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Synthesis report of the perceptions of academics and policy makers

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This document disseminates work in progress under the project Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in European Universities of people with fewer opportunities who follow a non-traditional path to Higher Education.

This is the second intellectual output and the overall aim of this document is to collect opinions and perceptions about the procedures of accreditation of prior experiential learning of academics and policy makers who are responsible for defining the accreditation procedure in their organizations/universities and applying the standards and conditions that shape the evolution of the education both at local and national level.

The data reported in this document have been collected through interviews to university teaching staff, researchers, deans and policy makers in four different countries (Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy).

APELE reports and documents are available at www.apele.eu

1. Acknowledgements

This report is the result of a team effort in 2020. The content about the accreditation of previous experiential learning (APEL) in Higher Education of people with fewer opportunities has been collected and developed at national level by the partners of the APELE project who have contacted and interviewed university professors and policy makers in Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy.

It comprises four individual country reports and each country report follows a similar structures and a same methodology.

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2. Introduction

This report is a synthesis of the mapping exercise about opinions and perceptions of university professors and policy makers on the assessment, recognition and certification of skills obtained in previous experiential learning in four European countries: Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy.

“Experiential learning means the knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study, which are not formally attested through any education or professional accreditation. It can include instruction-based learning provided by any institution, which has not been examined in any of the public examination systems“ (Evans, 1984).

The findings of this report bring together the point of views, experiences and proposals of academics and policy makers involved at national level in suggesting and eventually developing accreditation of previous experiential learning. It provides an overview of the current situation and highlights national differences, similarities and common elements on the discussion about the possibilities for adults with fewer opportunities to access Higher Education.

The recognition of the non- formal and informal learning as a non-traditional path to University opens the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area¹ to adult students from under-represented groups, such as low socio-economic or educational backgrounds, migrants and refugees and people who live in remote geographical areas.

Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)² could support and strengthen lifelong learning processes and develop new perspectives in line with today’s societal challenges. It responds also to the need of universities to reach out and attract new groups of people. Opening up Higher Education to new groups of learners who lack traditional qualification is in line with the lifelong learning and social inclusion policies at

¹ **European Education Area** by 2025 intends to promote mobility and the academic recognition of qualifications for all EU citizens. https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en Last retrieved 16.02.2021.

² **APEL** is a procedure for giving official public recognition to a person’s learning regardless of how it is acquired.

European and National level. In fact, widening participation and social inclusion strategies in Higher Education is imperative for the national political agendas and it has been high on the policy agenda in Europe for nearly three decades.

The Bologna declaration of 19 June 1999 recognized the need to create more comparable and compatible education systems across Europe (European Commission, 1999); social inclusion in Higher Education has been a key discussion point of the Bologna implementation process since the 2001. Increasing social inclusion in tertiary education is one of the four key goals of the 2017 European Commission's renewed EU agenda for Higher Education ³ It is also one of the objectives of the framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020⁴) to expand access and completion of tertiary education increasing at least of 40% the proportion of 30-34-year olds having completed some form of Higher Education or equivalent education.⁵ These benchmarks are aligned with the changes in the society and take into consideration the importance of matching the individuals' competences with labour market needs. The recognition and accreditation of informal experiential learning can reduce unemployment by improving skills of people at risk of social exclusion and can bridge the gap between education and employability. Technological development, digitalisation and the use of artificial intelligence are affecting the way we live and work, changing and increasing skill requirements for both for employed and unemployed people.

Initial training acquired in Higher Education is not sufficient to guarantee a lifelong personal success in the labour market and does not ensure employability throughout life. Education and training have to be supplemented and enriched by continuous acquisition of new knowledge and skills, in a system allowing people to pursue learning, understanding and developing of new specialized knowledge throughout their lives. Today's societies are knowledge societies⁶ where "knowledge is a central issue and a key to ensuring the future competitiveness of the European economic system" (ERT, 1989). In this context the universities play the role of leaders for a continuous education society while developing new cultural values, training people for fostering social inclusion and increasing their employability and mobility in Europe. "Social inclusion in Higher Education – often called the social dimension of Higher Education – refers to the increasing access to Higher Education and degree completion for underrepresented groups, improving Europe's human capital and innovation capacity (Kottmann et al.,2019).

Literature on APEL is largely discussed at European and national level and the accreditation and recognition of previous experiential learning "could act as a transformative mechanism in term of knowledge and learning" (Merrill B., Hill S.,1999). However, to have an efficient transnational accreditation system of experiential learning with a positive impact on the students' mobility and labour market requires a cultural shift and institutional changes by the member states and the Higher Education institutions. The attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area is linked to the need to adapt curricula and methodologies for building specific

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0247&from=EN>
Last retrieved 16.02.2021

⁴ European Policy Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020 Framework) https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en Last retrieved 16.02.2021

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en
Last retrieved 16.02.2021

⁶ **Learning society** is an educational philosophy advocated by the **OECD** and **UNESCO** that positions education as the key to a nation's economic development, and holds that education should extend beyond formal learning (based in traditional educational institutions – schools, universities etc.) into informal learning centers to support a knowledge economy (known as a "world education culture").

skills for the future. The design of a curriculum across disciplines, borders, cultures and languages is supported by the European Commission encourages and finances the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities'.

The findings of the synthesis report in combination with the findings of IO3 lay the basis for addressing the creation of APELE project methodology and the template for a personal portfolio.

3. Overall aim – specific objectives

The main purpose of this report is to identify and record ways of assessing the recognition and certification of prior learning of people with fewer opportunities including people with no high-school diploma, migrants etc. to access Higher Education through the views and experiences of academics and policy makers in Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy.

Specific objectives are:

- To collect the opinion of the target groups about the current status of accreditation of prior experiential learning;
- To investigate the target groups' views and perceptions about future changes in the current status;
- To record target groups' attitudes towards possible changes;
- To outline any opportunities for recognition and certification of prior experiential learning outcomes;
- To explore and identify new procedures and ways of organizing certifications and recognitions;
- To record proposals for the evaluation methods of accreditation of prior experiential learning.

4. Profile of the respondents

This research report is based on the input of sixty-six respondents representing universities and public institutions coming from four different European countries.

The group of respondents includes fifty-one academics and fifteen policy makers in a leadership/management position.

The criteria used for the selection of the academics and policy makers were common to all the four partner countries and were defined in the project proposal.

The criteria for selecting the representative sample of academics were:

- At least 10 years in an academic position.
- At least 5 years in university management position.
- At least 5 years of work in an educational policy management organization.
- At least 10 years of teaching in Higher Education/Universities.

The criteria for selecting the representative sample of policy makers were:

- At least 5 years in an administrative position in Ministry and Regional Governing Bodies.

5. Methodology

The data from academics and policy makers were collected from February to May 2020 using interviews. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the organization of the interviews and collection of information due to the restrictions adopted by the national governments. Gathering information through face to face interviews was not always possible and when necessary the partners used on-line meetings.

Before starting the interviews the leading partner of this output, Armes Progetti, has provided the partner institutions with guidelines that included a semi-structured questionnaire for conducting the interviews and an analysis tool for recording and reporting the results. All these documents have been commented on by the partners, revised by the leader and finally approved and used by all the partners when conducting the interviews.

The guidelines were intended to ensure a similar collection of information from different countries having in mind the objectives of the interviews.

With regards to the data collection method, the technique of random sampling has been used to explore the different status that allows individuals with fewer opportunities to access Higher Education. The selected tool was a semi-structured interview because it offers the possibility to guide the conversation according to a format and at the same time allows deepening the questions when the conversation becomes interesting.

In fact, most of the interviews were characterized by an interaction between the researcher and the respondent thus permitting a productive and meaningful conversation on the main topics of the research. Researchers have taken all the steps to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, and only few personal data about age, gender, professional situation and year in the professional situation have been reported in the national reports. The semi-structured interview was built on six sections (cf. Annex 1): one about personal data, one for comments and proposal and four for the following main axes:

Axis one: about the level of the respondent's awareness and involvement in the accreditation of prior experiential learning;

- Axis two: about personal perception on the type of evaluation;
- Axis three: about recognition of prior experiential learning adopted by the respondents' organization;
- Axis four: about certification at national level.

6. Demographics

The total sample in the four countries was comprised of sixty-six academics and policy makers: ten in Denmark, twenty-nine in Greece, eleven in Iceland and sixteen in Italy (Table no. 1). Only the interviews conducted in Iceland and in Italy present a balance between the number of academics and policy makers. In Greece and Denmark the academics are over-represented and policy makers are under-represented. The number of academics and policy makers in the four countries is displayed in Figure 1.

Country	Grand Total
Denmark	10
Iceland	11
Italy	16
Greece	29
Grand Total	66

Figure 1

Among the respondents were thirty-five men (53%) and thirty-one women (47%). Considering the total sample the majority of men were in Greece (27%) and the majority of women in Italy (17%) see Chart 1.

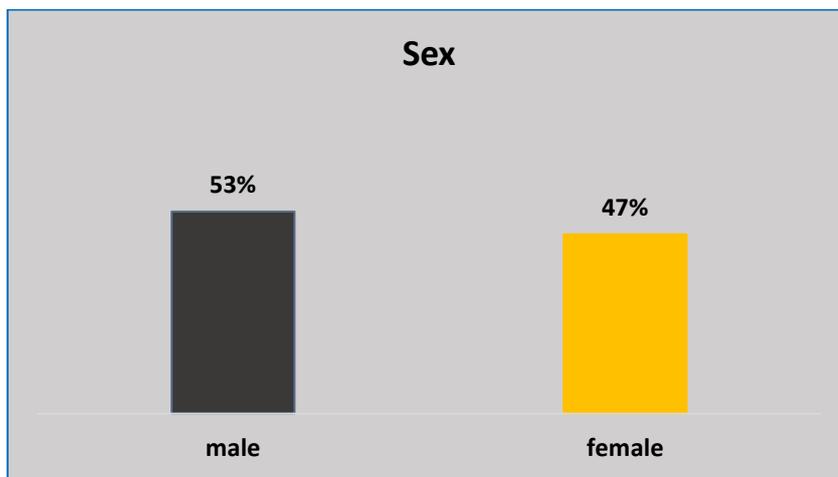


Chart 1

The age distribution of the respondents is shown in Chart 2. The majority of the respondents (twenty-seven were aged between 51-60 (41%), one was between 31-40 (2%), fifteen between 41-50 (22%), and twenty-three (35%) over 60 years old. In the sample the group of respondents in the age group 51-60 are over-represented.

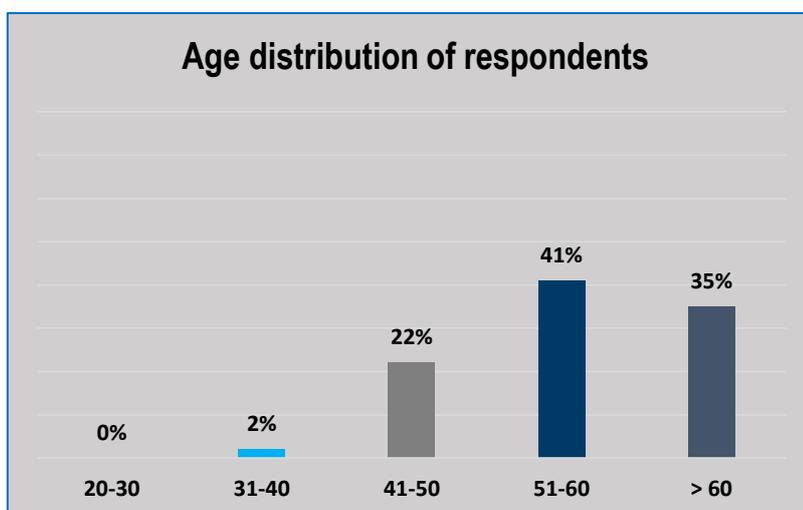


Chart 2

The analysis of the number of academics and policy makers in the four countries shows that more than three quarter (77%) of all the respondents were academics. Policy makers were 23 % (Chart 3).

The differences in the above shares might depend on the pandemic situation: the APELE teams in charge for collecting the data had more chances to interview academics working in their institutions than policy makers.

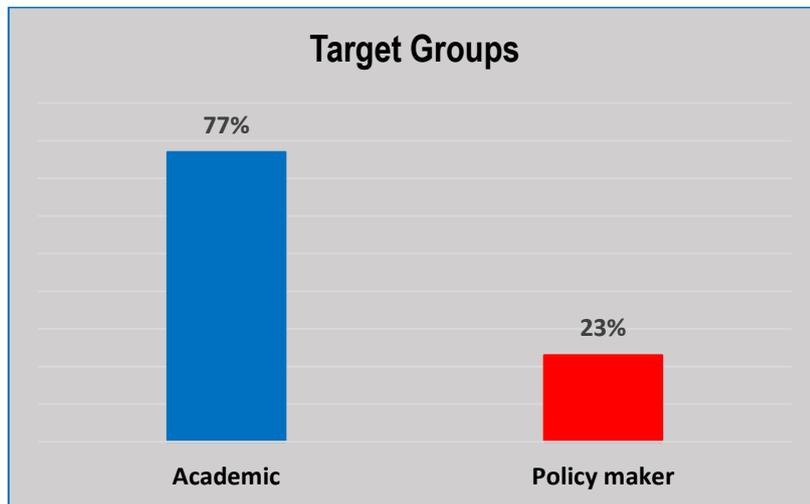


Chart 3

The country breakdown shows a wide difference among numbers of academics and policy makers in the four Member States.

The number of academics and policy makers in each of the country is displayed in Chart 4.

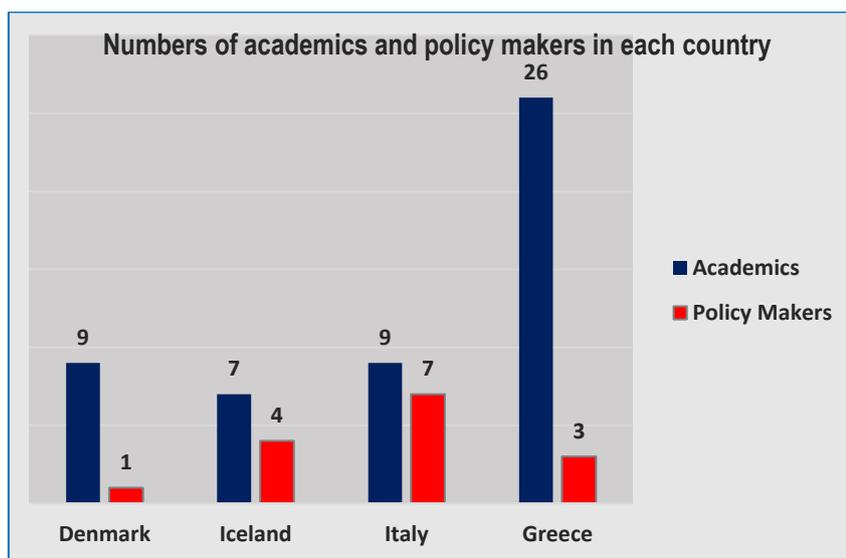


Chart 4

With regards to the experience of the fifty-one academics teaching in Higher Education institutions, fourteen had 11-20 years of experience (27, 45%) and correspond to the majority. The nine respondents with 0-10 years of experiences were three from Greece and six from Iceland (17, 64 %). Only six academics had more than 40 years of experience (11, 77%): four were from Greece, one from Iceland and one from Italy. The respondents with an experience of 21-30 years and 31-40 years were respectively twelve (23, 54 %) and ten (19, 60 %) as displayed in Chart 5. In each of the four countries most of the academics were responsible for internal policy and for shaping new admission systems in their institutions - including the APEL procedure - if their institutions permit to use additional selection criteria to enter Higher Education.

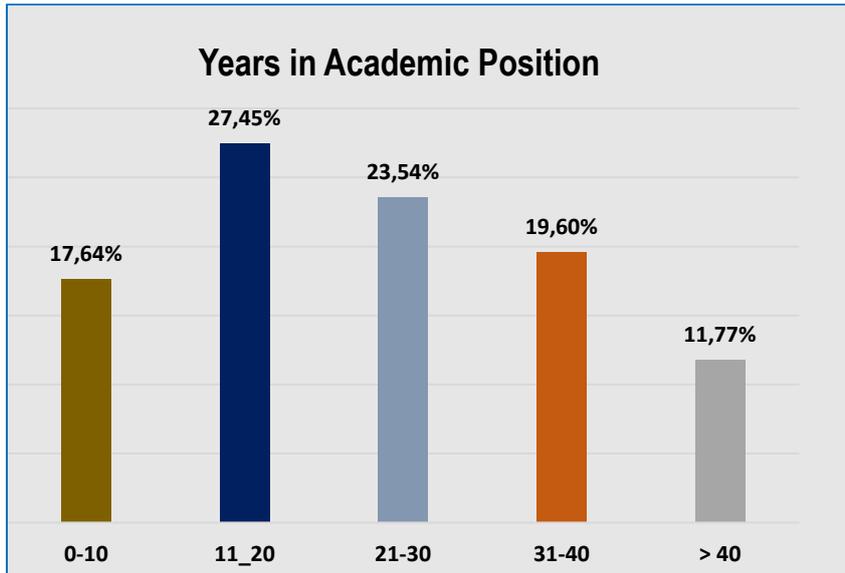


Chart 5

The fifteen policy makers had a long career in administrative position. The majority (58%) had more than ten years' experience; only three respondents from Iceland had 0-5 years of experience (20%), see Chart 6. The years of experience in administrative position of the policy makers is a very important element to consider because they are in charge for promoting and shaping the educational strategies at regional and national level on Higher Education in their countries.

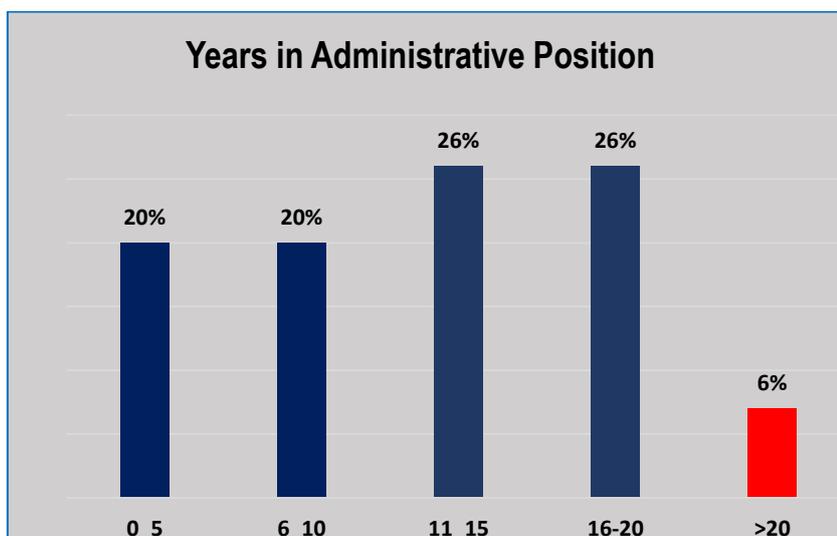


Chart 6

7. Contents Analysis

This section is a summary description of the analysis result of the qualitative data collected during sixty-one interviews and reported in country national reports by the project partners. Following the indications included in the guidelines for the preparation of the national reports the partners have proceeded using the method of content analysis. "Content analysis" is a research method that has been developed specifically to investigate a wide range of problems. The content of the investigation serves as a basis for drawing conclusions and can be both quantitative and qualitative⁷. This is a method and not a tool or technique as the items are "natural" quality communication materials which were not created by the researcher but were produced spontaneously by the target group.

To conduct the content analysis the partners have followed the following steps. First, they translated the data collected during the interviews into English and converted the answers and comments received by the respondents into a text. The next step was to get acquainted with the data by reading the entries multiple times and taking notes. This was followed by the codification based on a set of criteria and keeping in mind the purpose of the research and its objectives. Finally, the partners wrote topics and emerging concepts that came up from the data at national level. From the codification and classification of the topics identified in the interviews were created four categories that are presented in Figure 2

CATEGORIES		
Axis 1	Accreditation	Level of respondents' (academics and policy makers) awareness and involvement in the accreditation of prior experiential learning
Axis 2	Evaluation	Personal perceptions of the respondents (academics and policy makers) concerning the type of evaluation
Axis 3	Recognition	Formal recognition of procedures within the institution where the respondents work
Axis 4	Certification	Certification procedures within the institution where the respondents work

Figure 2

8. Highlights of the country analysis

9. Axis 1 – Accreditation in Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy

⁷ Content analysis can be both quantitative (focused on counting) and qualitative (focusing on interpreting and understanding).

Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) is the process of articulating individual knowledge and skills gained in life experience in order to make them assessable and subject to formal accreditation. Ideally, such process should have equivalence with formal qualifications, and should lead progressively to them. APEL is based on the principle according to which knowledge gained through experience can be considered equivalent to knowledge acquired in a classroom and underlines the integration of non-formal, informal and formal learning as well as the transfer of knowledge derived from work, family and leisure activities to mainstream education systems.

The process of enabling individuals to gain credit for learning outside the formal system of education and training has been developed in Europe over the last decades in parallel with the introduction of the system of National Standards in vocational training and of a modular credit system in Higher Education⁸.

The accreditation of prior experiential learning is formally recognized for the vocational sector while in Higher Education and in the majority of countries the APEL procedure is moving rather slowly (Valk, 2009), notwithstanding the fact that the recognition of prior learning has been officially stated as important topic by national ministers of education for entering or re-entering Higher Education. Sometimes theoretical discussions on APEL had been accompanied by practices and regulations in some universities while in others discussion is going on but with no actions.

The results of the interviews collected in this first category (Axis 1) provide evidence of the level of awareness of the sixty-one academics and policy makers in the partner countries about the accreditation of prior experiential learning. In addition the analysis of the interviews offers direct information on the participation and of the role of the respondents in the APEL process and the type of the APEL procedures that are legally approved and recognized at national level (if any).

Key questions about the awareness of the academics and policy makers in the accreditation of prior experiential learning

1.1 Do you know what accreditation of experiential learning is?

1.2 Have you ever participated in such activities?

1.3 If the answer to 1.2 is yes, please explain the type of the procedure and the role of the respondent

DK In Denmark all the respondents had knowledge about procedures of accessing university by non-traditional ways and all the policy makers had participated in this activity before. On the contrary the academics had not participated and had no experience in accreditation activities, however most of them (78 %) had an extensive knowledge of the system of Quota 1 and Quota 2 put in place in Denmark (see DK IO1 National Report). In Denmark, the Quota 1 system allows the students to enroll at the Higher Education institutions purely on the merits of his/her academic record achieved at the high school (formal requirements). Quota 2 was introduced to give a chance to the students who could not enroll Higher Education via Quota 1 because

⁸ Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education based on the Bologna Declaration, <http://ehea.info/page-qualification-frameworks>

they do not meet the formal requirements. Quota 2 system offers the possibility to have the enter requirements for applying to Higher Education to clever, talented, competent, skillful people, independently from their social status. Quota 2 is a system to correct the low scores through the acknowledgement of practical experience, strong 'drive' and willingness to study; Quota 2 admissions are allocated according to criteria published by the education institution(s) to which one have applied. The number of study places in quota 2 at some programmes is very limited, compared to how many applications are filed every year.

Some of the respondents had formal arguments against the admission of students via Quota 2 to Higher Education while others acknowledged that life-experiences' actually offers more than just a formal education degree. Nevertheless the common perception is that there is the need to find an alternative model of assessment and a broad system of admission to Higher Education for those ones who are very motivated and willing to pursue their studies. According to the respondents and their knowledge of accreditation of previous experiential learning for the APEL process a similar system to the Quota 2 could be used which would need to be less expensive from an administrative point of view.

GR In Greece, only few of the respondents (38%) were aware of the accreditation of previous experiential learning. Some of them were informed because they had been members of the working team at national level for developing the National Quality Framework (NQF)⁹ others due to their academic work, participation in international conferences or personal interest. The rest (62%) had never heard about it before the interview with the APELE team.

IC In Iceland there is a very high level of awareness and knowledge about the recognition of previous experiential learning. The majority of respondents (91%) were familiar with the recognition process and one had heard about it. The level of knowledge is different among the sample. However, there is a common opinion that the recognition of previous experiential learning had been a subject for discussion in Iceland for years. None of the respondents has ever actively participated in such activities.

IT In Italy the totality of the sample (100%) did know about accreditation of prior experiential learning and 93% of it has direct experience. Most of the academics had been directly involved in the accreditation of APEL procedure applied to vocational education and training sectors (VET)¹⁰ while the policy makers have been involved in the design of national and regional educational and employment policies for the accreditation of prior experiential learning.

Until May 2020, there was no national legislation providing rules for the recognition and certification of the APEL procedure for accessing Higher Education. To enter Higher Education in Italy it is compulsory to have secondary school diploma Nevertheless, in Higher Education, students enrolled in the university can have evaluated and recognized prior experiential learning (for a maximum of 9 ECTS) as a "curricular internship"

⁹ National qualifications framework is a formal system describing qualifications. 47 countries participating in the Bologna Process are committed to producing a national qualifications framework to understand learning outcomes.

¹⁰ In Italy, the term vocational education and training tends to be 'reserved' for specific programmes primarily under the remit of the regions and autonomous provinces. From a European perspective the term 'education and training' comprises all types and levels of general and education and vocational education and training (VET). Irrespective of the provider or governance scheme, VET can take place at secondary, post-secondary or tertiary level in formal education and training or non-formal settings including active labour market measures. VET addresses young people and adults and can be school-based, company-based or combine school- and company-based learning (apprenticeships). Therefore, the term VET also covers the technical and vocational schools. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4132_en.pdf Last retrieved 09.03.2021

when it is required by law and considered necessary for young people within the scope of alternating school-work opportunities.

There are also some attempts, , innovative practices, in the South of Italy where the Apulia Region and the “University of Bari” Service Centre for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.)¹¹ work together for the recognition of APEL procedure for migrant people.

Key questions about the awareness of the academics and policy makers in the accreditation of prior experiential learning in Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy

1.4 Are you familiar with the accreditation activities in your country?

1.5 If the answer to 1.4 is yes, please open a discussion according to the answer

DK In Denmark the respondents had different perceptions and opinions about the accreditation of previous experiential learning (APEL) that is not recognized yet as an alternative path to enter Higher Education. In the country, it is in place a Quota 2 system to access Higher Education studies but it does not correspond to the APEL process. According to the respondents and their knowledge of accreditation of previous experiential learning (APEL process) for the Danish Higher Education system it could be convenient to use a system similar to the Quota 2 system. However, the respondents reported that from the administrative point of view this system is too expensive to be used for APEL.

Some of the respondents had formal arguments against the admission to Higher Education of students via Quota 2 while others acknowledged that life-experiences actually offers more than just a formal education degree. Nevertheless the common perception is that there is the need to find an alternative model of assessment and a broad system of admission to Higher Education for those ones who are very motivated and willing to pursue the studies.

GR The majority of the Greek respondents (83%) did not have any official information of the APEL process and one of them declared that the Greek society is not ready for such an innovation. The remaining 17% certified that there is no official procedure in Greece for entering Higher Education following different path than the national examinations. It was also mentioned during the interviews that at national level no discussions have taken place for accreditation of experiential learning for entering Higher Education. In Greece and at national level the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is regulated only for the labour market and the qualification of individuals who have no educational diploma or qualifications.

¹¹The Centre for lifelong learning – C.A.P. – is a service of the University of Bari that promotes lifelong learning and certification and accreditation of skills acquired in formal and informal contexts. It is open to all EU and non-EU citizens. <https://www.inhereproject.eu/universities/c-a-p-centre-for-lifelong-learning-at-university-of-bari-it> Last retrieved 09.03.2021.

IC In Iceland the level of awareness among the respondents was high. However, the open discussion revealed two main different ways of understanding the accreditation of previous experiential learning. One view - and it was the majority - was about the accreditation of experiential learning implemented on secondary level. The second view was about the accreditation at university level. In this second case it has been declared that according to the Ministry of Education the law clearly states that students can enter Higher Education by other means. In fact, in Iceland the admission to Higher Education is up to each university and there is not legal obstacle for the universities to admit students with non-formal or informal education under the condition that admission criteria are clearly advertised in advance. All the respondents had favourable opinions on the accreditation of experiential learning at university level.

IT In Italy the admission to Higher Education requires the possession of an upper secondary school leaving certificate or other equivalent qualification obtained abroad and there was not a national legislation for the accreditation of prior experiential learning to enter Higher Education at the time (May 2020) the interviews took place.

From the results of the interviews in Higher Education, prior experiential learning can be evaluated and recognized (for a maximum of 9 ECTS) as a "curricular internship" when it is required by law and considered necessary for young people within the scope of alternating school-work opportunities.

The majority of the sample was familiar and had participated in relevant positions in the accreditation activities related to the vocational and training sectors. They have been involved in different positions: as presidents of the evaluating Committee, chairperson of the Commission in charge for the assessment of skills of foreign student, expert of the certification of competences, president of the Scientific Council of the Centre of Lifelong Learning in Bari, Member of the Italian Parliament and member of the Commission in charge for Culture, Science and Education, scientific Director of the Institute for Evaluative Research on Public Policies and manager in charge for adult education at the Lombardy Region etc.

10. AXIS 2 - Evaluation: Personal perceptions of the respondents (academics and policy makers) concerning the type of evaluation in Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy

Evaluation is often used in a generic way to mean any kind of review of quality or standards, irrespective of any evaluative judgement being passed. It is even used as shorthand for external quality evaluation. In some settings evaluation is used to encompass all forms of quality assurance other than accreditation. For example, in the discussions about the European Higher Education Area, accreditation is often contrasted with 'evaluation' (meaning audit and/or assessment and any other form of external evaluation).¹²

Key questions about the type of evaluation and the main characteristic of the evaluator for the accreditation by academics and policy makers

2.1 What are the types of evaluation that you consider the most suitable for the accreditation of the experiential learning in European Universities?

2.2 Why this type of evaluation?

2.3 Describe the type of evaluation of the selected type (s) above

DK The Danish respondents agreed that a good system for evaluation should combine the evaluation of the students' academic level and their motivation to study. They also agreed that it is difficult to apply objective criteria when the applicants come from another country because their qualification may not be easily converted, or when the educational credentials are from non-formal or informal learning. The respondents also agreed that the main evaluation criteria should be the level of language proficiency, analytical skills and level of knowledge of the society.

There was a common understanding of having a baseline of professionalism when determining the admission of new students to Higher Education and that both the evaluation criteria and evaluation procedures should be the same at national level in order to ensure the same system throughout the whole country and same evaluation practices across universities.

Regarding the modalities to evaluate an applicant, the respondents agreed that valuable tools could be interviews, essays, questionnaires and simulation with work sample. The modalities of self-assessment could not be reliable and on-site observations were considered not feasible from the logistic point of view.

The respondents perceived a portfolio as a good idea, as it can show something about the personality of the applicant, and give an insight of personal interests and life experience. However, the portfolio should be conceived in such a way as to assure that the applicant is the author of the text. It should also report in details applicants' previous experiences and analytical skills.

GR The Greek sample of respondents had different perceptions about the type of evaluation. The majority of the sample (45%) and most of them were academic, told us that traditional process of written examinations could be an effective type of evaluation. Practical (laboratory) exams as well as a combination of written examinations and practical (laboratory) exams were mentioned by 10% and 25% respectively. Some of the respondents (17%) suggested a supervisor in charge to support the individuals who want to enter Higher Education to build a personal portfolio before the evaluation of the qualification process. Only few respondents (3%) expressed the idea that different paths should be made available, i.e. first a supervisor for recording the qualifications, then a 6-month pre-university program followed by a written examination for the recognition of prior experiential learning.

In order to keep the validity and reliability of the APEL process the 83% of the sample suggested the setting up of a committee of at least three persons and 17% identified the university departments as the most appropriate institutions to be in charge for the organization of the evaluation procedure.

IC The Icelandic respondents stressed the importance of having an evaluation process very well organized, well defined, transparent and a safe procedure that the organizations could trust. A process that would build trust between institutions and between the applicants and the universities. Over half of the sample mentioned also the importance to provide support to the applicants (also linguistic support) during the whole procedure not to discourage them on their way to further education. The majority of the respondents believed that a mix of evaluation types would have the best outcome. Preferably a portfolio of the applicant's experiences and then an interview where the content of the portfolio could be discussed and verified. Except the portfolio, other types of evaluation were mentioned especially for entering Higher Education scientific studies.

As regards the different types of evaluation, there was a general concern among the sample about the difficulties that applicants could experience when taking an examination. The most common approach was to think out of the box and focus on what the applicants have to offer. The general idea about the evaluation of skills was that it should be organized in a way to make it possible and easier for the applicants to share knowledge. Over half of the members said that in order to have an effective and efficient evaluation process

the universities should seek assistance and knowledge from Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins (FA) (i.e., The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC)) and other service centers that have great experiences and knowledge on this matter at secondary level.

For strengthening the quality of the evaluation, most of the respondents proposed to outsource the evaluation to a group of three/four people or to an institution with the possibilities for the department of the universities to have a member in this group of experts. Training needs were also mentioned together with the necessity to have a well-defined framework for the learning outcomes.

IT In Italy the majority of the respondents considered a suitable evaluation system a procedure based on interviews where the conclusion should be associated to a personal description and to the context of origin of the candidate. Other methods considered important by the respondents were written and oral examinations, pre-disposition of « on the job » apprenticeship and interviews and documentation of the experiences, because they are the most appropriate type to evaluate experiential learning. It was also recommended to have a central political decision body and a national legislation to regulate and define in details how to ensure both the anonymity of the examiners and the examinees.

2.4 Who will evaluate?

2.5 Main characteristic of the evaluator

2.6 How to ensure the validity and reliability of the process?

DK The most qualified and suitable institution to evaluate the applicants was unanimously identified by the sample in the single Higher Education institution, which possesses the academic competences for the evaluation. An evaluation committee should be set up and have administrators and academics as members of the committee with at least one senior academic. The evaluation committee should ideally include academics that change from year to year, along with study counsellors.

The evaluators should be the professors in each university with knowledge of the subject matter of the university where the applicants intend to study.

The applicants' professional insights should be evaluated through a list of questions and answers to be assessed by the evaluator. A one-layer assessment of the evaluation committee and its activities – for example reflecting on the criteria that weighted the most when admitting students – would ensure that the process is lean, transparent, and also not too bureaucratic.

GR Most of the respondents expressed the idea that the evaluation should be carried out by a team of at least three academics having the position of university professor and with knowledge in adult's education policies and principles. The total sample agreed that the evaluator should have specific knowledge of the subjects to be evaluated, and 24% and a 14% of the sample suggested to organize a workshop or training seminar for academics before they get involved in such a procedure.

The evaluator should be an academic with the skills and the ability to judge objectively the knowledge, abilities and skills of the examinee. For this reason, apart to be familiar and have knowledge of the subjects, the evaluator should have the ability to recognise the general qualifications. The entire sample agreed that the characteristic of academics are appropriate for this process.

The majority of the sample (83%) suggested that the validity and reliability of the APEL process should be ensured by different committees for each academic subject. Additionally, for enhancing the quality assurance one committee had to be in charge for the exam's material and exam's questions and a different one for the evaluation and grading. Each committee has to be composed of at least three academics with expertise in different fields. 76% of the total sample was strongly in favour of a central political decision and legislation that could ensure the validity of the evaluation process and the anonymity of the examiners and the examinees. The graduate admission exams procedure and process was considered reliable by 66% of the respondents because it is a very well-known and accepted system by the Greek society and the academics are competent in all its steps.

IC Concerning the evaluator, the Icelandic sample had a very interesting opinion: since the university system is not able to grant credits at secondary school level, the whole process for the recognition of prior learning to enter Higher Education should be at the secondary school level because matriculation exam is not on university level. Some respondents mentioned student counsellors, staff members of different departments, service centres and the ENIC/NARIC office as suggestions for hiring evaluators.

Regarding the characteristics of the evaluator, a common perception was that an evaluator needs to have certain skills, insights and knowledge on the many factors involved in the evaluation and should be able to guarantee professional and fair treatment of the applicants. Furthermore, the university staff should have seminars or workshops of some kind on these matters so the employees of the universities can understand and trust the evaluation procedure. In order to ensure validity, the evaluation process to enter higher education could build on the experience of the accreditation system of prior learning at the upper secondary level. This approach could facilitate the creation of trust between secondary and Higher Education system. Majority of the samples said that this process needs to lead to an evaluation system agreed by all the universities in Iceland.

IT The majority of respondents agreed that the evaluation process should involve experts with strong empathic and listening skills with a long and consolidated experience in the field (at least ten-year experience in the field of the competence to be certified) and combined with the knowledge of the methods of appraisal. The process should also be standardised in order to ensure recognition at least at local (regional) level.

11. AXIS 3 – Recognition: current status or proposed status of recognition system within the institutions where the respondents work

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is known by many names in different countries. In UK it is called APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), CCC (Crediting Current Competence) or APEL (Accrediting Prior Experiential Learning). In France there is a more sophisticated system in which assessment is known as “Bilan de compétences”, “Bilan des compétences approfondi” or “Validation de Acquis des Expériences”.

Looking through the international literature the three phases of recognition, evaluation and certification are also described sometimes as accreditation to identify the whole procedure”depending on language, culture, local governments and the diversity of local development” (Andersson, 2013).

3.1 Current state of recognition system within your organization (if any)

3.2 Proposed recognition procedure

3.3 Characteristics of the proposed procedure: add details

DK There is not a recognition system for the accreditation of prior experiential learning in Denmark. A recognition system should consider the possibilities to give access to Higher Education to individuals who did not fulfil the required access criteria or dropped out and to groups of people with fewer opportunities and psycho-social differences. The recognition system should assure more equity in Higher Education for those ones who have good general qualifications and relevant competences.

It is a common opinion that could be beneficial an exchange of opinions among universities about the modalities and the criteria to be established for the recognition of prior experiential learning. A committee should be in charge for the recognition procedure with a rotation mechanism. The process should be as local as possible, and could vary from institution to institutions as the local Higher Education institutions know best, what is important to achieve in the studies connected to the course of studies they offer.

GR An official procedure for the recognition of prior learning that gives the possibility to enter Higher Education has not been officially established in Greece until the period this research has been carried out. Most of the Greek respondents (79%) were confident in the national legislation and were in favour of the establishment of a national recognition procedure. The opinion was that a national recognition could support the mobility of workers inside the country and give people more confidence and trust. Some of them suggested having a European procedure to facilitate the movement of citizens within the European Union. Only 21% of the Greek sample was in favor of recognition at local level university advocating that departments are the basic unit of a Higher Education institution according to the Greek Constitution.

IC Recognition of prior learning for admission to Higher Education is not implemented in Iceland. However the country has the legal basis that formally recognizes it. In fact, the Higher Education act, no. 63/2006 states that, despite the fact that an person who wants to enrol at a public university must have passed the matriculation exam or an equivalent final exam, universities can admit individuals who have not passed matriculation exams or equivalent exams, given that they have reached a certain level of maturity, experience, knowledge or skills corresponding to the university's qualification requirements for tertiary-level studies. The majority of the sample proposed a recognition registered into the traditional education system, that it should come from the Ministry of Education and be at national level. Five respondents in the sample (45%) said it would be good for the Ministry to clarify the laws regarding admission to Higher Education. By proposing a recognition on a national level, the role of the universities could be clearer and hopefully easier for the students to enter Higher Education. The possible benefits for the students would be: more equality, more freedom of movement, more possibility to select Higher Education path and improve the occupational level.

IT Recognition of prior learning for admission to Higher Education is not implemented in Italy. Among the Italian respondents there was not a common understanding: some of them mentioned the steps: "transparency" of competences, "evaluation" and "certification reported in the European Qualification Framework (EQF)", one respondent said that the credit recognition procedure in place at regional level can be an example of recognition of prior experiential learning for Higher Education. Another respondent was against the recognition of previous experiential learning that allows the enrolment to the Higher Education because it would mean going against the law, which lays down fundamental requirements and that cannot allow discrimination.

The recognition procedures proposed during the interviews were: internal recognition (inside the university), local recognition (at region level), and national recognition. Among the proposals was envisaged the creation

of a framework agreement between the Region and the Universities. An alternative suggestion was to recognize the experiential learning within the third level educational path through the attribution of ECTS based on a certification system that excludes an automatic recognition.

Regarding the characteristics of the recognition procedure there are two main ideas among the respondents. Some of them believe that the recognition procedure should be internal to the University and others, instead, believe that the recognition should be only at the local level (therefore regional).

3.4 How is it ensured the quality of the proposed recognition procedure?

3.5 Describe the main criteria for an objective recognition

DK The common perception of the sample was that it would be beneficial to have general guidelines valid all over the country, although the recognition has to be made at a local level.

The system could then be national, as a starting point, while the recognition should take place locally at the single Higher Education Institution. It was pointed out that there is a need to exchange evaluation experiences and have a common understanding for handling the selection procedures, without having a one-size fits all solution.

GR Among Greek respondents, there were different perceptions and point of views concerning the quality assurance of the recognition procedure. For recognition at local level (department or university), the experience of the teachers in the department was considered a factor that could assure the quality of the recognition procedure. For recognition at national level the quality assurance could be in charge of an independent body (such as Ministry of Education). 62% of the sample proposed to follow the rules of the graduate admission exams and some suggested including in the evaluation team some members with expertise in the subjects and in adult education.

The criteria suggested for an objective recognition process were many, and among others, the main criteria mentioned were to have different persons in charge for the evaluation and for the recognition and also an independent authority. An additional element was to adopt transparency tools such as National Qualification Framework.

IC For an objective recognition the main mentioned criteria was to ensure the quality of the proposed procedure. The recognition process has to be well organized, well defined, transparent and safe. It should be performed by well-educated and well-informed objective specialists, preferably groups, and with expertise in each field of studies in the universities. General opinion was that the outcomes must be registered into the education system in the form of units.

IT To this question, the respondents agreed that the effectiveness of the procedure must be guaranteed by objective criteria and by a certification. Three main criteria have been suggested by a university professor: validity, coherence, completeness. While a politician considered necessary to establish national guidelines for ensuring an objective recognition procedure.

12. AXIS 4 –Certification: current status and cost of certification system within the institutions where the respondents work and proposed person or organization responsible for certification in Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy

Certification is the process of formally acknowledging achievement or compliance: it can be used to signify the achievement of an individual, such as a student, or of an institution.¹³

In the APELE project, certification is considered the last step for the process called accreditation of prior experiential learning to access Higher Education.

4.1 Current state of certification in your organization (if any)

4.2 Who can certify? Identify/propose a person/organization responsible for certification

4.3 Is there any costs? If yes who is the beneficiary of this payment ?

DK In Denmark there is not a single procedure for the certification of prior experiential learning to access Higher Education. However, as a starting point, the government agencies are responsible for the certification system, and the respondents' opinion is that the requirement should be the same across the country. Concerning the costs, a common idea was that the certification to enter Higher Education should be free.

GR In Greece there is no procedure of certification of prior experiential learning to enter, re-enter Higher Education.

The most common opinion among the respondents (79%) was that the certification should be issued by a national organisation i.e., Ministry of Education or an ad hoc national organisation with the involvement of representatives from Ministry, Universities and National Organisation of certification. After the evaluation and recognition phases, the organization should be in charge of the legal and bureaucratic control before issuing the final certification. The rest of the sample (21%) was in favour of a final certification issued by the university at the level of department or by a newly created organization including a representative of each university who should be in charge to set conditions and process for the issuance of certificates.

Regarding the cost of the certification the majority of the respondents (72%) was in favor of a free certification. Others (28%) considered useful to pay a fee because the procedure of evaluation has a cost or because the payment of a fee makes the process more serious.

IC The totality of the Icelandic respondents agreed that there is no formal procedure, and no methodology regarding certification of prior learning at the university level in Iceland. There have been some exemptions for entering the universities in the past and there are still some for the shortening of a degree after admission. The majority of the samples believed that the Ministry of Education should provide guidance for a process at national level and define the rules for the evaluation groups. This should of course be done in good collaboration with the universities that should take part in the process. Nonetheless, the majority of the samples

¹³ <https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/certification.htm> Last retrieved 09.03.2021.

believed that certification should be done by an independent national authority and that extra funding should be available for the universities.

IT In Italy there is not an official procedure for the certification of prior experiential learning to enter Higher Education. The answers of the respondents were based on the personal experience and most of the time on the process in the area of vocational education and training inside their organizations. One of the respondent commented that Italy is far behind in this procedure compared to the countries of Northern Europe. The majority of the sample agreed on the fact that experts should be in charge for the certification. The experts should have skills and experiences in validation and certification procedures. A specific centre should be in charge for the certification. The « Centre for Lifelong Learning » of the University of Bari that issues the « Document of Validation of Skill for Migrants» which could be considered an example or good practice because it is in charge of preparing the examination for certification, working through a special joint committee of experts. Regarding the fees, the Apulia Region recognizes a voucher for each user engaged in the procedure.

13. Conclusion

In the four countries, the general perception of the target groups is that learning throughout life is a key element to citizen's personal development and that the accreditation of prior experiential learning has the potentialities to redirect careers and give access to new occupations, especially for the most disadvantaged groups of the society included the migrants. The data analysis demonstrates that the accreditation of prior experiential learning for entering or re-entering Higher Education is not formally recognized in the countries where the research was conducted. The awareness of the academics and policy makers about prior experiential learning is not the same in the four countries where the research was conducted. In Denmark, there is a high level of knowledge about procedures of accessing Higher Education via non-traditional path and both in Denmark and in Iceland there is a national legal background that can facilitate the accreditation of prior experiential learning to enter Higher Education. In Italy and in Iceland the data collection shows that there is a good knowledge about the accreditation. However, the open discussion in both countries revealed two main different ways of understanding the accreditation of previous experiential learning. One view - and it was the majority - was about the accreditation of experiential learning implemented on secondary level. The second view was about the accreditation at university level and not all the respondents in Italy agree to create different paths to enter Higher Education for individuals without a secondary upper school diploma. The Greek scenario presents a basic level of awareness and information on policies and opportunities among the target group and a general positive perception for such a procedure. Below two significant answers in Iceland and in Greece:

“...I can totally see that real skill assessment could be a good way to enrol peoples to universities...”

“... There is no such a procedure in Greece, and I don't know if it is possible to develop and apply such a procedure...”

In the four countries there is not a transversal approach concerning the evaluation system to put in practice and the number of the evaluators and their characteristic. A more general consensus was about the transparency and trust of this process. Regarding the recognition, the sample was divided between a national

and a local recognition system. In the four countries, there is no formal level of recognition and certification of prior experiential learning for entering Higher Education. An interesting suggestion was collected in Denmark regarding the setup of a post-admission support system to give the students a real chance to succeed in their project.

14. Definition of Terms

APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. It generally referred to non-formal learning experiences, such as those gained from doing a job or engaging in social activities (Fox & Nyatanga 1993).

APL: Accreditation of Prior learning. It generally referred to formal, organized learning experiences that might or might not have been certificated.

More recently, the distinction between APPEL and APL has become blurred as it has been recognized that the assessment/accreditation of such evidence of learning need not be different, regardless of the source and nature of the learning (Fox & Nyatanga 1993).

C.A.P.: Service Centre for Lifelong Learning

ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. ECTS is designed to make it easier for students to move between countries and to have their academic qualifications and study periods abroad recognised.

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en Last retrieved 09.03.2021

ENIC/NARIC: National information Centre, it is an entity established by each Party to the Convention for the Recognition of Qualification concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Commonly known as the Lisbon recognition Convention- LRC) in accordance with the Article IX.2

NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres www.enic.naric.net www.enic.naric Last retrieved 09.03.2021

ET 2020: Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training

ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning is the process that can help individuals acquire a formal qualification that matches their knowledge and skills www.lo.org Last retrieved 09.03.2021

TERTIARY EDUCATION: in this document tertiary education refers to level 5 of the classification issued by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)

SRVCC: In Italy is the acronym of System of Validation of Certification of Skills

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16. Annex 1: Outline of semi-structured questionnaire

<p>Axes 1</p> <p>At what level the target group is informed on prior experiential accreditation learning:</p> <p><u>Accreditation</u></p>	1.1 Do you know what the “accreditation of experiential learning is”?
	1.2 Have you ever been involved in any of these activities?
	1.3 If the answer to 1.2 is "yes", please explain the type of procedure and your role within it
	1.4 Are you familiar with accreditation activities in your country?
	1.5 Deepen the above issues based on your experiences

Axes 2 <u>Evaluation</u> : personal perception of the interviewee concerning the type of evaluation	2.1 Which type of evaluation is best suited to the accreditation of experiential learning in European universities?
	Some types that can be used are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Self-Assessment Questionnaire • On-site observation • Simulation with work samples • Examination (written or oral) • Portfolio of the experiences • Practice exams • Pre-survey with interviews • Others
	2.2 Why this type (or types) of evaluation?
	2.3 Describe the quality evaluation of the selected type(s)above
	2.4 Who is in charge of the evaluation?
	2.5 Describe the main features of the evaluator.
Axes 3 <u>Recognition</u>	2.6 Who ensures the validity and reliability of this process?
	3.1 Current status of the recognition of experiential learning in your Organization.
	3.2 Propose and describe a recognition procedure. Other possible proposal for recognition (choose only one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal recognition (inside the university) • Local recognition (at region level) • National recognition
	3.3 Characteristics of the recognition by the proposed procedure: add details.
	3.4 How it is ensured the quality of the proposed recognition procedure?
	3.5 Describe the main criteria for an objective recognition (choose one of following criteria) Types of criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training credits • Independent authority • External organization of the European Union • Transparency instruments (e.g. National Qualifications Framework, Guidelines, etc.)
Axes 4 <u>Certification</u>	4.1 Current state of certification in your organization/country
	4.2 Who is in charge of certification? Identify/propose a person/organization responsible for certification
	4.3 Are there any costs for the procedure? Who is the beneficiary of the payments?
Comments	
Add proposals based on your experience	