would have to start from scratch, and I did not want to say aloud that I had an education.*

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<sup>1</sup> Real testimonials collected by NOKUT.

*Now I feel that I am as valuable as before [in Iraq], and that Norway appreciates my background and effort. Now I do not think about going back home, I am happy about my work, and the future of my daughter is omnipresent. After receiving my recognition I chose only to apply for relevant jobs, I only wrote about 10 work applications, and was called in for four job interviews. I actually had to turn down two job offers! Now when I am thinking about studying I am only thinking about doing a Master's degree. Moreover, most importantly of all, I can shout out that I do have an education! The Norwegian Directorate for Immigration gave me as a refugee a future in Norway, and the recognition from NOKUT gave me my past back in order to have a better future.*

- b) *These documents [the recognition certificates] are my securities. They show that I am a good person who has studied, and a person who wants to work and contribute to the society. You need to have an evidence of that, and these documents are my evidence. This gives me the opportunity to continue studying. It states among other things where I did my previous studies. My greatest hope for the future is to be well integrated into the Norwegian society. I owe Norway so much for choosing me as a quota refugee. When you receive an opportunity like the one we have received, you have to show that you are able to work hard and do your best.*

## METHODOLOGY OF WORK USED IN VINCE

Apart from the transversal work, the project can be divided in 4 different phases as shown in *Figure 2*, which include empirical work, desk research, interviews and extensive peer learning sessions.



*Figure 2 Working phases of VINCE. C Royo, eucen, 2019.*

## **TOOLS TO HELP HIGHER EDUCATION STAFF TO UNDERSTAND NEWCOMERS AND DO BETTER VALIDATION PROCESSES WITH THEM**

VINCE has developed six main outputs:

### ***Interactive Platform***

The VINCE platform is addressed to validation professionals who can use it as a source of resources. Newly arrived migrants and refugees might find it useful to know more about the process of validation. The platform is available in EN, FR and DE <https://vince.eucen.eu>

### ***Country profiles***

VINCE has revised and updated the country factsheets developed by eucen's project OBSERVAL-Net<sup>2</sup> into a new set of 33 country/region profiles illustrating how VNIL practice and procedures in HE are implemented all over Europe. The new country profiles can be accessed from the interactive platform <https://vince.eucen.eu/validation-in-europe/>

### ***Case studies of validation practices***

VINCE has collected 68 cases in total (58 collected by the consortium and 10 accepted as cases for the VINCE VNIL Award 2019). These documents illustrate experiences of validation professionals and refugees regarding validation and recognition procedures. They are accompanied by a Commentary Report which summarises the main features of the collection and draws key conclusions and recommendations. All the cases can be accessed from the library at the interactive platform <https://vince.eucen.eu/vince-case-studies/>

### ***Guidelines for Higher Education staff to help migrants and refugees***

The VINCE guidelines are templates for HEIs, containing frequently asked questions (FAQs) from refugees and migrants concerning 5 different areas (Welcome to Europe, Welcome to this Country, Welcome to Higher Education in Europe, Welcome to this Institution, Welcome to Validation). HE professionals can use the templates and adapt them based on their country's and/or institution's specifications/needs. The templates are available at the interactive platform in EN, DE, DK, ES, GR, FR, IT, NL, NO, SI, HU and can be downloaded for direct use or adaptation <https://vince.eucen.eu/guidelines/>

### ***Prototype Training Course for Higher Education staff to help migrants and refugees***

VINCE has developed a generic Professional Development Course (CPDC) which aims to provide the reader with insights and ideas for developing staff training for validation professionals who work with candidates from other countries during their adaptation processes to our society. It contains references to the other tools developed by VINCE and examples taken from the case studies' collection. The prototype is available at the interactive platform and is available in EN, FR, DE, DK <https://vince.eucen.eu/vince-training-course/>

### ***Policy Recommendations***

The VINCE recommendations propose ways to deal with the recognition of the skills of newcomers. The document is addressed to policy makers, HEIs/VET institutions and newcomers in Europe. This document is available from the interactive platform in three languages: EN, FR, DE <https://vince.eucen.eu/policy-recommendations/>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://observal-net.eucen.eu>



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO PLAN FOR A VALIDATING EUROPE

The policy work carried out during the project (including public online and face-to-face consultations with external stakeholders) confirmed the appropriateness of the 8 priorities of validation of non-formal and informal learning identified by VINCE. *Figure 3* below shows a summary table pointing out which levels (i.e. policy makers, VNIL professionals or newcomers) would value more each of the recommendations:

VINCE IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES	Policy makers level	HEIs-VET VNIL professionals level	Newcomers level
<b>1. Communicate / Reach out</b> to inform newcomers about VNIL and encourage its use	✓	✓	✓
<b>2. Engage</b> decision makers to commit and invest in VNIL for newcomers faster integration	✓	✓	
<b>3. Be flexible</b> to make the process adaptable to cultural, language and other constrains	✓	✓	
<b>4. Train</b> the professionals to deal with “unusual” candidates and give them useful tools	✓	✓	
<b>5. Speed up</b> the processes for newcomers to make them actives members of society	✓		
<b>6. Reflect and self-assess</b> to estimate how VNIL can be improved. Refine processes		✓	
<b>7. Monitor</b> success, progress and further needs of VNIL transnational. Compare results	✓	✓	
<b>8. Build community</b> to allow sharing of experiences, tools and knowledge and to allow helping each other		✓	✓

Figure 3 Table extracted and expanded from the full VINCE Policy Recommendations paper<sup>3</sup>

The VINCE policy recommendations are meant to reach policy makers, especially in an attempt to make an impact on European policies. The recommendations are very focused on the eight priorities, the key elements to be addressed, and shows why each element is important and which is the final objective of each recommendation.

The VINCE policy recommendations paper has been prepared in a generic way, in order to allow potential users to adapt to their national context and needs. The interactive platform offers open access to the full paper in different languages.

<sup>3</sup> C Royo, F Uras (eucen) on behalf of the VINCE consortium (Ed.) (2019): Policy analysis and recommendations: the VINCE contribution to a more integrated Europe through validation. ISSN 2664-4789 <https://vince.eucen.eu/policy-recommendations/>

## CONCLUSIONS

The efficient integration of newcomers within their European hosting countries is a key element to making our society more balanced, fair and sustainable. The validation of newcomers' qualifications and skills enable refugees and migrants to access the labour market or pursue further studies as quickly as possible after their arrival, thus giving them a sense of purpose and more dignity, and at the same time liberating the hosting country from special social care that otherwise newcomers will need.

In this sense, higher education institutions can help by informing newcomers about the opportunities that validation offers and by providing the tools and training to validation professionals to address the specific needs of newcomers who decide to start their validation process.

Decision-makers, however, are ultimately responsible for embedding and validating measures in national regulations that enable the implementation of VNIL processes for newcomers and give enough visibility to the VNIL opportunities. These actions would encourage (a) institutions to invest in the staff involved in this area and (b) individuals to opt for VNIL route as an option for their career.

## REFERENCES

VINCE interactive platform <https://vince.eucen.eu>

VINCE country profiles <https://vince.eucen.eu/validation-in-europe/>

VINCE collected case studies <https://vince.eucen.eu/vince-case-studies/>

VINCE guidelines <https://vince.eucen.eu/guidelines/>

VINCE training course <https://vince.eucen.eu/training/>

VINCE policy recommendations <https://vince.eucen.eu/policy-recommendations/>

C Royo, F Uras (eucen) on behalf of the VINCE consortium (Ed.) (2019): *Policy analysis and recommendations: the VINCE contribution to a more integrated Europe through validation*. ISSN 2664-4789.

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Presentations during the VINCE Final Symposium in Barcelona, 14 November 2019 [http://autumn2019seminar.eucen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/02\\_Carme-ROYO\\_VINCE\\_Tools.pdf](http://autumn2019seminar.eucen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/02_Carme-ROYO_VINCE_Tools.pdf)

## COUNSELLING FOR THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS IN AUSTRIA: THE OFFERINGS OF THE COUNSELLING CENTRE FOR MIGRANTS IN VIENNA (CCfM) AND AST-NETWORK

Aleksandra PANEK, Counselling Centre for Migrants in Vienna (AT)

### ABSTRACT

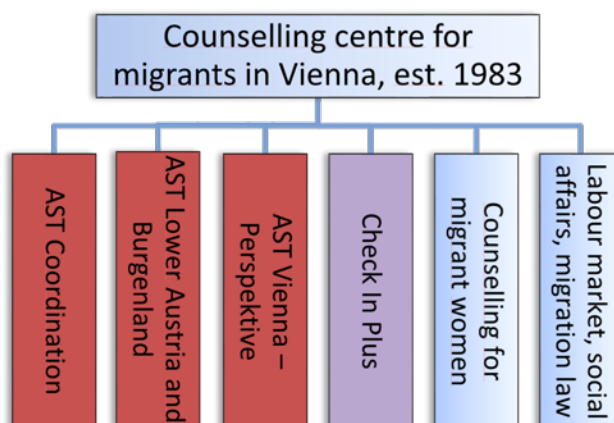
The Viennese Counselling Centre for Migrants (CCfM), an NGO, and other NGOs in Austria are offering Contact Points for people who gained professional qualifications abroad (AST). The countrywide AST-network has been providing counselling around the recognition of non-Austrian qualifications since 2013. This counselling supports migrants to validate their know-how and, in particular, to enhance their employability to match their existing qualifications. To reach this goal, many steps are needed. One of the steps can be provided by the additional offering of Check In Plus (CIP) by CCfM in Vienna.

In this paper the background of counselling for the process of qualifications recognition will be described: the counselling process itself, the target group, goals and principles, as well as Austrian conditions for recognition, will be outlined.

Key words: Austria-wide, counselling, migrants, procedure, qualification, recognition, refugees, service, measure-set.

### INTRODUCTION – ORGANISATIONAL, HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The CCfM in Vienna was established as an NGO in 1983, and is one of the oldest NGOs in Austria dealing with the issues of labour market policy for migrants. The focus was originally on migrants from Turkey and former Yugoslavia. Currently, there are six sections of CCfM:

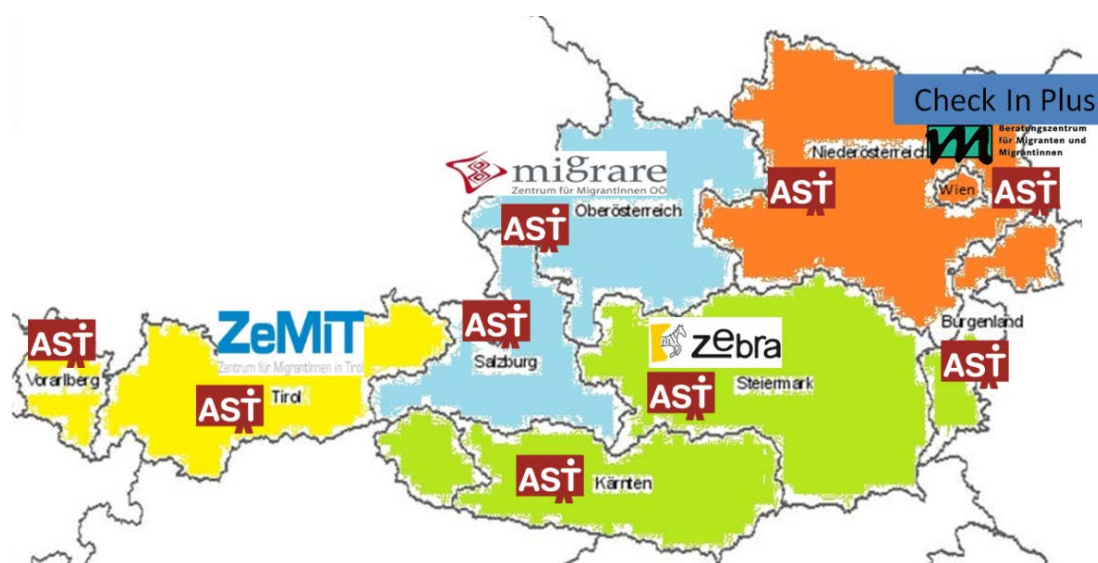


*The organizational chart of CCfM in Vienna (red and purple sections provide recognition and education counselling).*

During the 1980s another three Austrian NGOs were founded to support migrants: ZeMiT in Innsbruck, Zebra in Graz and *migrare* in Linz. Since being established all four NGOs have specialized in counselling for specific target groups and issues: female migrants, social affairs, employment, social and migration law, etc.

During the early 2000s a strong need for counselling on recognition of foreign qualifications was observed. CCfM started with *Perspektive – recognition counselling* in 2006. At the beginning of 2012 an inter-ministerial *Recognition of foreign qualifications* task force was formed, and developed the concept of “Contact Points for people who gained professional qualifications abroad – AST” (Anlaufstellen für Personen mit im Ausland erworbenen Qualifikationen - AST).

The concept of an AST-network was presented in summer 2012. The Viennese *Perspektive – recognition counselling* was taken as a model, so that by the first of January, 2013 five AST-Contact Points had been integrated into well-established counselling partner-NGOs for migrants in Linz, Graz and Innsbruck.



Geographical chart of NGOs including their offer of AST

Since its establishment the AST-network also provides counselling in the neighbouring federal states and districts, and additional locations can be provided by request. Each NGO is responsible for several regional AST-Contact Points. CCfM in Vienna offers two Contact Points (AST-Vienna and AST-Lower Austria) and coordinates the AST-network (AST-coordination).

AST-network provides counselling services according to § 5 *Recognition and Assessment Act (AuBG)*. The Austria-wide AST-offering is supported by the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection. Additionally, AST-Vienna is supported by the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (waff) and the Integration and Diversity Department of the City of Vienna (MA 17).



Organization chart of AST-network

Since being launched, CCfM in Vienna has expanded from a small association with two employees to an NGO with more than 50 staff members, offering counselling in over 20 languages. We cooperate with the Austrian Public Employment Service (PES) and many other public stakeholders and authorities.

The demographic conditions determining the counselling for migrants in Austria are as follows (2018): Austria has 16.2% foreign citizens and 23.3 % of the inhabitants of Austria have a so-called “migration background” (that is, at least one foreign-born parent). The fact which is determining counselling on recognition of existing non-Austrian qualifications the most is that so many migrants are overqualified for the work which they are doing: 23.5 % of foreign-born compared to 8.8% of the native-born population are working beneath the level of their qualifications. We assume that only approx. 20% of the qualified migrants benefit from our recognition counselling offer.

### CIP AS PART OF CCfM

CIP is a specialized follow-up project of CCFM which targets guidance in cases of longer-lasting recognition processes. CIP is an offering for highly qualified but unemployed clients registered by the Austrian PES. The goal of CIP is to build on prior qualifications and skills, and to search for and finance tailor-made measures (bridging courses, internships, etc.) which will supplement the individual recognition process. All of the necessary steps for the individual are listed in the “educational plan” for each client, as well as for the PES advisors.

CIP specializes in particular in clients from non-EU backgrounds with regulated professions, such as those from the medical professions: doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists and physiotherapists; but it also targets many other groups such as teachers, lawyers, etc.

CIP has developed unique measures and measure-sets for clients, and arranges the coverage of costs for any additional expenses during the recognition process with PES Vienna and Lower Austria. CIP has provided support for nearly 5,000 academically / professionally qualified migrants and refugees since it was launched in 2012.

## THE ROLE OF AST-COORDINATION

AST-coordination is the back-up for AST-counsellors. This support includes the organization of continuing education for the AST-network; quality management, and the elaboration of working- and position-papers and checklists.

AST-coordination maintains the homepage of the website for the network, and informs stakeholders and actors about news from the education sector. It is involved in PR, and issues statements and comments in reaction to the ongoing development of law and policies around recognition and migration law.

AST-coordination is involved in lobbying and networking with decision-makers to promote adequate employment of migrants, and works on the further development and adaptation of the regulations around qualifications recognition. Additionally, there are meetings and events for stakeholders organized by AST-coordination several times every year, maintaining contacts with authorities on a regional, national and international level.

## THE DETAILS OF COUNSELLING FOR QUALIFICATIONS RECOGNITION

AST-counselling for qualifications recognition includes:

- preliminary information and professional advice about the legal basics of individual recognition: offered multilingually (German, Bosnian / Serbian / Croatian, Bulgarian, Turkish, English, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, French, Spanish, Chinese, Farsi, Arabic), free of charge and case orientated, at every stage of the recognition process, with reference to regional possibilities.
- comparison of the foreign qualification with the professional requirements in Austria (referring profession in Austria).
- clarification of the necessity and potential for formal recognition (not every qualification can / must be formally recognized), leading to a decision as to whether assessment or recognition is needed.
- coverage of costs of certified translations of documents needed for recognition (approx. 40% of the clients are using the translation service).
- support with the application for recognition, assistance during recognition proceedings, and explanation of the decision given.
- cooperation with recognition authorities like Enic-Naric *et al.*, and other partners.
- clarification of the occupational fields, qualification profiles and regulations of the Austrian labour market.
- clarification of opportunities for continuing education and training, and of potential sources of funding and the eligibility criteria.
- assistance in the search for “bridging courses” and the financing of these (a set of measures in cooperation with Viennese CIP),
- identifying alternative paths if formal recognition is not possible.

Counselling regarding the recognition procedures is a specific form of professional advice, assisting clients to gain the formal and equal recognition of foreign qualifications as well to identify employment appropriate to their qualifications and, thereby, allowing them equal participation in the Austrian labour market. This kind of counselling is an interface between labour market counselling, education counselling and career guidance. The approach of AST-network is based on Austria-wide networking and cooperation between relevant recognition authorities, institutions and organizations at a regional and national level to promote recognition and utilize the existing resources.

The AST- and CIP-counselling is based on the following principles:

- open to the evaluation of all formal qualifications, and professional analysis of the individual's set of qualifications and competencies in the context of the Austrian labour market.
- recognition counselling is not obligatory.
- the duration of the counselling process has no prescribed limit.
- includes a filter function: preventing unpromising applications.
- core values of empowerment, equality of opportunity, cooperation, solution- and goal-orientation, transparency, assistance for decision making, up-to-dateness.
- no general education advising or vocational orientation is offered.
- clarity that counselling is not the recognition, but supports clients to seek recognition - recognition as a formal act is the responsibility of the authorities;
- due to the complexity of the recognition process, the counselling can't be offered by e-mail, and only in a limited way by telephone (however, in some Austrian regions, difficulties in attending for personal counselling occur).
- Recognition counselling can't solve other issues like compliance with migration law, but due to cooperation, there is access to other counselling for these matters for clients.

Our mission statement and a description of the counselling concepts underpinning AST-network and CIP are available.

## TARGET GROUP OF AST – FACTS AND FIGURES

The target group of AST contains clients living in Austria with completed formal qualifications from abroad above the Austrian complementary level (8th grade) and who wish to utilize their competencies in the Austrian labour market. The labour market status of the client (employed or unemployed) is irrelevant to the counselling, as is nationality, origin or ethnic group. However, the clients must have approved access to the labour market (permission to work in Austria). Clients contact the appropriate AST depending on their place of residence in Austria. Because we offer multilingual counselling, clients can book an appointment for counselling in their mother tongue.

The following details describe the profile of the AST-target group (2018):

- 38.3 % of AST-clients are residents of Vienna.
- 54.1% of the clients have academic degrees; 33.5% have high school diplomas; 10.1% have completed a professional qualification / apprenticeship.
- 62% of AST-clients are women.
- 70% of AST-clients are below the age of 40.

- 61.2% of AST-clients are non-EU citizens. About 23% of the clients among non-EU citizens are state-approved refugees (entitled to asylum or holding subsidiary protection status).
- the ten major groups among AST-clients are citizens of Syria, Iran, Serbia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Iraq, Turkey, Russia and Slovakia.

The target group of CIP overlaps partly with the group of AST-clients. The profile of the CIP clients includes persons who are unemployed and registered by PES Vienna, which is in the case of refugees only possible if they have been granted the status of asylum protection or subsidiary protection (asylum seekers are neither allowed to work in Austria or to be registered as unemployed). Because the focus is on usability of the qualifications, the CIP target group is confined to persons already living in Austria for a maximum of seven years. The individuals also have to be interested in using their existing qualification (rather than to seek to re-train or engage in another occupation), and willing to build upon the recognition process and to undertake further relevant education or training.

## **RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS IN AUSTRIA**

Currently, there are very different procedures, and no uniform system, for the recognition and validation of foreign qualifications in Austria. Formal recognition is formative for the AST-counselling - numerous regional and federal laws and regulations determine the counselling. There are more than 100 authorities responsible for recognition Austria-wide.

The validation of non-recognised foreign qualifications is being driven by the demands of the labour market and companies' requirements. Clients encounter difficulties in gaining professional experience in Austria. Professional recognition is often an agreement between the employer and the employee, except in the case of regulated professions where formal education and qualifications are needed to engage in the professional activity; e.g. nurses, medical doctors, dental practitioners, physiotherapists, teachers, etc.

The type and form of recognition depends on many variables, for example, the level of education gained abroad. In the case of a university degree, there will be the Ministry of Education or the university responsible for recognition. In the case of an apprenticeship, the Ministry of Economics will be the recognizing authority. If the qualification originates in the EU, the recognition will be determined under the relevant EU directives, but there are still multiple authorities responsible for the assessment. Qualifications gained in countries outside the EU need to be recognized through different boards. The purpose for which the recognition is sought defines the authority too: depending on whether the client is planning on further education or aiming directly at immediate employment, a different authority will be involved. The variable of whether the relevant profession is regulated or not specifies the form and the length of the recognition process as well. Based on the type of qualification and the client's professional plans, the assessment or recognition procedure can be started.

The complexity of recognition of foreign qualifications, based on the examples of an EU- and non-EU qualification for dentistry and dental assistant, is demonstrated in the following chart:



Qualification	Steps needed for recognition
Dentistry gained in EU-country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language courses in German and medical German.</li> <li>• Collecting of documents, translation and application by Ministry of Labour, Social Issues, Health and Consumer Protection.</li> <li>• Decision of authority – recognition based on the EU-directive.</li> <li>• Registration in Dentistry List of Dental Medical Council.</li> </ul>
Dentistry gained in non-EU country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language courses in German and medical German.</li> <li>• Collecting of documents and translation, and application to Medical University.</li> <li>• Attending the nostrification assessment; comparison of foreign transcript of records with Austrian curriculum by the Medical University.</li> <li>• Decision of authority including complementary exams and diploma thesis.</li> <li>• Attending the complementary exams, writing of diploma thesis.</li> <li>• Exam in Medical German by Dentistry Medical Council.</li> <li>• Registration in Dentistry List of Dentistry Medical Council.</li> </ul>
Dental assistant gained in EU-country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language courses in German and medical German.</li> <li>• Collection of documents and translation, and application to Ministry of Labour, Social Issues, Health and Consumer Protection.</li> <li>• Decision of authority with potential complementary measures.</li> <li>• Attending the complementary exams / training.</li> </ul>
Dental assistant gained in non-EU country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language courses in German and medical German.</li> <li>• Collection of documents and translation, and application to local governmental Department of Social and Health Issues.</li> <li>• Decision of authority including complementary measures.</li> <li>• Attending the complementary exams / training.</li> </ul>

The huge number of regulations and laws concerning formal recognition within Austria make the counselling and the recognition process itself challenging. Additionally, there are various other challenges, which need to be considered, such as:

- insufficient language skills to meet the need for those skills during recognition (for some recognition types German language skills have to be confirmed).
- missing or incomplete documents.
- lack of system-knowledge and inadequate practice; not enough experience; how to initiate professional performance. Some migrants spend years trapped in low skilled jobs for which they are overqualified. The reasons are very diverse: lack of support in job search, being a single wage earner or the unknown / complex processes for recognition of qualifications.
- different qualification profiles in the country of origin and in the country of residency.
- personal situation and family background.

## **INNOVATIVE ADDITIONAL SERVICES**

AST-network, as an initial expert body in the matter of recognition counselling in Austria, now offers meetings for specific groups of clients. These meetings provide group counselling for certain occupational groups or owners of specific degrees (doctors, dentists, nurses, etc.). These events take place in all AST regional centres.

The meetings for occupational groups started in 2010 with “Nurses from former Yugoslavia”, offered in the mother tongue. Currently doctors, dentists, construction engineers, psychologists, pharmacists, teachers, kindergarten teachers, those from economic and commercial professions, those from the technical occupations, and a group for “utilizing the high school diploma” are meeting regularly, to share ideas, experiences and learning materials across members. The goal of these groups is to get know each other; avoid social exclusion, and become informed about recognition procedures or existing training / courses. At the same time, there is a need for contact with stakeholders or relevant recognition bodies and potential employers, and for preparation for job-seeking. Ex-clients whose qualifications are already recognized participate in these meetings to speak about their experiences and become role models.

Additionally, there are meetings and events concerning various fields of education in the context of recognition, e.g. international education systems and support systems for refugees and migrants in Austria. These events are organized by AST-coordination several times every year.

## **CONCLUSION: THE INVOLVEMENT OF AST AND CIP**

AST-counselling is a well-known offering in Austria. We shape the issue of recognition of qualifications and make it visible. Recognition is an issue for civil society, and a political and economic matter.

The AST-network employs 29 staff members, who are experienced multi-professionals with self-explored expertise and accumulated knowledge. Cooperation at regional level within the AST-network is essential as there is no uniform system for recognition and validation of foreign qualifications in Austria. Since its founding in 2013 AST-network has counselled more than 50,000 beneficiaries Austria-wide. About 500 (5,000 since launched in 2012) among them were parallel clients of CIP in Vienna.

AST-counselling, connected with the offer of CIP, can cause the following effects for clients:

- formal recognition of the equality of foreign qualifications in reference to its Austrian equivalent.
- achieving an education level through complementary measures.
- qualification activities financed through public funding.
- supplementing professional abilities and language skills.
- occupational change and adequate job opportunities.
- networking, connection with additional counselling offers.

The external evaluation of AST shows that participation in AST-counselling speeds up the recognition and / or assessment of foreign qualifications; helps with requalification and further training / education; supports finding employment suited to migrants' qualifications and helps avoid underqualified employment. Since the AST-counselling was established many new training / education options have been developed.

Based on wide experience, AST-Contact Points provide structured pathways for getting learning outcomes validated / recognized, and a matrix of solutions for clients, depending on their personal and educational situations. In cases where the intended recognition process doesn't work, AST-counselling seeks to find alternative case-orientated solutions.

The daily practice of AST-counselling implies a need for the revision of some legislation, which we are lobbying for (e.g. labour law, collective agreements and recognition practice) to represent the interests of migrants. We are lobbying in favour of further regulation of recognition adaptations, especially the adjustment of degrees from third countries to EU standards.

Employing people who gained qualifications abroad is still beset with the issue of employers' doubt. This has to be overcome by awareness-raising on the subject of recognition of foreign qualifications and competences, so preventing "overqualified" employment. Awareness-raising among employers to the existence of available skills among migrants and refugees is an important part of our work. We are trying to encourage employers to rethink their current recruitment policies to identify and target foreign-diverse skills and knowledge.

The process of recognition of foreign qualifications is long, but it has a long-term positive effect once completed. Due to the information and counselling provided, and the resulting clarification of professional goals, the AST-Contact Points promote adequate employment of migrants. Having settled in Austria, migrants are supposed to be reached as soon as possible to provide information about the professional possibilities available. Furthermore, AST-counselling makes a contribution to sustainability: counselling resulting in a job appropriate to the client's qualification has a sustainable impact on the further career and the employability of the individual.

The employment of persons who are qualified abroad positively affects their long-term labour market integration. It impacts and helps to stabilize the Austrian labour market and economy permanently. The hidden potential of migrant's qualifications and their need to utilize this potential can in turn address the needs of the Austrian labour market regarding several under-supplied professions (IT, medical occupations etc.).

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## **EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: LISBON CITY COUNCIL QUALIFICA CENTRE**

**Luísa DORNELLAS, Helder TOUÇAS, Daniel OLIVEIRA, Vanessa VERÍSSIMO, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, Portugal**

### **ABSTRACT**

Lisbon City Council's Department of Development and Training created its Qualifica Centre in 2002 to promote the Lisbon City Council as a lifelong learning organization. The Centre constitutes a citywide effort to close the opportunity gap by transforming the way adults access and experience learning and the paths they can follow to turn life achievements into empowerment and success. It is open to refugees and people with a migrant background and it has served thousands of participants from both native and migrant communities. Its main activity is the recognition of prior learning process (RVCC), which is part of the Portuguese National Qualifications System. This article focus on exploring the methodological approach and its contribution to the empowerment of candidates, through the use of trigger questions, life history (Histoire de Vie), critical thinking workshop sessions and the Competences Portfolio.

Key words: Migrants, Recognition of Prior Learning, Qualification, Methodology, Competence, Portfolio, Empowerment, Refugees, Lisbon.

### **LISBON SOCIAL CHALLENGES**

The Lisbon region faces major social and economic challenges, particularly regarding the education and training of young people and adults. According to the 2011 national population census, about 60% of the residents of the Lisbon region have not completed the compulsory education of 12 years of schooling (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2012).

### **LISBON QUALIFICA CENTRE**

In 2002, Lisbon City Council's Department of Development and Training created the Qualifica Centre (Lisbon Qualifica Centre) which aims to promote the Lisbon City Council as a lifelong learning organisation, committed to the qualification and the empowerment of its workers and of all citizens living, studying or working in the city. The Centre is open to refugees and people with a migrant background and since 2002, the Qualifica Team has served thousands of participants, from both native and migrant communities, including hundreds whose country of origin is not Portugal.

The Centre is coordinated with the city's refugee network and has active partnerships with dozens of organisations such as *Conselho Europeu para os Refugiados*.

The Centre's 'Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences' process (RVCC) is an ongoing city-wide endeavour effort to close the opportunity gap by transforming how adults access and experience learning and the paths they can follow to turn life achievements into empowerment and success.

## NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

The RVCC process is part of a wider lifelong learning and Vocational Education and Training (VET) national ecosystem, the National Qualifications System (NQS) that includes the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) established by Decree-Law no. 396/2007 as a governing structure for its operation. The NQF was established in compliance with the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and aims to raise the qualification of adults through education and professional development.

## THE RVCC PROCESS

Lisbon City Council's Qualifica Centre invests in the RVCC process as a means to foster consolidated, transformative change for adults who are locked out of traditional paths to success and to ensure that everyone can develop their full potential in life and work.

Despite the significant educational divide in the Lisbon region, evidence clearly suggests that learning also takes place outside school through non-formal and informal education, and that non-formal and informal education are as valuable as the formal learning taking place in school (Cavaco, 2007).

The RVCC process allows for the identification, recognition, validation and certification of previously acquired competences by adults, throughout life in formal, informal and non-formal contexts with the use of methodological tools such as the competences audit and the autobiographical approach - life history (*Histoire de Vie*).

It involves the use of a set of assessment tools and activities resulting in the candidate's Competences Portfolio (portfolio). The portfolio contains evidence and proof of the competences that the candidate possesses.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Through the implementation of Paulo Freire's 'Problematizing Pedagogy' and Marie Christine Josso's 'Histoire de Vie', in which learning becomes a critical understanding of the world (Freire, 2014), the team set the methodological principle of challenging the participants to explore several dimensions of their life. Through critical thinking and confidence-building collaboration, candidates' personal interests, supportive relationships and diverse learning opportunities are leveraged, embraced and self-recognised as important and empowering. The adoption of Marie-Christine Josso's 'Histoire de Vie' as a methodological approach towards the acknowledgement of the importance of life choices and experiences (Josso, 2002) is a paramount principle adopted in the RVCC process and evidenced in the candidates' portfolio, where achievements are shared and skills are showcased (Pires, 2005).

### ***Trigger questions***

Inspired by Freire's and Josso's work, the Centre's RVCC Process is based on 15 trigger questions deployed through multiple-sessions workshops by a cohesive and diverse team of professionals. Questions put the focus on the candidates and aim to instigate the identification and characterisation of their competences by involving the candidates in the analysis and reflection of their own life history, allowing them to take charge of their own skills and knowledge, but most importantly, their strengths and empowering opportunities.

The trigger questions are:

1. What are my expectations?
2. What do I get out of the RVCC Process?
3. What does it mean to recognise and validate my competences?
4. What are competences?
5. How does one learn?
6. Why is my life experience important?
7. How do I identify the competences/skills that I have acquired in my life?
8. How can I document my skills in a portfolio?
9. What is the Key Competences Charter?
10. How can I relate this Charter to my life?
11. What are my plans after finishing the RVCC Process?
12. Where should I focus my attention, where should I invest my energy?
13. What are the steps towards my goal?
14. Am I ready to validate and certificate my competences?
15. Are my Portfolio and my Life History concluded?

The trigger questions are drawn upon the following key principles:

- i) *Interdependent* - all questions overlap and are reinforced by each other. Although sessions are planned beforehand, all trigger questions are interchangeable and may be omitted.
- ii) *Nuclear* - questions are core to the validation process and oriented towards showcasing certification and achievement.
- iii) *Flexible* - questions are not binding nor are they forced. Participants are free to explore or skip trigger questions according to their own interests and sensibility.
- iv) *Customisable* – questions are open and thought provoking; they can be addresses partially or separately. Questions can be modified and must be adapted to participants' goals, expectations and workflow, allowing for individual pathways to validation.
- v) *Empowering* - questions are purposefully set in a progressive manner in order to help participants solidify their own tools to uncover and evidence their skills. Trigger questions ask participants to look into themselves from new and different perspectives, supporting their own (re)signification.

With guidance from Lisbon Qualifica Centre's team, trigger questions help the candidates to uncover their own skills and competences, by documenting their life, identifying strengths and areas for improvement and ultimately changing their outlook and aspirations.

The following principles guide the methodology:

- i) *Nobody wants to learn (again) what they already know.*  
Identifying and mapping learners' expectations and interests is paramount to creating engaging and customised learning experiences. Sessions are constantly redesigned in order to adapt to the selected goals. All activities deployed in the RVCC process must facilitate and promote collaboration and allow self-assessment.
- ii) *Learning happens everywhere. Not only in the classroom.*  
Following Paulo Freire's work, critical thinking and collaboration are encouraged as means to fully exercise citizenship (Freire, 2014).
- iii) *In the digital age, learning is connected, social and lifelong.*  
The connected learning paradigm combines personal interests, supportive relationships and opportunities. It is a type of learning that takes advantage of abundant access to information and social connection rather than isolating it, and embraces the diverse backgrounds and interests of candidates. Furthermore, all planned activities are interest-based and a collaborative friendly environment is maintained during RVCC group sessions.

iv) *The learner is the focus and the centre of the learning process.*

Non-formal education theory drives the instructional design of every session, ensuring that all learners have an opportunity to succeed. RVCC sessions are always focused on participants' interests, expectations and needs.

Following the Centre's decades of experience in the field of RPL and the empowerment oriented methodology it uses, an intention was declared to contribute to the advancement of RPL and to benefit from the knowledge that academia provides. University researchers and students became regular collaborators, broadening the possibility to share experiences, to promote study circles and support the team's opportunity to continuously question the methodology and update it through thought-provoking inputs.

Candidates have also contributed by granting researchers access to their portfolio for the purpose of scientific and academic research and by directly collaborating with investigators.

In 2014, part of the team attended an advanced training programme for a semester at the University, including classes in Non-Formal Education and were taught by leading researcher Carmen Cavaco. The training was particularly effective towards deschooling our RVCC approach. Finally, the Centre team is involved in the City Council's Human Rights Education Programme and Training of Trainers Programme, providing it with an updated Non-formal Education toolbox and networking opportunities with local lifelong learning organisations.

## **RVCC GROUP SESSIONS AND INDIVIDUAL WORK**

The RVCC process is currently comprised of 90 hours of group workshop sessions and as many hours as necessary of individual guidance.

Building a safe learning environment is essential to allow candidates to share experiences others can relate to. Sharing experiences is a gradual but vital aspect of the RVCC workshop sessions and the understanding of each participant's context is essential for a purposeful self-identification of learning achievements and competences. Group discussions and group work provokes opportunity, autonomy and accountability which are fundamental for the individual work the portfolio requires and are followed by mandatory individual work. Writing, documenting and building the portfolio, although guided, constitutes a profoundly solitary task, filled with individual choices as well as empowering opportunities.

The portfolio documents the candidate's lifelong acquired competencies, including evidence of skills and the RVCC activities. Submission of the candidate's final portfolio enables access to the Certification stage of the RVCC process.

## **VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION**

Full academic accreditation of basic education (4, 6 or 9 years of schooling) or upper-secondary education (12 years of schooling) is issued upon successful assessment of the candidate's Portfolio by an appointed Jury within the scope of the Basic Level or Upper Secondary Key Competence Frameworks that are part of the National Qualifications Catalogue.

In the case of a partial certification, a Personal Qualification Plan is issued with information on education and training opportunities and suggestions of pathways for the acquisition of the competences still required.



## **MIGRATION AND EMPOWERMENT**

The most significant aspect for migrant candidates is the assignment of an advisor who accompanies the candidate throughout the entire RVCC process. The advisor (Técnico ORVC) acts as a mediator between the candidate and the RVCC process team.

Another important aspect is the methodological focus on empowerment. Trigger questions, life history (Histoire de Vie), critical thinking workshop sessions and the Competences Portfolio, are all oriented towards mapping cultural heritage and lifelong experiences which, in turn, helps to more effectively value one's identity.

The RVCC Process is also a channel for the emergence of new competences and skills, such as digital literacy, maths and literature, as well as the capacity of speaking out and the exercise of full citizenship, as the RVCC Process is highly participatory.

Creativity is boosted and the capacity for decision making is improved, as candidates are constantly asked to make choices, organise information, write, commit to a script and build up a narrative.

The Centre's methodology has been honed to ensure as much impact as possible for both migrant and native candidates:

Firstly, advice, guidance and co-planning of each participant's concrete next steps in terms of training, academic goals, personal goals and work goals are integral and mandatory in Lisbon Qualifica Centre's methodology. The empowerment that is achieved during the RVCC process is thus maximised and potentially transformed into impactful changes for the candidates.

Secondly, the Centre is part of a larger learning ecosystem. It is integrated into Lisbon's Lifelong learning Programme and it is part of the City Council's Department for training and development, ensuring candidate's access to several lifelong learning initiatives, including digital inclusion courses, literacy courses and alphabetisation for both, native and migrant communities. Most candidates take part, after or during the RVCC process, in training courses, VET or other lifelong learning initiatives promoted by the Lisbon City Council, partners or other organisations. Moreover, candidates are often informed depicted and/or invited to awareness initiatives ensuring continuous follow-up to interested candidates.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Lifelong Learning is paramount to bridge all the divides in Lisbon and to foster equality and success. It has been the goal, since the foundation of the Training and Development Department - more than thirty years ago - to develop skills, foster partnerships and accelerate adults' qualification, allowing workers and citizens to find new paths for professional and personal fulfilment.

Our results, our care for the methodological approach attest to our vision. To transform Lisbon into a city of learning by leveraging knowledge, developing skills, addressing the educational divide, the digital divide and the citizenship divide, and creating opportunities for the success of all its citizens.

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## **PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION OF SKILLS ACQUIRED IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXTS**

**Fausta SCARDIGNO, University of Bari, Centre for Lifelong Learning for  
Migrants and Refugees (CAP), Italy**

### **THE MISSION OF CAP (CENTRE FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BARI (ITALY)**

CAP<sup>1</sup> was established in 2015 at the University of Bari as an experimental output of two research projects funded by the European Fund for the Integration of non-EU migrants (EIF). Since 2016 it has been supporting young and adult refugees and migrants in managing their vocational and professional careers through a process of formal validation and certification of their skills and prior learning, acquired in formal and informal contexts (Berger-Schmitt, 2000). These forms of informal and non-formal learning frequently take place without full awareness or intentionality on the part of the protagonist, who thus finds it hard to acknowledge them and attribute them to him / herself. The vocation of CAP, as a university service for the valorization of lifelong learning among adults, is expressed in the service offered to the users of self- and hetero-assessment of soft skills against a profile of skills useful for new employment and ongoing training paths. This relies on the interdisciplinary work carried out by researchers in the areas of sociology, the psychology of work and didactics / formative assessment.

The University of Bari, through CAP, is a member of the Italian University Network for Lifelong Learning (RUIAP), which over recent years has been dealing with the problems of formal recognition, validation and certification of foreign qualifications, such as the time required, the costs and the complexity of the bureaucratic procedures.

It currently seeks to apply the combined guidelines of articles 22 and 25 of the Geneva Convention, of art. 2 of Law 148/2002, of art. 39 of the TUIM (Testo Unico Immigrazione) paragraph 5, the procedure laid out in the Testo Unico on immigration (legislative decree No. 286/98, directive 2011/95/EU – legislative decree 16/2014 - recognition of qualifications in lieu of original documents, the procedure foreseen for law No. 148/2002 following the Lisbon Convention).

It provides services to migrants and refugees such as information and guidance; assessment of soft skills; conversion of informally acquired on-the-job learning into academic credits; accreditation of previous studies and professional qualifications (also in instances where the original documentation is unavailable) according to the regional and national framework. The process of accreditation and certification consists of 5 steps: profiling, evidence gathering, evidence assessment, evaluation and accreditation, and conclusion (Scardigno, Manuti & Pastore, 2019).

The attention given by the Centre for Life Long Learning for Migrants and Refugees (CAP) to the valorization of learning acquired in all kinds of contexts arises from the reflection on the radical changes that the labour market has been subjected to, effectively imposing a rethinking of the framework of professional competence. The fluid and uncertain edges of post-modern careers call for not only technical skills but also soft skills, such as independence, flexibility, a spirit of adaptability and re-orientation (Bauman, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> [www.uniba.it/centri/cap](http://www.uniba.it/centri/cap)

The skilled worker is not merely one who possesses qualifications and experience, but who is able to demonstrate his / her skills and knowledge in the field in relation to context-specific demands. In order to understand the cognitive aspects of the learning process, it is useful to make a distinction between three terms: knowledge, skill and competence. One may know information, a fact, a theory or a procedure. The associated skill lies in the capacity to apply such knowledge in order to carry out tasks and solve problems. Having competence means having the capacity to use knowledge, skills and information in real life and work situations.

This dimension of expertise is closely linked to informal learning, i.e. all those forms of learning that take place tacitly and through informal channels, starting with the family itself. This reflection, supported by evidence gathered in work contexts and by the results of scientific research on a national and international level (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002; Jacob & Parks, 2009; Kyndt, Dochy, & Nijs, 2009; Manuti *et al.*, 2015), is broadly confirmed in the attention which over recent years the European Union has dedicated to the role played by the informal and non-formal contexts of life in the development of competences.

Individuals learn and acquire skills not only in the traditional scholastic and / or university context (formal learning), but also and ever more often in alternative contexts: through participation in the organizations of civil society or in the virtual field of Internet and mobile devices, either individually or among peers.

## **CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION OF SKILLS ACQUIRED IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXTS**

The connection between social research and the contextual policies of cultural and academic integration was obtained through an operative protocol adopted between CAP and the Regional Council of Apulia, and later extended to include the Universities of Foggia, Salento and the Polytechnic of Bari in June 2018.

The protocol concerns the construction and implementation of the Regional System of Validation and Certification of Skills of the Apulia Regional Council (SRVCC), which embraces the experimentation set up by CAP for the certification of the skills / qualifications acquired in non-formal and informal contexts over the course of the individual's life, which must be valorized, clarified and recognizable, with particular reference to the target group for CAP: political refugees or beneficiaries of international protection.

CAP researchers and the Professional Training Section of the Apulia Regional Council collaborated on the definition of an experimental working methodology for the provision of the service for the identification and validation of skills, and the University of Bari CAP was acknowledged as the regional 'certifying authority' for the identification and validation of skills.

The experimentation began with the request, sent to CAP, to examine the experiential and training background of two users of Afghan origins, who had been in Italy for a few years, and had been involved on a daily basis in intercultural mediation at reception centres, public structures and bodies. The two users aspired to carry out their professional activity with a formal recognition of the title / qualification of 'intercultural mediation expert'. In specific terms, the folder of transversal skills enhanced the profile of the two users, in line with the skills required by the professional body in question, as highlighted in the judgement given by the operators and provided together with the clarification document.

The service centre of the university accepted this innovative (the first case in Italy with refugees) request, making the commitment to lay down the basis of an ever more structured service, which would be accessible also to those who might need it in the future.

The activity started with the drafting of the application and the compilation of the 'Consent to the itinerary for the identification and validation of skills' sheet.

Those responsible for the acceptance and validation at CAP therefore undertook the process for the recognition and clarification of formal qualifications as well as non-formal and informal experience, in view of their potential certification by the Apulia Regional Council. The starting point, from within the Regional Repertory of Professional Bodies, was to identify the profile for which certification had been requested. The description sheet of the skill units and the relative knowledge and skills was compared with the evidence presented by the users to verify any similarities. The figure identified as the target of their certification for both users appeared to be made up of three areas of competence: the acceptance of foreign citizens, the facilitation of the exchange between foreign citizens and their territory of reference, and the development of social integration activities.

Starting from there, individual interviews were carried out in which the CAP researchers asked the users to provide as detailed a description as possible of their formative and professional experiences relevant to the field of reference. This information, documented by proof (letters of reference, work contracts, certificates of participation, diplomas, etc.), was included in the clarification document or portfolio, which highlights the experiences and the activities carried out, translating them into meaningful and documentable learning processes.

In particular, by making reference to the experimentation carried out with the two users, respectively citizens with subsidiary protection and international protection, the analysis of the curriculum and its translation in the clarification document highlighted major overlapping between the skills, knowledge and abilities outlined in the sheet of the Regional Repertory and the studies documented by various sources of proof, numbered so as to make them available in the confirmation process as foreseen by the certification itinerary.

CAP then contributed to enhancing the portfolio of the two users, inserting among the documented studies and those in progress an evaluation of their so-called soft skills, i.e. interpersonal skills useful for carrying out the role of intercultural mediation expert alongside their other technical skills.

The phase following the drafting of the clarification document consisted in the validation of skills, which in concrete terms entailed the analysis of the evidence produced to support the studies enumerated. Once the reconstruction phase was completed, the itinerary outlined the possibilities for completing the itinerary – in relation to the percentage of coverage of the skills expected by the users – with the definition of a plan of action regarding the potential completion of their study careers, and / or the integration of relevant professional experiences.

In the case of the two users, given that the percentage of coverage of the three areas of competence investigated was over 70%, it was possible to continue along the path of formal certification. The validated skills were formalized in the Certificate of Validation, and this stage came to an end with the identification of the contents to investigate in the direct assessment followed by the official request for the constitution of a third-party evaluation panel, made up of experts in the subject area in question, as well as experts in validation and certification from CAP, representatives of the social sectors, of the Ministry of Labour and the Sector of Professional Training of the Apulian Regional Council.

The assessment consisted in a technical / practical test of the skills not covered by the users' curricula. The itinerary was finalised successfully, with the awarding of the certificate of professional qualification as 'intercultural mediation experts' for both users, the first two beneficiaries of international protection in Italy to receive a professional qualification recognized by the Regional System of Education and Training. The agreement was based on the common institutional interest in guaranteeing to every individual the valorization of the

skills acquired in all learning contexts, coupled with the possibility of putting such skills to use in the various fields of lifelong learning (education / training / work).

On the basis of the protocol, access to services for the identification and validation skills acquired in non-formal / informal learning contexts will be possible in dedicated service centres, lifelong learning centres and / or university structures with placement services (career guidance) offering the recognition and acknowledgement of skills in the universities of Apulia.

The Apulian universities and the Puglia Regional Council will be called upon to guarantee the matching of training and university courses for the recognition of university training credits (CFUs) and, should the responsibility remain on a regional administrative level, develop the methodology of issue of the certification of skills / qualifications; analysis of the access requirements to the roles of the SVCC-RP; staff training; the definition of a regional repertory of soft skills; the formulation of a methodology of credit recognition covering training paths and university careers for the purposes of student placement; all with particular reference to our target group of international students and refugees.

## **OUTCOMES OF ACADEMIC INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BARI ALDO MORO CAP**

Over these years, thanks to the efforts of CAP, 17 refugees have won a grant financed by the Conference of Italian Deans, by the Ministry of Inner Affairs and by the Regional Agency for the Right to Study to start and / or continue their university study, and two refugees have gained a formal recognition of their professional experience and the consequent certification by the Apulia Region. This experience is a clear example of how it is possible to achieve such an ambitious goal in southern Italy, where we are very near the Mediterranean area where many migrants first land.

Over the years, CAP has developed an innovative approach to prior learning recognition based on identification, validation and certification of experience and learning. During identification CAP examines the professional and educational resumé of the candidate and, where necessary, supports him or her in the writing and editing of the Europass curriculum. Later it carries out an assessment of the evidence provided, according to three criteria (value, pertinence, validity). At the end of the second phase, CAP communicates the final decision to the candidate and issues the validation documents. The third and last phase provides for a final assessment before a board composed of experts, representatives of the Regional Council, members of CAP, and the representatives of trade unions, trade associations and social partners, according to Italian law (art. 29 L. R. n. 15/2002).

The strategic element often undervalued by the hosting community, called upon to work towards integration, is the desire for autonomy among migrants and their wish to move away from a welfare-based dimension in order to affirm their own capabilities and skills.

This aspiration is very often frustrated by the objective difficulties that they encounter, but even more by the subordinate level to which not only their contribution is relegated – often downgraded compared to their actual professional potential – but also their social position.

The step forward that the hosting societies are called upon to make, as expressed also by the UNHCR, consists of placing the refugees in a condition to be able to state their own needs and to take part actively in decisions concerning their own lives. When they are in a position to be able to take part in the definition of strategies and policies, it will at last be possible to speak of the real empowerment of the refugees themselves.

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Balmes 132-134  
08008 Barcelona - Spain

T. +34 935 421 825  
F. +34 935 422 975  
[www.eucen.eu](http://www.eucen.eu)  
[office@eucen.eu](mailto:office@eucen.eu)

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