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APELE

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Needs Analysis – Comparative report

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The APELE reports disseminate work in progress under the project Accreditation of prior experiential learning in European Universities.

The overall aim of APELE project is to focus on people with fewer opportunities who follow a non-traditional path to university. Besides being relevant for the local population, access to university is extremely important for migrants across Europe, as university offers possibilities for further education and development. The project will record how typical, but mostly prior experiential learning, is recognized in different European countries, enabling people with fewer opportunities (including migrants) to have access to study in Higher Educational Institutions in Europe.

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APELE reports are available at www.apele.eu



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Introduction

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in European Universities (APELE) is a project that focuses on people with fewer opportunities who follow a non-traditional path to universities. The overall aim of the project is to explore innovative ways to access higher education and provide a new tool for the recognition of prior experiential learning for people with fewer opportunities. The partners of the APELE project will develop a procedure that meets the needs of the target group and is acceptable for EU policies. The project focuses on people with educational difficulties, geographical obstacles, cultural differences, people with no school diploma including migrants.

According to the European Commission (2019) there is a shortage of skilled workforce in Europe, but by giving migrants and other people with fewer opportunities greater access to the labor market this problem might belong to the past. It is necessary to assist people with fewer opportunities in seeking education and work. Each individual is unique, not only in a biological sense but also concerning wants, needs and desires. Maslow argued that needs come both from within us and are something that is created by the society and psychosocial elements. It is natural for human beings to fulfill their needs, which is accomplished with motivation and effort. Educational needs are a part of his theory, along with safety needs, social belonging needs and more (Maslow, 1943).

The modern world strives, or at least should strive, to celebrate this diversity. Mobility is constantly increasing, and borders are getting more and more unclear. Higher education institutions are no exception and universities follow strategies to increase internationalization and mobility within their walls. In this spirit the APELE project wants to present an alternative path in order to encourage the target group to make significant and outstanding contributions while joining higher education. This process needs to be done in an organized and scientific way to ensure both its utility and its effectiveness.

In the first intellectual output (IO1), out of five IO's, the existing status and institutional/legal framework in each country was recorded. The IO1 report pointed out that a common factor, in all four researches, is the need for the candidates to have a high school diploma to enter universities (Adamo, 2020). The second intellectual output (IO2) recorded the perceptions of academics and policy makers in each country. This comparative report is the third one (IO3) of the APELE project and outlines the needs of the target group in the four partner countries – Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy. The report covers what really needs to be done in order to help and encourage the target group to continue to study at European Universities.

As regards to the outlined aim and objectives, the description of the target group, methodology and tools as well as a timeline of the output, this needs analysis follows the guidelines of empirical research and is both quantitative and qualitative. The design of the needs analysis considers and includes demographics and special characteristics of the participants, their educational level, past training and experiences of the target group. The tool used was a structured questionnaire that included the following four focusing factors: Demographic data, professional situation, recognition process and educational needs for study in higher education. A questionnaire was selected as it is a method which allows the respondents to maintain their anonymity and gives the target group the chance to reflect on the questions and answers at a convenient time. The design of the questionnaire gave the participants the chance to express and explain their needs and expectations, views and stories.

Regarding the target group, the needs analysis includes the data of demographics, i.e. family-related and socio-economic characteristics of the target population. These include age, gender, family status, number of children and financial situation amongst other factors. The level of education of the target groups, both the level of formal education and/or initial vocational training is recorded. The analysis also focuses on those category features that are directly related to the problem and the reference framework. Additionally, prior training and experience relevant to the project, such as studies, participation in training programs and professional/vocational experiences are outlined.

This analysis is necessary in order to record the qualifications and characteristics of the target population that have been obtained through non-formal education or based on vocational routes. It is essential to investigate the special characteristics of the target population depending on the problem to be solved. For all these features, it is essential to specify the level of heterogeneity in the target population, which will determine the execution of the intervention.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on everyone's daily lives all over the world. Because of the outbreak, all activities slowed down as lockdowns and restrictions made it hard or even impossible for people to go out. Many could work from home, but others did not have the means to do so. All of this also had an impact on the APELE research project. In each of the four participating countries this situation made it demanding to reach participants which fulfilled the necessary requirements to belong to the target group. Interactions and communications with organizations, institutions and regional education directorates are examples that were, in some instances, hard to get in contact with. The data was collected via email, online

videos, audio calls and in-person meetings. The situation differed between the participating countries during the time of the research but overall, it was a demanding task which took more time and effort than expected.

This comparative report's aim is to give an overview of the target group's circumstances, their past, their needs and motivations on their educational journeys.

The analysis focuses first on the background of the target group, where they were asked what their specialties, level of studies and current profession are. It was inquired how many years of work experiences they have in their current profession, if they have other work experiences and if so for how many years. Next the target group was asked if they have prior experience of accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)¹. If they had participated in APEL they were asked to score the procedure on a five-point Likert scale (*very bad - bad - ok - good - very good*). They were asked on whose initiative they are pursuing higher educational studies as well as participating in the APELE project. The participants of the target groups were given the chance to express their motivations and expectations for pursuing higher educational studies. Their language preference, time of year and location of where the procedure could take place, as well as the financial side of it, were observed. Another question revolved around at what level they would propose the certification and recognition and if that would be at, national, local or internal level. By providing a list of university programs they were asked what their educational needs for study in higher education were and what their special educational needs were. They were then asked to express how important certain objectives are for them in terms of their decision to study in higher education. As a last step, they described their soft skills capabilities.

One of the most important parts of IO3 is the target group's needs related to recognition and proposed ways of the recognition process. This is particularly important as it defines the success of the two last steps of APELE, IO4 (portfolio) and IO5 (evaluation).

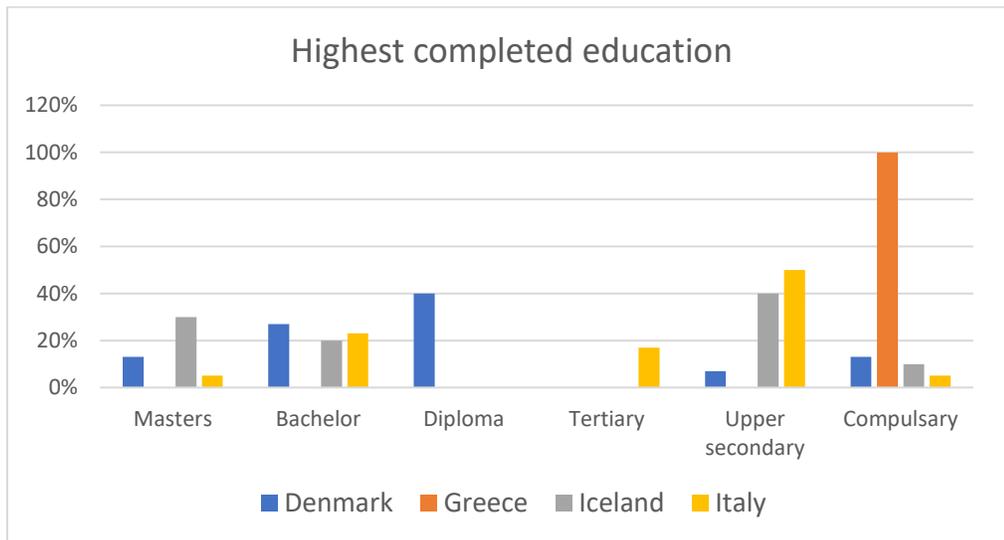
¹ APEL - Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning is a process of applying for credits for learning that take place outside the traditional education system. Skills knowledge and abilities that can be equal to those that are gained in the formal system (University of Cumbria, e.d.).
APELE - Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in European Universities is the name of the project which focuses on the accreditation process in European universities (apele.eu, e.d.).

Personal data

The number of participants in the four researches were between ten and eighteen. In every research but the Danish one, the majority identified themselves as women. One chose not to identify any gender. The most common age group in total was thirty-one to forty years, although the age spectrum differs between each individual research. Most of the participants were married and had children, except in the Danish research as the majority was unmarried and none had children. Most of the participants in all four researches were migrants.

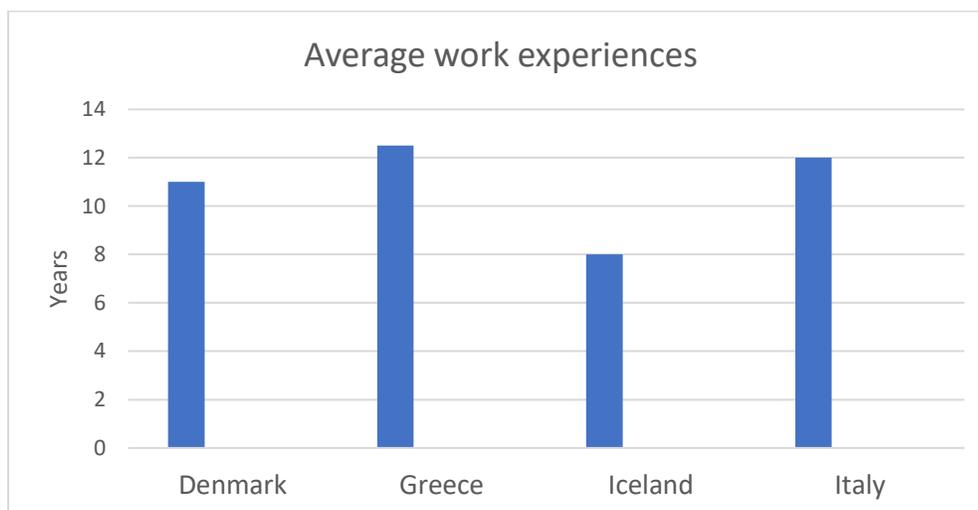
The educational levels and experiences varied between individuals in the researches. In the Danish, Icelandic and Italian ones some of the participants had already earned a degree, bachelor's or master's, and some had even applied to a university without the necessary credits, as was the case in the Icelandic research. Only in the Greek research each participant had merely finished compulsory education, demanded by law in Greece (graphic 1).

Graphic 1



Work experience varied greatly between both individuals and each research. Individual work experience in the four researches was from just a few months to forty years. The years of average work experiences in the four participating countries were between seven to fifteen years, Denmark 11,5 years, Greece 10-15 years, Iceland 7-8 years and Italy 12 years (graphic 2).

Graphic 2

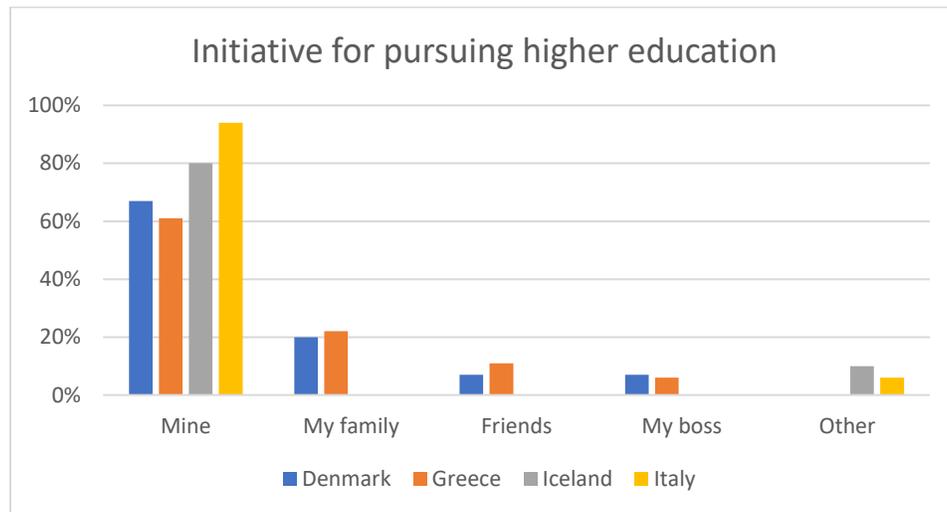


As noted above, all participants in these four researches had at least one factor in common. They all faced difficulties applying for higher education. They were individuals who, for many different reasons, did not hold the key which would give them access to a university.

APEL

Until they took part in the APELE project none of the participants in the Greek research had not heard of APEL, and therefore had not participated in one before. The majority (67%) felt personally motivated to take part in this research, the remaining participants were motivated by others (family, friends or boss). As for the motivation to pursue HE, 61% felt personally motivated. In the Danish research the majority had not participated in APEL before and 80% felt personally motivated to take part in this APELE research. The rest were motivated by others. Looking at the initiative to seek higher education, 67% felt personally motivated. Many in the Icelandic research had heard of APEL and three of the participants had already taken part in such a procedure. One did not give an answer concerning this matter. The motivation to take part in the APELE research was personal for many participants (60%) and the rest were motivated by others. The great majority felt personally motivated to seek higher education studies (80%), one felt motivated by others and one chose not to give an answer. Most of the participants in the Italian research had not taken part in APEL before. The motivation to take part in APELE came, for the majority of 72%, from themselves (graphic 3).

Graphic 3



Almost every participant felt personally motivated to seek higher education, as a matter of fact 94% of the participants. In the picture below is a summary of common keywords describing motivations to pursue higher education and expectations among participants in all four researches.



“I want to study because I want to create a change in the world and not just for myself. When studying I expect to get the knowledge in order to achieve this goal.”

Danish national report, p. 22.

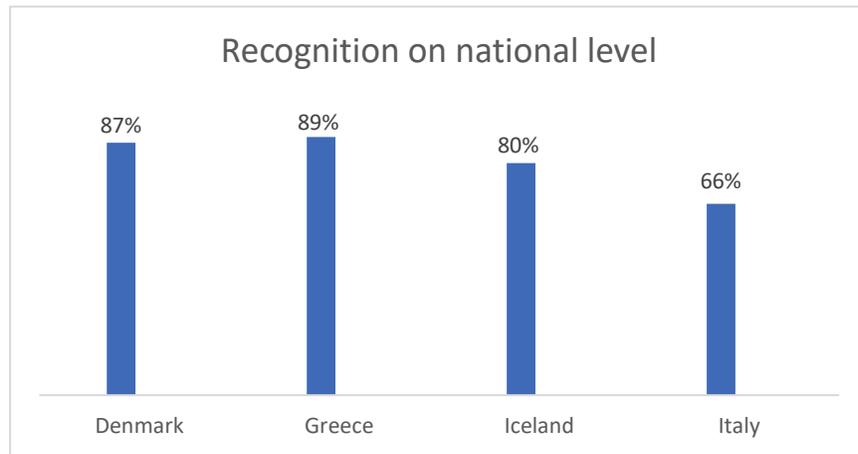
Needs relating to recognition process

Candidates who wish to participate in a recognition process in order to gain access to higher education were asked in which level they prefer to get this recognition, internally, locally or nationally. In the four researches the participants were given different options, most fitting for each of them. They could choose whether their certification and recognition were to be national, local or internal (that is, within a specific university). Furthermore, the participants were asked to identify what type of evaluation they would prefer for the process. They could choose from eight different types or propose a different type; examination (written or oral), practice

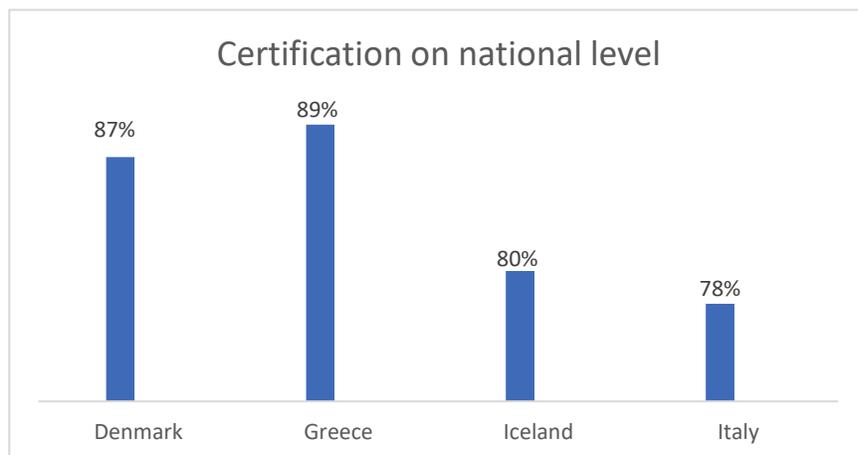
exams, portfolio of experiences, on-site observation, simulation with work samples, interview, self-assessment questionnaire and pre-survey with interviews or another type they want to propose.

Most of the participants in the Greek research feel that a national recognition is strong, and they do agree on the recognition process to be in the national language of the host country. However, the participants in the other researches wished for it to be either in their own native language or in English. The majority of all participants stated that they are willing to follow a language program in the native language. The greater majority in all four wished to acquire a national certification (graphic 4&5). This is in line with the European Council’s recommendation “the steps necessary to achieve automatic mutual recognition for further learning without having to go through a separate recognition procedure” (European Union, 2018).

Graphic 4

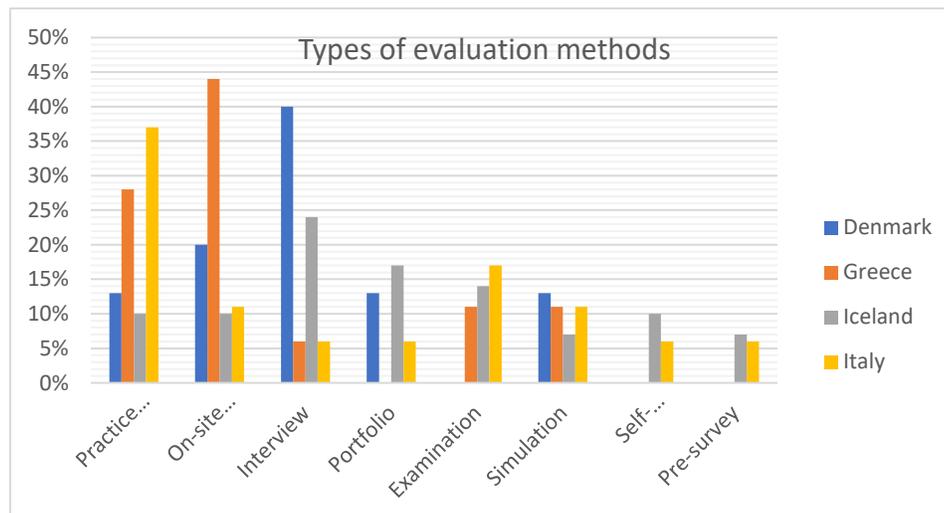


Graphic 5



Regarding the type of evaluation best suited for each participant, there were a few common denominators. Interviews were most often chosen in the Danish and Icelandic researches. Practice exams were the most often mentioned type of evaluation in the Italian research and the second most popular choice in the Greek, the most popular being an on-site observation. In both cases the reasons were that the participants felt that their qualities were best shown in practice/on-site. The participants have in fact acquired certain skills that cannot be demonstrated without them being able to physically do them (graphic 6).

Graphic 6



According to the participants in all four researches proposed evaluation methods are valid and reliable for different reasons.

The participants of the Danish research expressed that interviews are valid and reliable because it is a “face to face” method. In an interview a person’s body language, communication skills, expressions and personality can be shown. There the evaluators get a wider understanding of the interviewee, can get to know their personality, and seek in depth information from the persons.

In the Greek research practical methods were most chosen, on-site observation and practice exams. According to the participants those methods enhance the reliability and validity of the process. With these methods the examinee can prove their knowledge and the examiner can see the result of their acquired knowledge in practice. Using these methods, it becomes evident that the knowledge and skills of the participants indeed exist while other methods (such as interviews) may relate more to the self-evaluation of skills and capabilities without a demonstration in practice. This idea is also expressed by members of the

target group in Greece who pointed out that learning from books and writing does not guarantee that knowledge has been acquired.

In the Icelandic research the participants' most chosen method were interviews. The majority mentioned that they would choose to mix the three most chosen methods amongst the total participants (interviews, portfolio and examination). They believe that by using mixed methods the examiner will see more dimensions of the examinee and get a better understanding of the person's ability and knowledge. Based on this, they consider that this approach would make the process more valid and reliable.

In the Italian research the methods practice exam and written and oral examination were the most chosen. The participants found that practice exams are valid because the examinee's competence can be shown and proven directly in the exam and there for is a way that avoids deceits and is a reliable and valid method. They also mentioned that some tasks cannot be described with words. Written examination is considered by the participants to be valid because it is a type that tests the examinee objectively and gives the examinee time to reflect on answers. It was also mentioned that multiple choice tests are especially good as they avoid the examinee's personal judgment. Oral examination is performed "face to face", where the examiner can see the examinee's communication skills, personality, interactions, and capabilities. Therefore it is impossible to cheat which makes it a valid and reliable method according to the participants of the Italian research.

A suitable time of year and location of the evaluation procedure, as well as possible procedure payment, were investigated. The majority of participants in all four researches had no preference on what time of year the procedure should take place. Some mentioned that it is important to know the exact date in advance. The majority expressed that they are able to travel outside of their city to participate in the procedure. However, in the Italian research the majority expressed difficulty in travelling outside of their current location. Concerning payment for the procedure, the great majority of participants in the Icelandic research were willing to pay, half of the participants in both the Italian and Greek research stated that they were also willing to pay for the procedure. In the Danish research on the other hand many expressed that this would be difficult for them and some expressed that the process should be free of charge.

Educational and special educational needs for study in higher education

The participants in the four researches are numerous and therefore they highlighted many different kinds of scientific fields in which they would like to educate themselves. The participants could choose from thirty-nine different fields and even add a field of their choosing. Furthermore, they were asked to identify the objectives for entering higher education studies and evaluate what was of most importance to them. Finally, the participants were asked to identify their personal soft skills, that is their capabilities. Detailed information can be found in each national report.

Educational needs of the participants in the four reseaches were very diversified. Many chose traditional higher educational programs while others expressed special educational needs. The programs mentioned in all four researches were fifty-two (table 1).

Table 1

Animal production, Fisheries & Aquaculture	History and Archeology
Art Studies	Hippotherapy and disability
Architecture	Industrial engineering
Agriculture	Interdisciplinary studies
Bio Systems and Agricultural Engineering	Law
Business Administration	Mathematics
Civil engineering	Mechanical Engineering and Aeronautics
Computer Engineering and Informatics	Medicine
Conservation and Restoration Studies	Media Studies
Cultural Studies/Cultural Management	Museum studies
Criminology	Music studies
Degree in education	Nursing
Dentistry	Odontology
Design	Pedagogy
Economics	Pharmacy
Education and Social Work	Physical education and sports
Educational sciences	Physiotherapy
Electrical and Computer Engineering	Production technology
Engineering management	Psychology
Environmental engineering	Public Administration
Ethology	Physical Education and Sports
Epidemiology	Social work
Fashion design	Speech and language therapy
Food Sciences	Theater Studies
Foreign languages	Tourism management/studies
General Engineering	Veterinary
Gender and Minority Studies	Zoology
Geology	

The greater majority found it important to have personal satisfaction when entering higher education studies. Many of them considered it important that the local society would be more accepting of them, should they pursue higher education. Quite a few felt that improving their confidence is of great importance and that this could be achieved via higher education. Over half of the participants found it important to find a better job after their studies as well as an increase in salary. A little over half considered an improved social life to be an important aspect. The majority of the participants were either neutral or felt it was not important that they could learn more about their subject of choosing by entering higher education studies.

In the Danish research the most chosen fields were art studies, business administration, computer engineering and informatics and tourism management. As for the decision to continue to study in higher education the participants felt it was more important to gain knowledge in their desired field of study than, for example, to be accepted by the local community or improve their social life. Being in an organized training environment and having personal satisfaction was, on average, of much importance for the participants. Getting a degree and improving self-confidence was the least important aspect of entering higher education studies.

In the case of the Greece research the most chosen field were agriculture, second was animal production, fisheries and agriculture, the third was nursing. Additionally, two participants added theology and one participant music studies as a field. The majority of the participants found that to continue study in higher education is very important in order to have personal satisfaction, be accepted by the local society and to improve their confidence. To learn more about a certain subject was of least importance.

In the Icelandic research the fields most often chosen were educational and social work. The second most popular fields were educational sciences and business administration. As for special educational needs, dentistry, interdisciplinary studies, engineering management and criminology were among the mentioned fields. The greater majority found it very important to learn more about their subject and have personal satisfaction. Overall, it was not of great importance for the participants to improve their self-confidence and their social life or to be accepted by their community.

For the participants in the Italian research the most chosen fields were art studies, cultural studies/management and foreign languages. Examples of other educational needs were zoology, hippotherapy and disability studies. On an average, having personal satisfaction and gaining knowledge on the subject was considered the most important element for continue to study in higher education. Getting a

degree, being accepted by the local society and improving social life was of least importance for the participants (graphic 5).

Graphic 5

Denmark	Greece	Iceland	Italy
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get a specific degree 2. Be in an organized training environment 3. Have personal satisfaction 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have personal satisfaction 2. Be accepted in the local community 3. Improve your confidence 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn more about the subject 2. Have personal satisfaction 3. Get more knowledge 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have personal satisfaction 2. Learn more about the subject 3. Find a better job after end of program

“Evaluation has to include as many dimensions of person’s experience as possible.” (Icelandic national report p. 9)

“Because I can express myself easier in this way [via interview]. I can tell them about my motivation and convince them to accept me. I think it is a good type because you can see if people are actually motivated and serious about it. You can see if they want to contribute to their country.” (Danish national report p. 30).

“In my age I’m afraid that writing exams is not an option. So, if the evaluator wants to check my qualifications, he has to ask me and see me doing my job. It will be valid and reliable procedure if the criteria are how I’m doing the job and not how can I describe it.” (Greek national report p. 9).

“Knowledge is also to know “how to do”. Sometimes the school diploma does not give the ability “to do practical things”. (Italian national report p. 32).

Concerning the key soft skills, the majority of participants in the Danish, Icelandic and Italian research felt confident about being able to adapt themselves in different contexts and work conditions. Other often mentioned soft skills were “I like to achieve results and solve problems” and “I prefer to learn by doing”. Furthermore, the majority felt confident with changing work and relationships.

Conclusion and recommendation

The target groups of the four researches had similar demographic characteristics concerning gender and age. In all cases but the Danish research the majority were married and had children. Migration was one of common factors amongst the participants in all four researches. The Greek participants had only finished compulsory education while in the other three cases some participants had earned a degree, bachelor’s or master’s. Work and educational experiences and years of work experiences varied greatly between individuals and researches. Most of the participants in the research did not have any prior experience of

accreditation of experiential learning but a few had heard about such a procedure. When asked about what motivated the participants to seek higher education most of them said they were self-motivated to do so.

All but the participants in the Greek research wished for the recognition process to be either in their own native language or in English. Most of the Greek participants said that if the process would be in the local language it would be a good opportunity for them to learn the language. The majority in all researches were positive towards the idea of following a language program in the native language of their host country. Regarding recognition and certification, national level was the most chosen option in all four researches. Italy stood out where almost one third of the participants' preference was on an internal level for recognition but followed the others in wanting certification on national level. Concerning what time of year, the participants found most suitable to participate in the procedure, the majority of all four researches had no preference. Most of the participants said that they would participate even if the evaluation procedure would take place in another city. Paying for the procedure was not a barrier for many of the Danish and Icelandic participants, while only half of the Greek and Italian participants would agree to pay. It is important to consider the socio-economical position of the target group and adjust the potential payment to their financial opportunities.

In the Danish and Icelandic research's interviews were the most often chosen type of evaluation. Practice exams were most popular amongst the Italian participants and second most popular to the Greek participants whereas on-site observation was most popular in the Greek research. It was mentioned that the choice of methods could be related to what types and valuation procedures people know best. This could change if people were introduced to more methods.

The participants were given a list of thirty-nine educational programs and asked to make up to five choices based on their educational needs, as well as their special educational needs that were not found on the program list. Their selection was very diverse as can be seen in the national reports of each country.

The majority of all participants seek personal satisfaction and more knowledge by deciding to study in higher education. The Danish participants objectives were also to be in an organized training environment and learn more about the subject. In the Greek research the participants want to improve their confidence and be accepted into the local communities. In Iceland and Italy, the participants, in addition to seeking satisfaction and learning more, hope to have better job opportunities after graduation.

The needs analysis shows that the participants in IO3 of APELE, although being a group of people with fewer opportunities, are motivated and ready and wanting to change their future based on entering higher education. The individuals face different barriers and have very different backgrounds but most of them are

confident and willing to adapt themselves to different conditions and are unafraid of changes. However, many of them experience difficulties doing so due to their family and economic situation, geographical locations and lack of time as a result of long working hours. They are people that are willing to learn the language of their host country and adapt into society, seeking personal satisfaction and knowledge, to make a better life for themselves and their families. In conclusion, these are people whose skills and abilities would greatly benefit the society, if their capabilities were aptly recognized in order to access higher Education.

Proposals from the target group

- The procedure of evaluation should be in English or in the native language of each participant.
- A language program should be available for those that are not familiar to the language of the host country.
- The procedure can be conducted anytime of the year, and if carried out regularly over the year it might increase participation.
- The procedure should preferably be free of cost to ensure equality.
- It would be best if the participants would not have to travel long distances to take part in the procedure. For some it would be very hard or impossible.
- National recognition by a national recognition authority is preferred. That would increase opportunities regarding entering educational programs and institutions.
- Educational and special educational needs, regarding preference of educational programs, are very diverse between the four countries so it is recommended that they are based on each national report in each participant countries.
- The type of evaluation method proposed is different between countries, and the emphasis is on “face-to-face” methods. It is recommended to use a diverse mix of methods where people can show their personalities, demonstrate their skills in practice and be evaluated on paper (exams, portfolio).
- Support methods are suggested in the Danish research, not only for the procedure of the evaluation but also during the target groups studies, so they have a better chance of completing their education. These are support methods like the voluntary driven project “Student Refugee Buddies” in Denmark.²

² Student refugee. 2017. “Student Refugee Buddies”. Student Refugees. <https://studentrefugees.dk/en/>

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Annexes: National Reports Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Italy