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# APELE

## Intellectual Output 5

### Report on Methodology for Recognition of Prior Learning

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## Introduction

The overall aim of the report is to provide a methodological framework and guidelines for the implementation of the recognition of the prior learning outcomes of the target groups and specifically those with fewer opportunities including migrants. The purpose is to create a solid basis for discussion and exchange of ideas on how recognition procedures could be implemented by the partner Universities, namely the University of Akureyri, University of Patras, Università Degli Studi Di Bari Aldo Moro, in cooperation with Armes Progetti and University of Copenhagen in the participant countries, Iceland, Greece, Italy, and Denmark. The development of the methodological framework has been built on the results of the findings of the intellectual outputs (IOs) elaborated by the partners of the present consortium.

The report is structured upon three main parts. The first part outlines the context of the methodology. In particular, it provides a brief description of the current situation and some good practices that contributes to a common conceptual and methodological understanding. The report then presents the evaluation of the needs analysis related to recognition process in the participant countries (IO3) and the key findings on the perceptions of academics and policy makers (IO2). The report also develops a comparison table to provide an overview of the legal conditions, organisation, and evaluation in the participant countries (IO1).

The second part suggests the common methodological principles that need to be adopted to form the basis on which we develop the steps and guidelines for the recognition of prior learning, especially for those with fewer opportunities including migrants. The report concludes with an integrated methodological framework for the recognition of prior learning in higher education, which includes common principles, steps and guidance questions, and concrete guidelines using the findings of the intellectual outputs (IOs). The proposed framework has been discussed between the partners in order to be finalised and implemented on a pilot basis.

The third part presents on a comparative basis the findings of the pilot procedure implemented by the partner Universities, specifically the University of Akureyri (Iceland), Panepistimio Patron (Greece), Università Degli Studi Di Bari Aldo Moro, in cooperation with Armes Progetti (Italy), and University of Copenhagen (Denmark). The report concludes with comments and final remarks on strengths and weaknesses of prior learning recognition procedures that could enhance access to higher education for those having fewer formal qualifications.

## Part A. Context, good practices and key findings of Intellectual Outputs

### I. Current situation and good practices

The Council of the European Union's (2012) "Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning" initiated a new stage of validation in Europe, calling the EU member states to establish validation arrangements in place by 2018. According to the Recommendation, "Validation is a process that aims to make non-formal and informal learning visible socially, in the labour market and in the education and training system, based on the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of such learning"<sup>1</sup>.

The recognition of prior learning differs from the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The validation process aims to make visible non-formal and informal learning through identification, documentation, assessment, and recognition, while the recognition of prior learning also includes prior learning in formal education<sup>2</sup>.

The Recommendation defines 11 principles against which the development and compliance of validation arrangements of EU member states are assessed. These principles related to validation arrangements, information, guidance and counselling, transparency tools for the documentation of learning outcomes, quality assurance measures, and skills audits are presented in the following Table 1 and should be taken into consideration in the APELE methodological framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report*.  
[http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european\\_inventory\\_validation\\_2018\\_synthesis.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_synthesis.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Souto-Otero, M. and Villalba-Garcia, E. (2015). Migration and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe: Inclusion, exclusion or polarization in the recognition of skills?

**Table 1. Council Recommendation Principles and degree of comprehensiveness**

Recommendation principle	Level of comprehensiveness
Validation arrangements in place	High
Guidance and counselling is readily available	High
Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures is available and accessible	High
Validation arrangements are linked to NQFs and in line with the EQF	High
Transparent quality assurance measures support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation	Medium-high
Qualifications or parts of qualifications obtained through validation comply with agreed standards that are the same or equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes	Medium
Synergies between validation and credit systems exist	Medium
Disadvantaged groups are particularly likely to benefit from validation	Medium
EU/ national transparency tools are promoted to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes	Medium
Provision is made for the development of the professional competences of validation practitioners	Low
Skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment	Low

Source: Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report*, p. 2.

The Recommendation provides four stages of validation, namely, identification, documentation, assessment, and recognition, each of which is applied depending on the needs of the individuals. In relation to education and training, when the emphasis is on the identification and documentation, the validation supports the access to formal programmes. When the emphasis is on the assessment and certification, the validation leads to the acquisition of qualifications in higher education. It is worth mentioning that the assessment stage includes various methods, such as observations, interviews, portfolios, and examinations.

The recommendation placed particular emphasis on the importance of validation for disadvantaged groups and specifically those with fewer opportunities including migrants. A typical example refers to the recognition of migrants' prior learning, which is considered as one of the main barriers for their employment chances and social integration. Therefore, it is important to enable such groups to increase their knowledge and skills about validation, which requires tailored systems and tailored oriented support and advice<sup>3</sup>. As the existing mechanisms for

<sup>3</sup> Souto-Otero, M. and Villalba-Garcia, E. (2015), *ibid.*

recognition are often complex, lengthy, and too fragmented, the need to simplify procedures, increase flexibility (through multiple methods of recognition) and reduce costs have been emphasised<sup>4</sup>.

According to the European thematic report on validation initiatives, very few countries place disadvantaged groups a dominant user group of validation in the higher education sector. There are at least three illustrative examples presented in this report, which findings concerning different groups could inform the experiences and practices to be developed within the Icelandic, Italian, Greek and Danish contexts in the framework of the project APELE.

### 1. Validation Initiatives in higher education in European countries

The initiative 'Supporting Migrants in Higher Education' in Finland aims to enhance the identification and recognition of prior learning of highly educated migrants of different statuses. The purpose is to ensure that the previous studies and degrees of highly educated migrants are identified and recognised according to national policies, while guidance and counselling services are in place to support individuals through the process. Similar is the initiative '**Skills recognition and accreditation hub for the common good**' in Scotland. This initiative aims to establish a hub for benchmarking participant's skills and learning against the Scottish Qualifications Framework (SCQF) in order to identify and address gaps in learning. Existing staff have been trained as validation practitioners to support the initiative. It should be noted that, even if the focus of these initiatives is on migrants and refugees, the established procedures may apply to other disadvantaged groups.

The success of validation opportunities requires the cooperation with stakeholders, employment authorities, social partners etc. Furthermore, procedures and combined methods should be tailored to the individual, including for example interviews in the first language of the individual; multilingual self-assessment tools and relevant online-guides, aptitude tests, exams, workplace observation or simulation<sup>5</sup>. Finally, advice and counselling should accompany validation processes to support migrants and refugees in their transition to the labour market. The above practices combining tailored methods, guidance and counselling services could be taken into consideration within the methodological framework.

### 2. Good practices and perspectives on validated prior learning

To give a more complete picture, we will present a good practice on validated prior learning as an instrument for access to higher education in the United Kingdom by two disadvantaged groups: *people with a special need or disability* and *higher education students in the 50-plus age*

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<sup>4</sup> Murphy, I. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update. Thematic report: Validation of non-formal and informal learning for migrants and refugees.*

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, I. (2019). *Ibid.*

category<sup>6</sup>. Two focus points were identified in the UK data: (a) prior learning or experience reducing or eliminating entry requirements and (b) allowances during the course ease progress through a degree. The study on the validation of prior learning presupposes the detailed analysis of the European and UK contexts and the characteristics of the selected target groups. This practice focused on Key Competences, such as communication, mathematics, science, and technology, learning to learn, social and civic areas, initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression, which apply to disadvantaged groups.

The direct and indirect influence of the legislation should be further considered in order to assess if the cultural climate of the institution promotes the validation of prior learning<sup>7</sup>. A detailed presentation of accreditation / validation practices in the country is also needed along with the main features and reforms of the Higher Education Institutions in England, as well as the policies introduced by the government for disadvantaged groups. This holistic approach seems to be the most appropriate, as validation of prior learning specifically for disadvantaged groups cannot take place and be effective outside a given social context. Murray further addresses national validation processes at macro and micro levels<sup>8</sup>. The key issues considered at the macro level are national legislation, strategy, guidance, organisations responsible for the administration of validation, its financing, main function, roles of validation professionals and links with national qualification framework. Validation professionals have clear roles and stages, as in the Table 2, to help the individual to identify and agree on an action plan to demonstrate prior learning and prepare the evidence.

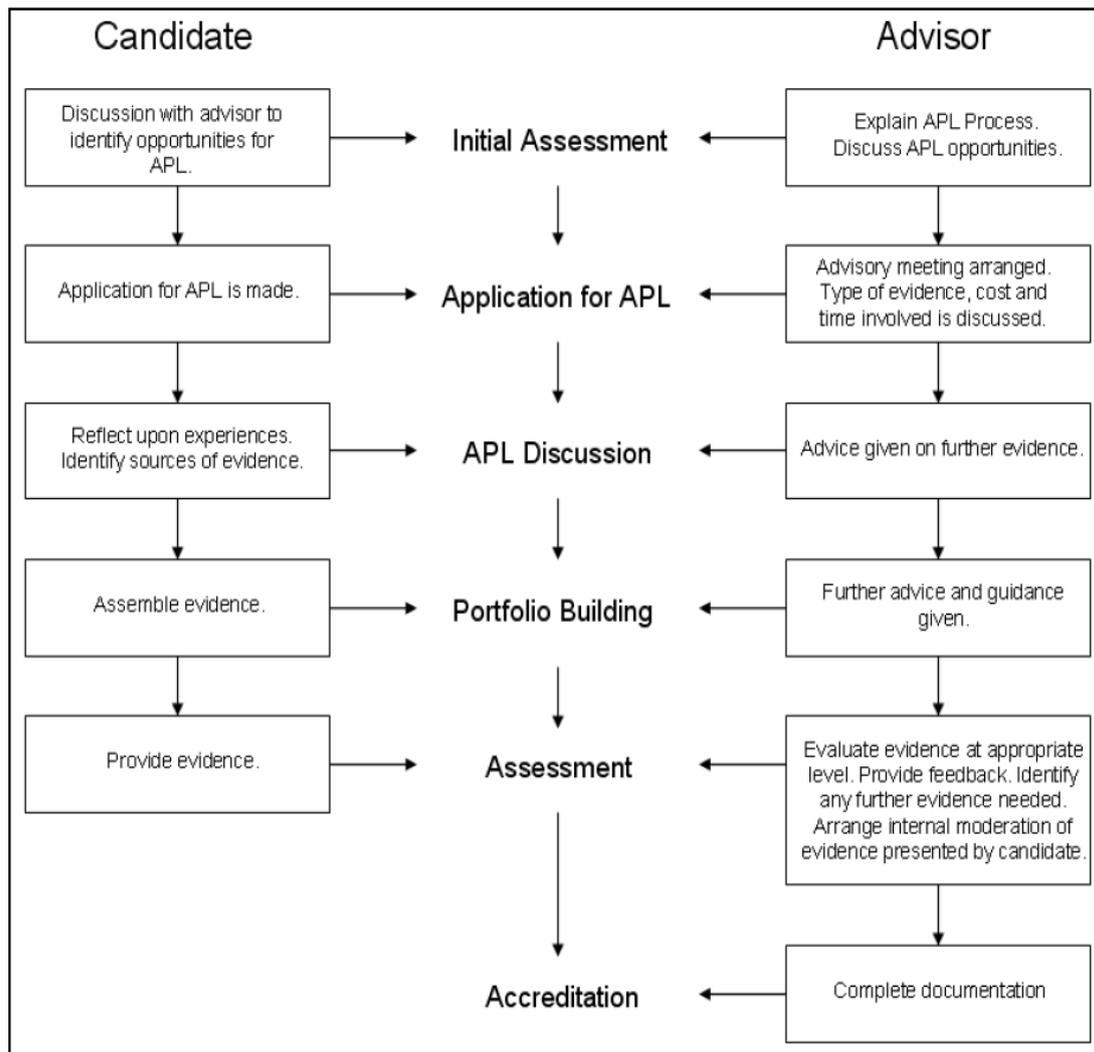
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<sup>6</sup> Murray, J. (2014). A UK perspective on validated prior learning: validated prior learning as an instrument for access to higher education by two marginalised groups. In R. Duvekot, B. Halba, K. Aagaard, S. Gabrscek, & J. Murray (Eds.), *The Power of VPL: Validation of Prior Learning as a Multi-Targeted Approach for Access to Learning Opportunities for All* (pp. 129-158). Inolland University AS and European Centre Valuation Prior Learning. <https://ec-vpl.nl/downloads/book-2014-english-vplbiennale-the-power-of-vpl.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Murray, J. (2014). Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Murray, J. (2014). Ibid.

**Table 2. Validation of prior learning process for advisors and candidates**



Source: Blake Hall (2010) *APL Policy Document*. London: Blake Hall as cited by Murray, (2014), p. 140.

Higher Education Institutions have their own policies, which can be separated or through the admissions policy. Their procedure covers roles and responsibilities of the Admissions Team, Admissions Tutors, Senior Admissions Tutors, etc. Candidate applications for validation are assessed by the Universities upon values and principles reflecting the status of the information provided by the student, such as current, sufficient, authentic, relevant, valid<sup>9</sup>. The evidence provided by the candidates can include certificates, transcripts of study, syllabus, CV, references from employers or institutions, evidence of continuing professional development and portfolio, while universities may apply different methods, such as interviews, attendance at a workshop, observation of performance, assessment of skills and exams<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Murray, J. (2014). Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Murray, J. (2014). Ibid.

The board, committee or other university services that assume the responsibility for the management of the validation of prior learning should be clearly defined. Appropriate quality assurance methods should also be applied. Finally, the analysis at the micro level of candidates' opinions expressed in relevant interviews provide rich feedback from real situations about the needs, barriers, difficulties, expectations, policies, and validation practices.

### 3. A national experience on the validation of prior learning

The validation of prior learning has been the subject of much debate in all areas of education in Ireland. The measures adopted under the Education and Training Qualifications Act 1999 made Ireland one of the first European States to implement national legislation on the recognition of informal or non-formal learning. Each person has the right to apply for recognition of prior learning in order to obtain a credit unit either in the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) or for access to an educational program.

The National Qualifications Framework (NFQ), adopted in October 2003, allows formal, non-formal and informal learning to be recognised in the national context, in which credits are assigned to specific learning outcomes with comparative indicators. Specific criteria for proof, evaluation and quality assurance are adopted and higher education and vocational training certification bodies decide how to apply these criteria. The validation steps of prior informal or non-formal learning are displayed in the following Table 3:

**Table 3: Validation steps of prior or informal and non-formal learning**

Steps	QUALITY SAFETY CRITERIA
<p><b>1. Diagnosis of the appropriate certificate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the candidate detects a certificate</li> <li>• comes into contact with HEI</li> <li>• information and advisory support are provided to the candidate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appropriate certificate in relation to the applicant's prior learning</li> <li>• the certificate must be included in the HEI list</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Linking experience to specifications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the applicant links his knowledge and qualifications to an existing specification-national standard certificate</li> <li>• the candidate is supported by a consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the specifications and standards of the certificates must be available, and the applicant must demonstrate experience with those specifications</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Collection of evidence for evaluation</b></p> <p>Evidence is collected to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and competences relied on by the candidate to achieve learning outcomes. These data are collected in an individual qualification and skills folder (portfolio).</p>	<p>The individual qualifications and skills dossier(portfolio) must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CV</li> <li>• existing certificates</li> <li>• job descriptions</li> <li>• references/confirmations</li> <li>• products/samples</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evidence of participation in educational programmes</li> <li>• test results</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Evaluation of evidence</b></p> <p>An assessment and confirmation of the candidate's knowledge, skills and competences in relation to specifications/national standards shall be carried out.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the evaluation criteria from the HEI must be fulfilled.</li> <li>• the individual dossier must be evaluated in terms of adequacy, validity, authority, reliability and timeliness (HEI criteria).</li> <li>• the external inspector of HEI inspects the evidence in relation to national standards.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Opinion on the issue of the Certificate</b></p> <p>The result shall be determined on the basis of the evidence provided.</p>	<p>Opinion on the issue of a certificate on the basis of the fulfilment of the relevant national specifications by the applicant.</p>

Source: CEDEFOP (2009). *The shift to learning outcomes Policies and practices in Europe*, Cedefop Reference series; 72 Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

#### 4. The study on obstacles to recognition of skills and qualifications

Finally, the European Commission study on barriers to the recognition of skills and qualifications is necessary to be considered before any methodological design to validate prior learning<sup>11</sup>. This study presented in the following provides the evidence basis for the revision of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Recommendation. The study clarifies that although the recognition of skills and obstacles is under the responsibility of EU Member States, the EU is trying to facilitate the recognition through a range of tools, such as the EQF, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System in higher education (ECTS).

Among the pathways existing in most systems, the study on obstacles to the recognition of skills and qualifications considers as most acute the issue between general/academic tracks and vocational education and training. It also raises the predominant concern of policy in the last 10–15 years about how to ensure that higher education accepts vocational qualifications as valid and equivalent with general/academic qualifications<sup>12</sup>.

The study depicted 'a journey to recognition' and identified the following three stages:

- (i) *an orientation stage* prior to entering the recognition process, which focus on developing the individual's awareness of its skills and necessity to enter the recognition process,

<sup>11</sup> Donlevy, V., Curtarelli, M., McCoshan, A. and Meierkord, A. (2016). *Study on Obstacles to Recognition of Skills and Qualifications*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>12</sup> Donlevy, V., Curtarelli, M., McCoshan, A. and Meierkord, A. (2016). *Ibid.*, p. 26.

(ii) *the recognition process* itself, which involves a formal or informal procedure in which individuals have to demonstrate existing skills and qualifications and

(iii) *a follow-up stage*, which is important because even when the recognition is granted, more actions are needed to support either the access to the desired job or training, or to apply for employment, or to recognise de facto this validation<sup>13</sup>.

Based on these stages, the study identified the obstacles to recognition and possible solutions for each stage separately. Drawing on the relevant tables of the study<sup>14</sup>, we present a customized table and specifically the following Table 4 on obstacles and solutions for prior learning recognition, which can constructively inform the design of the present methodology.

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<sup>13</sup> Donlevy, V., Curtarelli, M., McCoshan, A. and Meierkord, A. (2016). Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Donlevy, V., Curtarelli, M., McCoshan, A. and Meierkord, A. (2016). Ibid., p. 63-64, 103.

Table 4: Obstacles and solutions for recognition of prior learning

1. Obstacles and Solutions prior to entering a recognition process		
1.1 Awareness, information and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of awareness of recognition services</li> <li>▪ Lack of awareness of own skills and how to present them</li> <li>▪ Complexity of individuals' guidance needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Use of existing tools</li> <li>✓ Improvement of information portals</li> <li>✓ Provide 'one-stop shops' for information and guidance</li> </ul>
1.2 Understanding of systems and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of understanding the education and training system</li> <li>▪ Changing qualifications</li> <li>▪ Lack of knowledge and use of qualifications amongst employers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Information and communication campaign on recognition addressing employers</li> </ul>
1.3 Deficiencies in current recognition practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Existence of informal recognition practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Development of an online database of recognition practices</li> </ul>
1.4 Systemic structural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increasing diversity of recognition practices</li> <li>▪ Limited opportunities for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning</li> <li>▪ Lack of comprehensive information on recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Mainstreaming of existing tools</li> <li>✓ Offer opportunities for recognition</li> <li>✓ Transparency and information on recognition</li> </ul>
1.5 Access and entitlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restricted access to recognition procedures</li> <li>▪ Lack of language skills and training courses</li> <li>▪ Lack of entitlement to recognition of foreign qualifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Establish an entitlement to recognition</li> <li>✓ Expand provision of language courses</li> </ul>
1.6 Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Costs of recognition procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Financial support programme to individuals for the recognition process and bridging courses</li> <li>✓ Reduce the costs of a recognition body</li> </ul>

2. Obstacles and Solutions during the recognition process		
2.1 Systemic structural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complex and lengthy recognition processes</li> <li>▪ Poorly developed recognition procedures for movement within education and training</li> <li>▪ Unclear responsibilities and lack of coordination between different institutions</li> <li>▪ Complex procedures for recognition of non-formal learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Improvement in co-operation between institutions in the recognition processes</li> <li>✓ Development of a framework, system and process for the recognition of non-formal and informal competences for all</li> <li>✓ Implementation of the Recommendation 2012</li> </ul>
2.2 Deficiencies in current recognition practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difficulties in assessing soft skills, informally and non-formally skills</li> <li>▪ Lack of capacity to understand foreign qualifications and skills</li> <li>▪ Lack of fairness in the application of recognition procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Training the staff involved in recognition processes</li> <li>✓ Work placements with employers</li> <li>✓ Develop employers' capabilities to assess more effectively skills</li> </ul>
2.3 Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited resources, capacity and capability of recognition bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Improve resources for intermediaries</li> <li>✓ Development/expansion/further funding of advice and guidance</li> </ul>
2.4 Understanding foreign qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difficulties in understanding foreign qualifications and the validity of foreign documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Develop tools for employers to understand foreign qualifications more easily</li> </ul>
2.5 Lack of evidence of previous education/employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of documentary proof of education and employment</li> </ul>	
3. Obstacles and Solutions after granting of recognition		
3.1 Lack of recognition of qualifications from certain institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of recognition of qualifications issued by certain education or training institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Invest in a follow-up system</li> </ul>
3.2 Complex partial recognition procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complex (partial-) recognition notifications</li> </ul>	
3.3 Lack of evidence of the usefulness of recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of evidence regarding the effect of recognition, and potential effects on providing guidance</li> </ul>	

Source: Donlevy, V., Curtarelli, M., McCoshan, A. and Meierkord, A. (2016). p. 63-64, 103.

## II. Key findings of Intellectual Outputs

### 1. Evaluation of the needs analysis related to recognition process

In this section, an evaluation is provided of the needs analysis related to the recognition process in the participant countries. The evaluation is based on the national reports and, mainly, on *the Intellectual Output 3*, which is the comparative report on the needs of the target groups in the four partner countries – Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Italy. The aim of the evaluation is to provide an overall picture of the needs analysis and indicate the key issues raised that should be considered in the pilot implementation and the finalisation of the methodological framework.

The comparative report focuses on the following areas and questions, which are summarized into four factors, i.e., demographic factors, professional situation, recognition process and educational needs for entering in higher education:

- I. **Background of the target groups:** specialties, level of studies and current profession, years of work experiences in their current profession, previous work experiences and years of experiences.
- II. **Prior experience of accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL):** participation in APEL and score of the procedure on a five-point Likert scale (*very bad - bad - ok - good - very good*), and indication of whose initiative they are pursuing higher educational studies and participating in the APELE project.
- III. **Motivations and expectations** for pursuing higher educational studies.
- IV. **Preferences:** language preference, time of year and location of where the procedure could take place, as well as the financial side of it.
- V. **Levels of certification and recognition:** national, local or internal level.
- VI. **Educational needs** in higher education and special educational needs
- VII. **Soft skills** capabilities

The findings are summarized in the following Table 5 on the basis of the questions chosen in the comparative report.

Table 5. Factors and key findings of the needs analysis in participant countries

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Iceland</b>	<b>Italy</b>
<b>Highest Educational level</b>	Masters (13%) Bachelor (27%) Diploma (40%)	Compulsory education (100%)	Masters (30%) Bachelor (20%) Compulsory (10%) Upper Secondary (40%)	Masters (5%) Bachelor (23%) Compulsory (5%) Upper Secondary (50%) Tertiary (17%)
<b>Average work experiences</b>	11 years	12,5 years	8 years	12 years
<b>APEL / HE Motivations</b>	80% APEL 67% HE	67% APEL 61% HE	60% APEL 80% HE	72% APEL
<b>Initiative for pursuing HE</b>	Mine (62%) My family Friends My boss	Mine (60%) My family Friends My boss	Mine (80%) Other	Mine (95%) Other
<b>Levels of Recognition process</b>	National level (87%) native language or English	National level (89%) National language	National level (80%) native language or English	National level (66%) native language or English
<b>Types of evaluation methods</b>	Interview Onsite observation Portfolio Practice exams Simulation	Onsite observation Practice exams Examination Simulation Interview	Interview Portfolio Examination Self-assessment Pre-survey Practice exams Onsite observation	Practice exams Examination Simulation Pre-survey Self-assessment Portfolio Interview
<b>Educational needs for study in higher education</b>	Art studies, business administration, computer engineering & informatics and tourism management	Agriculture, animal production, fisheries and agriculture, nursing	Educational & social work, educational sciences & business administration, dentistry, interdisciplinary studies, engineering management and criminology	Cultural studies, management and foreign languages. zoology, hippotherapy and disability studies

Source: Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2021). APELE Intellectual Output 3, Needs Analysis - Comparative Report.

The overall picture of the target groups shows that the participants have graduated mostly from compulsory, upper secondary education and diploma, while there is a good percentage of Bachelor and Master graduates. They also have a good amount of working experience. Their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and higher education. Their preference for the level of the recognition process is unanimous at

the national level in all four countries. As far as evaluation methods concerned, there are several methods indicated in the participant countries with a different hierarchy which reflect the particularities of each country. Finally, according to the comparison report, the motives for continue to study in higher educations is to have personal satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society and improve social life. The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.

## 2. Key findings on perceptions of academics and policy makers

This section aims to provide an overview of the opinions and perceptions of university professors and policy makers on the assessment, recognition and certification of skills obtained in previous experiential learning in the four European participant countries: Denmark, Greece, Iceland, and Italy. It is based on *APELE Intellectual Output 2*<sup>15</sup>, which is a synthesis report of perceptions of academics and policy makers.

The synthesis report aimed to collect the opinions of academics and policy makers about the accreditation, their perceptions about future changes, opportunities for recognition and certification of prior experiential learning outcomes, new procedures of organizing certifications and recognitions, and to gather proposals for the evaluation models of accreditation of prior experiential learning.

The answers of academics and policy makers come from the synthesis report and are briefly presented in the following categories.

### **Awareness and involvement of academics and policy makers in the accreditation of prior experiential learning**

The awareness of the academics and policy makers about prior experiential learning is not the same in the four countries. While accreditation is mainly recognised in the vocational sector, in higher education a national procedure does not exist. Compared to Denmark, Iceland, and Italy where a high level of awareness was recorded, in Greece, only few of the respondents were aware of the accreditation of previous experiential learning. On the contrary, in Denmark all the respondents knew the procedures of accessing university by non-traditional ways and all the policy makers had participated in this activity before. In Iceland, there is a very high level of awareness and knowledge about the recognition of previous experiential learning. Also in Italy,

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<sup>15</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). APELE Report - Intellectual Output 2 Synthesis Report of the perceptions of academics and policy makers. Italy: Armes Progetti.

the totality of interviewees knew about accreditation of prior experiential learning and had direct experience with it, especially in vocational education and training sectors<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, in Denmark there are different perceptions and opinions about the accreditation of previous experiential learning, as this type of learning is not recognized yet as an alternative path to enter higher education. However, the common perception in Denmark is that it is necessary to find an alternative model of assessment to the traditional one based on formal assessment (grades), and to have a broad system of admission to higher education for those who are very motivated. On the other side, the majority of Greek respondents did not have any official information about the APEL process, and it is believed that the Greek society is not ready for such an innovation. In Greece, the recognition of prior learning is regulated only for the labour market.

In Iceland, there is a high level of awareness but different ways of understanding, depending on whether the recognition of prior learning is taking place at the secondary or academic level. What is different in Iceland compared to the other participant countries is that 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 based on admission criteria. In Italy, the admission to higher education requires the possession of an upper secondary school diploma or other equivalent qualification obtained abroad, but there is not a national legislation for the accreditation of prior experiential learning to enter higher education<sup>17</sup>.

### **Personal perceptions of the respondents concerning the type of evaluation**

The Danish respondents claim that a good system for evaluation should combine the evaluation of the students' academic level and their motivation to study. As a result, they believe that the portfolio is as a good idea, as it provides information about the personality of the applicant, its personal interests and life experience. They consider Higher Education Institutions the most qualified to perform the evaluation of skills and qualifications, and they suggest an evaluation committee including academics and study counsellors. The majority of Greek respondents, who were mostly academics, supports that the traditional process of written examinations could be an effective type of evaluation. For the Greek respondents, practical (laboratory) exams as well as a combination of written examinations and practical (laboratory) exams could be equally effective. They also suggest setting up a committee of at least three academics in order to ensure validity and reliability, and different committees for each academic subject. Furthermore, they consider that the university departments are the most appropriate institutions to be in charge for

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<sup>16</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

the organization of the evaluation procedure. Meanwhile, they highlight the need for legal and political arrangements to ensure the validity of the evaluation procedure<sup>18</sup>.

The Icelandic respondents stressed the importance of having an evaluation process very well organized, well defined, transparent and a safe procedure that will build trust between institutions and between the applicants and the universities<sup>19</sup>. Taking into consideration that the university system cannot grant credits at secondary school level, they suggest that the process for the recognition of prior learning to enter higher education should be at the secondary school level. They also highlight the importance to provide support to the applicants and to apply a mix of evaluation types to have the best outcome. For instance, they argue that the portfolio of the applicant's experiences combined with an interview could contribute to the discussion and verification of the portfolio's content. Their main argument is that the evaluation process needs to be organised in a way that the applicant can easily share their knowledge and experience.

In Italy, the majority of the respondents suggest an evaluation procedure that will be based on interviews associated to a personal description and to the context of origin of the candidate. They also consider as important the written and oral examinations, pre-disposition of "on the job" apprenticeship, interviews and documentation of the experiences, because they are the most appropriate methods to evaluate experiential learning. In any case, they promote the standardised process in order to ensure the recognition of prior learning at least at local level. Finally, they raise the necessity of a central political decision body and a national legislation to ensure both the anonymity of the examiners and the examinees<sup>20</sup>.

As a whole, the majority of respondents from participant countries consider that higher education institutions or a team of academics, or different committees for each academic subject are more suitable to evaluate the applicants. Exceptionally in Iceland, it is argued that the whole process for the recognition of prior learning to enter Higher Education should be at the secondary school level, because the university system is not able to grant credits at that level.

### **Formal recognition of procedures: where they could work**

A recognition system of an official procedure for the accreditation of prior experiential learning does not apply in any of the four partner countries, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, and Italy. In particular, a Danish 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. At the same time, more equity should be ensured for those

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<sup>18</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

who have good general qualifications. In any case, there is need to discuss among universities and establish criteria for the recognition of prior experiential learning<sup>21</sup>.

Although no official procedure for the recognition of prior learning to enter higher education exists in Greece, the majority of respondents are in favour of the establishment of a national recognition procedure through national legislation. Very few respondents support that the recognition can take place at local level university. In contrast to Greece, Iceland has the legal basis allowing universities to admit individuals who have not passed the matriculation exams but have the skills corresponding to the university's qualification requirements. However, recognition of prior learning for admission to higher education is not implemented in Iceland<sup>22</sup>. For Icelandic respondents, a recognition procedure into the traditional education system and at national level could make the role of universities clearer.

In Italy, recognition of prior learning for admission to higher education is not implemented and there is not a common understanding about the recognition procedure. Italian respondents suggest either the creation of a framework agreement between the Region and the Universities, or the recognition of experiential learning within the third level educational path through the attribution of ECTS based on a certification system<sup>23</sup>.

### **Certification procedure: where they could work**

In all four partner countries, there is not a single or formal procedure for the certification of prior experiential learning to access higher education.

In Denmark, the government agencies are responsible for the certification system and thus, according to the respondents, the same procedure should be applied. The Greek respondents support that the certification should be issued by a national organisation, such as the Ministry of Education alone or in cooperation with universities and the National Organisation of Certification.

Icelandic respondents believe that the Ministry of Education should provide guidance at national level and define the rules for the evaluation groups in collaboration with the universities. As far as certification concerned, they believe that this should be done by an independent national authority. Finally, there is not an official procedure for the certification of prior experiential learning to enter higher education in Italy. According to the respondents, the certification process should be the responsibility of experts and a specific center that will undertake to organize the examination for certification and work through a special joint committee of experts.

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<sup>21</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Laurelli, C. (2021). Ibid.

### 3. Comparison table of legal conditions, organisation, and evaluation

Based on the *APELE Intellectual Output 1* on the existing institutional and legal framework for access to higher education for people with fewer opportunities<sup>24</sup>, this section will develop a comparison table presenting the legal conditions, organisation, administrative process, and evaluation in the four participant countries. This comparison will be considered along with the previous Intellectual Outputs 2 and 3 for the design of the methodological framework.

**Table 6. Legal conditions, organisation, and evaluation in participant countries**

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Iceland</b>	<b>Italy</b>
<b>Legal basis</b>	Both EQF and NQF have been implemented.  Institutionalised processes of accreditation for quality assurance.	Comprehensive framework for ratification is under development.	Research carried out in HEIs comply with the NQF.	Adapted to EQF in 2018, but process of adaptation of NQF is lengthy. Coordination of regions for recognition of regional qualifications systems.
<b>Organisation</b>	HE follows the Bologna process and includes a three-cycle system.  HE is offered at four professional levels or university institutions.  Admission requirements divided to general, specific, and language requirements.	HE follows the Bologna process and includes a three-cycle system.  To access HEIs, have to pass the national Greek exam, organised by the Ministry of Education.  Foreigners provide a list of documents translated and certified to attest requirements.	HE follows the Bologna process and includes a three-cycle system.  Based on ECTS Portability of degrees.  To access HE you need matriculation examination.  Each University has own rule of recognition.	HE follows the Bologna process and includes a three-cycle system.  Universities enjoy autonomy, they also administer and decide on entrance admissions.  If evidence of possessing the educational requirement, international students can be admitted to university.

<sup>24</sup> Adamo, S. (2020). APELE Report Intellectual Output 1 - Report on the existing institutional and legal framework for access to higher education for people with fewer opportunities. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

<b>Administrative process</b>	<p>A distinction between EU and non-EU applicants is made to access higher education.</p> <p>English and Danish proficiency is needed, depending on the course of study pursued.</p>	<p>Hellenic NARIC for recognition of foreign degrees.</p> <p>Proficiency in the national language in Greece is assessed by means of exam.</p> <p>Certificate in Greek language at B2 level (intermediate knowledge) in the CEFR.</p>	<p>Assessment of educational and informal qualifications to seek admission to local HEIs.</p> <p>Icelandic and English proficiency is needed, depending on the course of study pursued.</p>	<p>A distinction between EU and non-EU applicants is made to access to higher education.</p> <p>The national center of the ENIC-NARIC network can provide a certificate of equivalence to enroll in HEIs.</p> <p>Language requirements for admission.</p>
	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Iceland</b>	<b>Italy</b>
<b>Barriers</b>	<p>Danish, EU and EEA have access to higher education, while all other nationalities have to pay tuition fees and fees for visa and residence permits.</p> <p>Websites in English provide information.</p> <p>Not easy to integrate in, and foreign students often experience cultural and linguistic barriers.</p> <p>High cost of life and lodging.</p>	<p>Greek universities are entirely publicly funded.</p> <p>Admission is free of charge.</p> <p>Websites provide information on HEIs requirements in Greek.</p> <p>Authenticated translations of the documents are required.</p> <p>Private tutoring for preparing for the national admission exams.</p>	<p>Icelandic universities are public funded.</p> <p>Annual registration fee to cover administration services.</p> <p>Website in English provide information.</p> <p>May be difficult to access information and help centres.</p> <p>May not feel as if they master the local language.</p> <p>De facto barriers concern the rules on immigration.</p>	<p>Fees for registration, tuition, and admission, although based on merit and economic strained circumstances.</p> <p>Authenticated translations of the documents.</p> <p>Difficulty of admission tests.</p> <p>Access to Italian HEIs is limited for refugees.</p> <p>Insufficient recognition of foreign qualifications.</p>

	Denmark	Greece	Iceland	Italy
<b>Evaluation</b>	No specific studies that target this varied group of young people with fewer opportunities.	People with fewer opportunities have a low income, which may prevent them from being able to sustain the costs. There is no alternative path.	Ongoing, international cooperation for a research project on 'Recognition of Prior Learning in Practice', before access to higher education.	The journey towards admission is complicated endeavour for migrants and people with fewer opportunities. There are some good practices.

Source: Adamo, S. (2021). APELE Intellectual Output 1 on the existing institutional and legal framework for access to higher education for people with fewer opportunities.

According to the report<sup>25</sup>, in Greece and Iceland there is lack of transparent path towards admission in HEIs for people with fewer opportunities due to the insufficient implementation of the legislation. Simple, inexpensive, and fast administrative procedures are needed, taking into consideration eventual differences in Higher Education Institutions or regional limits, like in Italy. Finally, a system of guidance services through online and local avenues, providing updated information in several languages and in easy terms, following the good practice in Denmark, is critical to encourage young people in pursuing higher education.

## Part B. Methodological framework for the recognition of prior learning

### I. Common methodological principles

The design of the methodological framework for the recognition of prior learning in higher education aims to provide:

- ✓ *A common ground based on agreed principles* that allows participant universities to coordinate their efforts to recognise prior learning in higher education and at the same time develop their own processes.
- ✓ *Specific guidelines that implement common principles* that can be adapted and applied to different systems of recognition of prior learning. These guidelines will be presented

<sup>25</sup> Adamo, S. (2020). *ibid.*

in the form of questions that each participant university will answer according its legal, organisational, and administrative particularities.

- ✓ *Concrete examples* will be given in the guidelines/questions through the answers provided by the findings of the APELE Intellectual Outputs.

In particular, we will make optimum use of the different parts presented in this report and a previous methodological study on the same topic to ensure a coherent and effective methodology for the recognition of prior learning, namely:

- the EU *Council Recommendation Principles 2012* on the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- the good practices on validated prior learning
- the European Commission study 2016 on obstacles and solutions to recognition of skills and qualifications<sup>26</sup>
- the key findings of *APELE Intellectual Outputs* regarding the needs analysis of the target groups, the perceptions of academics and policy makers, and the existing legal basis, organisation, administration and evaluation of the recognition or prior learning.
- the previous similar study 2011 on the *definition of basic principles of the single framework of recognition of vocational skills and validation of knowledge, skills and competences*<sup>27</sup>

The first step in designing the methodological framework is to create the common ground for cooperation between universities and the development of their own recognition processes. We suggest that the 11 principles for validation in the 2012 Council Recommendation<sup>28</sup> should be placed at the core of the methodological framework. It is upon these common principles that the progress of policies and practices on validation across Europe is evaluated<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the common ground for collaboration can be built upon the following common principles and illustrative points:

1. ***Validation arrangements are in place***: validation arrangements creating routes and links and if these are embedded into a strategy establishing validation initiative.

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<sup>26</sup> Donlevy, V., Curtarelli, M., McCoshan, A. and Meierkord, A. (2016). Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Galata, P.V. (2011). Definition of basic principles of the single framework of recognition of vocational skills and validation of knowledge, skills and competences. In INE GSEE – IME GSEVEE *Elaboration of a study for a single framework of qualitative improvement of initial-continuous training and adult education*, Athens: Ministry of Education.

<sup>28</sup> Council of the European Union (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report*. Ibid.

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2. **Guidance and counselling are readily available:** to ensure a widespread dissemination of information and guidance on opportunities, procedures and benefits of validation.

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  3. **Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures is available and accessible:** focused on the content of the advice and guidance, i.e., process, assessment, outcomes and benefits of validation.

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  4. **Validation arrangements are linked to NQFs and in line with the EQF:** NQF provides reference for validation of non-formal learning and links to formal education, leading to the acquisition of modules or partial qualification.

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  5. **Qualifications or parts of qualifications obtained through validation comply with agreed standards** that are the same or equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes. The definition of standards is central for the legitimacy and reliability of validation processes.

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  6. **Development of the professional competences of validation practitioners** and necessary provisions in terms of qualifications, experience or training on advice and guidance practitioners and assessors involved in validation.

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  7. **Transparent quality assurance measures** support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation. Once the validation system is developed, specific quality assurance measures for validation should be adopted.

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  8. **Synergies between validation and credit systems** could materialize if an individual wants to access a suitable validation opportunity linked to the NQF in a different country from his country of residence and then have the skills recognised in both countries through the links between NQFs and EQF.

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  9. **Disadvantaged groups**, low-skilled adults, young adults not covered by Youth Guarantee, long-term unemployed, young people not in education, employment or training, migrant and refugee are more likely to benefit from validation.

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  10. **Skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed** or at risk of unemployment. It is a useful tool for upskilling pathway through skills assessment, learning opportunities, validation and recognition of skills.

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  11. **EU/ national transparency tools** are promoted to obtain evidence on learning outcomes. Tests, examinations, portfolios and interviews associated with the assessor's skills ensure reliability. The validation process should be adaptable to personal histories and lead to standardised and recognizable outcomes.

According to the European Inventory, the Council Recommendation on validation is not prescriptive and allows different interpretations of the degree of development of policies and

practices on validation. The main purpose is to provide information for illustrative purposes and to support exchanges, development of mutual understanding and interpretation of the principles as well as the identification of priority areas for future action<sup>30</sup>.

## II. Methodological guidelines for the recognition of prior learning

In this section, we will develop the whole methodological framework for the recognition of prior learning, based on the aforementioned common principles. The structure of the methodological framework will be as follows:

In each common principle, the main steps will be presented in the form of questions. Next to the questions, there will be some guidelines that result from the findings of the APELE Intellectual Outputs and the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018. Based on these steps and guidelines, participating universities should tailor the steps and actions required according to their own specificities and preferences.

### 1. Validation arrangements in place

This principle refers to validation arrangements for the recognition of prior learning that are available in at least one of the three broad areas, namely, education and training, labour market and third sector. According to the European Inventory<sup>31</sup>, validation arrangements are most commonly in place in education and training. Here, we are interested in existing *validation arrangements* in higher education or *validation strategies*, i.e., legal frameworks or policies that establish validation initiatives for the recognition of prior learning.

Validation arrangements or strategies include the definition of *validation outputs*, such as the award of a full formal qualification or parts of qualifications in the form of credits, modules or exemptions. It also includes *the types of certificates* and whether these are linked to formal education or not. Arrangements cover all *four stages of validation*, specifically, *identification* and *documentation* which as formative approaches aim to provide feedback to the learning process, and *assessment* and *certification* which as summative approaches aim to formalise and certify learning outcomes<sup>32</sup>. Other issues that need to be settled in validation arrangements concern *the involvement of stakeholders*, such as national organisations, social partners, education and training providers etc., and the *funding sources* for validation.

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<sup>30</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

So, the first steps and relevant guidelines of methodological framework for the recognition of prior learning are the following:

**Table 7. Methodological guidelines for validation arrangements**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>1. Validation arrangements</b></p> <p>1.1. Are there validation arrangements for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in your country to recognise prior learning for admission to higher education (HE)?</p>	<p>Please specify if there are validation arrangements for HEIs to recognise prior learning for admission to HE.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If yes, please specify what validation arrangements are in place.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>None of the four partner countries has a recognition system of an official procedure for the accreditation of prior experiential learning. Iceland has the legal basis allowing universities to admit individuals who have skills corresponding to the university's qualification requirements. However, recognition of prior learning for admission to higher education is not implemented.</p>
<p><b>2. Validation strategies</b></p> <p>2.1. Are there validation strategies, i.e., legal framework or policies that establish validation initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access HE?</p>	<p>Please specify if there are validation strategies to establish initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access HE.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If yes, please specify the policy framework and the validation strategy.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Across European countries validation strategies are included within strategic frameworks on lifelong learning or with the development of National Qualification Frameworks (NQF).</p>
<p><b>3. Pilot a validation initiative and integrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning</b></p> <p>3.1. If your university is piloting a validation initiative, what does it take to integrate into the strategy for recognition of prior learning?</p>	<p>Please specify what does it take for your university to ingrate a validation initiative into the strategy for recognition of prior learning.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify the legal and administrative requirements.</p> <p>-----</p>

<p>3.2. What are the legal and administrative requirements, i.e., law, ministerial decision, university decision to define the competent departments?</p>	<p>In the partner countries, admission requirements are regulated (DK) or there are national exams to access HEIs (GR). In Denmark, specific criteria need to be established to give access to HE to individuals who did not fulfil the required access criteria. In Iceland, there is matriculation examination, but each University has own rule of recognition. In Italy, Universities enjoy autonomy, they also administer and decide on entrance admissions.</p>
<p><b>4. Validation outputs</b></p> <p>4.1. Do validation arrangements define validation outputs?</p> <p>4.2. If so, do they provide award of full formal qualifications, of parts of qualifications in the form of credits, modules or exemptions, or of non-formal qualifications?</p> <p>4.3. If not, what validation outputs would be most appropriate for your university?</p>	<p>Please specify whether validation arrangements define validation outputs.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If so, please specify if they provide full formal qualifications or parts of qualifications.</p> <p>If not, specify the validation outputs you consider most appropriate for your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Most countries allow for the award of parts of qualifications and give access to formal programmes through validation. This is the most common output in higher education.</p>
<p><b>5. Four stages of validation</b></p> <p>5.1. Do validation arrangements define or need to define all four stages of validation, i.e., identification, documentation assessment and certification?</p> <p>5.2. Do some stages of validation need to be more emphasised than others in certain areas?</p>	<p>Please specify if validation arrangements define or need to define all four stages of validation</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if some stages of validation need to be more emphasised than others in certain areas</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Identification and documentation aim to provide feedback to the learning process and support access to formal programmes.</p> <p>Assessment and certification aim to formalise and certify learning outcomes and are often used in formal education for obtaining Qualifications.</p>
<p><b>6. Involvement of stakeholders</b></p> <p>6.1. Is the involvement of all relevant stakeholders ensured in validation initiatives?</p> <p>6.2. Is there a need to involve different types of stakeholders in different validation functions?</p>	<p>Please specify if the involvement of all relevant stakeholders is ensured in validation initiatives.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if different types of stakeholders need to be involved in different validation functions.</p> <p>This is expected to be specified by each partner organisation.</p>

<p><b>7. Funding sources</b></p> <p>7.1. What funding sources are available or needed for validation?</p>	<p>Please specify the funding sources that are available or needed for validation</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The most common source is the national public funding. It is rarely to have a specific state budget for validation. It is also common that individuals pay a fee for validation.</p> <p>In partner countries, Greek and Icelandic Universities are public funded, while Danish and Italian Universities, on top of being publicly funded also require fees for admission, tuition etc. for non-EU/EEA nationals. There are no fees for Danish or EU nationals.</p>
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## 2. Accessibility to guidance and counselling

Accessibility to guidance and counselling is one of the conditions that can stimulate the development of validation. Here, we consider the content of the advice and guidance that relates to process, assessment, outcomes, and benefits of validation, and whether the validation is required<sup>33</sup>. The aim is to provide information, guidance and counselling to learners to improve their skills through education and training and validate their competences. The key issue is to ensure guidance and counselling readily accessible. Guidance and counselling are most commonly provided by the institutions that carry out validation procedures. Also, the designated agency for validation can have a specific role in guidance and counselling.

**Table 8. Methodological guidelines for guidance and counselling**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>8. Accessibility to guidance and counselling</b></p> <p>8.1. Is guidance and counselling readily accessible in your university?</p> <p>8.2. Which department of the university is responsible for</p>	<p>Please specify whether guidance and counselling are readily accessible to your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify which department of the university is responsible for ensuring access to information, guidance, and counselling.</p> <p>-----</p>

<sup>33</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<p>ensuring access to information, guidance and counselling?</p> <p>8.3. How regularly is information, guidance and advice provided at your university?</p>	<p>Please describe how regularly information, guidance and counselling is provided at your university</p> <p>-----</p> <p>In all of the participating partner countries, a number of barriers could be identified. For instance, websites in Greece provide information on HEIs requirements in Greek. In the rest of the countries, while website in English provide information, students often experience cultural and linguistic barriers, like in Denmark. In Iceland, may be difficult to access information and help centres. Access to Italian HEIs is limited for refugees.</p>
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### 3. Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities, and validation procedures

Interconnected with the previous principle is the wide dissemination of information and guidance on the opportunities for, procedures and benefits of validation. As already mentioned, information and guidance refer to process, assessment, outcomes and benefits of validation. Although not required as a prerequisite in validation initiatives, information and guidance is most often focused on the process and the steps needed to obtain validation<sup>34</sup>. Less often there is information and guidance on assessment and outcomes and benefits of validation. In general, information and guidance are less common in general education compared to initial and continuous vocational education and training, i.e., IVET and CVET.

In some EU countries, also outside the scope of the participant countries in APELE, education and training institutions are obliged to provide information, advice, and guidance. For example, in higher education institutions in Belgium-Wallonia, the provision of support and guidance to candidates undertaking validation procedures is compulsory<sup>35</sup>. Also, in Belgium and in Bulgaria a validation counsellor is allocated to each candidate to assist through the validation process<sup>36</sup>. In some countries, such as Finland, Sweden and Netherlands, education and training institutions provide individuals with a personal competence development plan, in which the individual study plan and prior experiential learning are documented. In some other countries, like in Estonia, institutions have to inform students about the conditions, the procedure and the cost for validation of non-formal and informal learning, and ensure their access to information, guidance and

<sup>34</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

counselling<sup>37</sup>. Finally, in several countries like in Cyprus, England, Spain, Germany, and Denmark, there is a designated agency or a range of agencies for validation that play a role in providing information, guidance, and counselling.

**Table 9. Methodological guidelines for information and guidance**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<b>9. Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities, and validation procedures</b>	
9.1. What should be the aim and content of information, guidance, and counselling?	Please specify the aim and content of information, guidance, and counselling in your university. -----
9.2. To what extent is information, guidance and counselling incorporated into the validation process?	Please specify to what extent information, guidance and counselling is incorporated into validation process. -----
9.3. Are there specific provisions on how to provide information, guidance and advice on the validation process, opportunities, and benefits to candidates?	Please describe the provisions that may exist or envisage on how to provide information, guidance and advice on the validation process, opportunities, and benefits to candidates. -----
9.4. Who is providing information, guidance, and counselling to applicants for validation at your university?	Please indicate who is providing information, guidance, and counselling to applicants for validation at your university -----

#### 4. Links of validation arrangements with NQF

To ensure the links of validation arrangements with NQF is not only important for transparency reasons of lifelong learning systems, but NQF provides reference for validation of non-formal learning through learning outcomes-based level descriptors<sup>38</sup>. In most cases in education and training, the qualifications included in the NQFs are accessible through validation. Modules, some qualifications or credits can also be obtained through validation.in different degrees. In

<sup>37</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

some countries, any qualification can be accessible through validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>39</sup>.

**Table 10. Methodological guidelines for linking validation arrangements with NQF**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<b>10. Links of validation arrangements with NQF</b>	
10.1. How and to extent the NQF in your country provides reference for validation of non-formal learning?	Please specify how and to what extent the NQF in your country provides reference for validation of non-formal learning. -----
10.2. Which qualifications in the NQF can be obtained through validation of non-formal learning?	Please specify to which qualifications in the NQF can be obtained through validation of non-formal learning -----
10.3. Are links of validations arrangements with NQF sufficiently clear?	Please describe whether links of validation arrangements with NQF are clear or not. -----
10.4. If not, what you should be done to ensure the links of validation with NQF?	If not, please describe what additional actions are required to ensure the links of validation with NQF, i.e., specific criteria, ministerial or university decisions etc. -----

### 5. Compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards

The definition of standards is crucial for validation processes, as it ensures their legitimacy, trustworthiness and reliability. To facilitate validation, it is better to translate standards in learning outcomes. According to the European Inventory<sup>40</sup>, what is important to see is whether the standards used for those qualifications that can be obtained through validation are the same or equivalent to the standards used in qualifications obtained through formal education and training programmes. While qualification and occupational standards are commonly used in validation, in most of the countries standards for qualifications obtained through validation are exactly the same as standards for qualifications obtained through formal education and training

<sup>39</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

programmes<sup>41</sup>. In some countries and in some subsectors of education and training, standards for qualifications obtained through validation may be equivalent to those standards for qualifications obtained through formal education and training.

**Table 11. Methodological guidelines for compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>11. Compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards</b></p> <p>11.1. Is the validation process based on uniform, predefined and commonly agreed standards?</p> <p>11.2. Is the validation process based on the standards set in educational curricula and/or occupational profiles?</p> <p>11.3. Is there a specific procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards at your university?</p>	<p>Please specify whether validation process is based or will be based on uniform, predefined and commonly agreed standards.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if the validation process is based on the standards set in educational curricula and/or occupational profiles.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please describe the specific procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards at your university.</p> <p>-----</p>

## 6. Professional competences of validation practitioners

A specific provision should be made for the development of the professional competences of practitioners involved in the validation process. Concerning competence requirements for validation practitioners, the most common is professional training, followed by having completed qualifications which are not specific to the delivery of validation<sup>42</sup>. While requirements for specific qualifications for guidance and counselling practitioners have decreased, the requirements for non-specific qualification for validation practitioners have increased, mainly, in terms of relevant experience and in relevant professional training.

<sup>41</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

**Table 12. Methodological guidelines for professional competences of validation practitioners**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>12. Professional competences of validation practitioners</b></p> <p>12.1. What are or should be the profile, qualifications and professional competences of validation practitioners?</p> <p>12.2. Are there specific requirements for the participation of academics, experts or other members of the university in validation procedures?</p> <p>12.3. Are there any provisions, possibilities or forms of entitlement to professional training for validation practitioners?</p>	<p>Please specify the profile, qualifications and professional competences of validation practitioners.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please indicate any specific requirements that are needed for the participation of academics, experts or other members of the university in validation procedures.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if there are any provisions, possibilities or forms of entitlement to professional training for validation practitioners.</p> <p>-----</p>

## 7. Transparent quality assurance measures

There is a general tendency in several European countries to switch from general to specific quality assurance arrangements for validation<sup>43</sup>. Yet, it is still most common for countries to apply existing quality assurance frameworks to validation. It is also quite often that individual higher education institutions establish their own quality assurance procedures on validation<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the question here is whether existing quality assurance systems in universities can be implemented to ensure the quality of validation procedures or more specific quality assurance arrangements are required for validation.

In any case, there are some questions that explicitly concern validation. Based on a previous study conducted in 2011 for the Greek Ministry of Education on the *definition of basic principles of the single framework of recognition of vocational skills and validation of knowledge, skills and*

<sup>43</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

*competences*<sup>45</sup>, we present some of the questions that need to be addressed in the context of quality assurance arrangements for validation:

- Is the validation process based on predefined and commonly accepted validation standards?
- Is the validation process linked to educational curricula and occupational profiles?
- Are evidence and validation decisions directly linked to validation standards and learning objectives?
- Has the required mutual trust been achieved for all parties involved?
- Have clear and measurable targets been set for the validation process?
- Have clear guidelines been adopted for the implementation of validation and for the role of all involved parties?
- Have clear methods of evaluation and validation been defined corresponding to the specifications?
- Are adequate evaluation, feedback and improvement mechanisms in place?
- Does the implementation of validation process build trust in the validation decisions made?
- Is the use of validation standards transparent?
- Is the evaluation process accurate and relevant to validation objectives and specifications?
- Do the methods and tools selected ensure the accuracy and consistency of the assessment in the validation body?

These questions serve as quality assurance criteria that can be taken into account when considering whether existing or planned quality assurance measures are appropriate to validate prior learning.

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<sup>45</sup> Galata, P.V. (2011). Ibid.

**Table 13. Methodological guidelines for transparent quality assurance measures**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<b>13. Transparent quality assurance measures</b>	
13.1. Has your university established its own quality assurance procedure on validation?	Please specify if your university established its own quality assurance procedure on validation. -----
13.2. Can the existing quality assurance framework be applied to validation?	Please explain if and how the existing quality assurance framework can be applied to validation. -----
13.3. Do you think that specific quality assurance settings would be more appropriate to validate prior learning?	Please present your opinion and explain why you think that specific quality assurance settings would be more appropriate to validate prior learning or not. -----

## 8. Synergies between validation and credit systems

Synergies between validation and credit systems, such as ECST and ECVET, could materialize if an individual wants to access a suitable validation opportunity linked to the NQF in a different country from his country of residence and then have the skills recognised in both countries through the links between NQFs and EQF<sup>46</sup>. As the European Inventory explains, this could practically take the form of an engine where individuals could input their skills, occupations or desired qualifications and get as a response information on eligibility requirements and relevant validation initiatives across Europe<sup>47</sup>. The question here is how synergies between validation and credit systems can be implemented in the NQFs and the universities.

<sup>46</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

**Table 14. Methodological guidelines for synergies between validation and credit systems**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>14. Synergies between validation and credit systems</b></p> <p>14.1. How can your university establish synergies between validation and credit systems?</p>	<p>Please explain how your university can establish synergies between validation and credit systems in order to better reflect the equivalence of standards to those of qualifications obtained through formal education.</p>

### 9. Use of validation by groups with fewer opportunities including migrants

Disadvantaged groups, namely low-skilled adults, young adults not covered by Youth Guarantee<sup>48</sup>, long-term unemployed, young people not in education, employment or training, migrant and refugee are more likely to benefit from validation. According to the European Inventory<sup>49</sup>, while validation arrangements targeting these groups exist or are in development, specific validation initiatives are more often implemented in favour of the long-term unemployed and low-skilled adults. Here, the type of skills plays a role, as validation initiatives vary depending on the types of skills. In particular, validation most frequently address job-specific skills or basic skills for the different target groups. Digital, entrepreneurial and transversal skills receive less attention<sup>50</sup>.

**Table 15. Methodological guidelines for the use of validation by groups with fewer opportunities**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>15. Use of validation by groups with fewer opportunities</b></p> <p>15.1. What validation initiatives will you design at your university based on the needs analysis of</p>	<p>Please present your ideas about the validation initiatives that would better respond to the need's analysis of the target groups at your university. Also, explain how you will use the information on the background, motivations and expectations, preferences and educational needs.</p>

<sup>48</sup> European Commission, 2018. Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 either find a good-quality job suited to their education, skills and experience; or acquire the education, skills and experience required to find a job in the future. One way to upskill young people is to support their reintegration to regular education and training through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

<sup>49</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<p>the target groups related to the recognition process?</p> <p>15.2. What type of skills and which target groups will you address with the envisaged validation initiative?</p> <p>15.3. What are the validation stages and procedures you intend to apply at your university?</p> <p>15.4. How do you plan to scale-up this validation initiative and ingrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning for people with fewer opportunities?</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Please specify the types of skills and the target groups that you will address with the envisaged validation initiative at your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify the validation stages and procedures you intend to apply at your university</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify how you plan to scale-up this validation initiative and ingrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning for people with fewer opportunities.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>According to the findings of the target group needs analysis, their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and Higher Education. Their preference for the level of the recognition process is unanimously in all four countries at the national level.</p> <p>The motives for continue to study in higher educations is to have personal satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society and improve social life.</p> <p>The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.</p>
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## 10. Skills audits

Skills audits are available for unemployed people or at risk of unemployment. It is a useful tool for upskilling pathway through a three-step process, including skills assessment, learning

opportunities, validation and recognition of skills<sup>51</sup>. This is an initiative to offer individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment to undergo a skills audit, which is aimed at further informing decisions about career orientation, education or training<sup>52</sup>. This initiative could be taken into consideration as a tool to support people with fewer opportunities.

**Table 16. Methodological guidelines for skills audits**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>16. Skills audits</b></p> <p>16.1. Do you think that skills audits could be a useful tool for upskilling pathway of people with fewer opportunities?</p>	<p>Please express your opinion about skills audits and whether it could be a useful tool for upskilling pathway of people with fewer opportunities.</p> <p>-----</p>

### 11. Transparency tools

Transparency tools are central to the quality, legitimacy and acceptance of the validation process, as they help to obtain evidence on learning outcomes<sup>53</sup>. Tests, examinations, portfolios and interviews associated with the assessor’s skills ensure reliability. According to the European Inventory<sup>54</sup>, the validation process should be adaptable to personal histories and lead to standardised and recognizable outcomes.

Given that different tools shed lights to different aspects of learning experiences, it is suggested to use an array of tools in order to give to individuals the opportunity to reflect the full range of their skills and competences<sup>55</sup>. For example, tests and examinations bring quick results which then can be linked to formal education standards, while interviews and dialogues can have high degree of validity as they enable the dialogue and clarifications. Standardised tools are often applied to allow self-assessment, online tools for validation, and portfolio templates.

<sup>51</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

The portfolio is the most commonly used transparency tool at EU-level that facilitates the documentation of learning outcomes<sup>56</sup>. According to the validation steps of prior or informal and non-formal learning in Ireland<sup>57</sup>, the validation process based on the portfolio is as follows:

1. The first step begins with the **diagnosis of the appropriate certificate** in relation to the applicant's prior learning.
2. The second step aims **to link the individual's experience with an existing specification**-national standard certificate.
3. The third step is devoted to **the collection of evidence for evaluation** that demonstrate the knowledge, skills and competences relied on by the candidate to achieve learning outcomes. These data are collected in an **individual qualification and skills folder (portfolio)**. This portfolio must include CV, existing certificates, job descriptions, references/confirmations, products/samples, evidence of participation in educational programmes, test results<sup>58</sup>.
4. The fourth step is related to **the evaluation of evidence**, that is, the assessment and confirmation of the candidate's knowledge, skills and competences that shall be carried out in relation to specifications/national standards. The evaluation of evidence is based on **the evaluation criteria from the HEI** that must be fulfilled. The individual dossier must be evaluated in terms of **adequacy, validity, authority, reliability and timeliness** (HEI criteria).
5. The final fifth step is related to **the Opinion on the issue of the certificate**. In particular, the external inspector of HEI inspects the evidence in relation to national standards<sup>59</sup>. Thus, the Opinion on the issue of a certificate is based on the fulfilment of the relevant national specifications by the applicant.

Taking into consideration the target group needs analysis concerning evaluation methods in the APELE participant countries, we see that several methods are suggested with a different hierarchy which reflect the particularities of each country. In Denmark, the evaluation tools indicated are interview, onsite-observation, portfolio, practice exams, simulation. In Greece, the tools are onsite-observation, practice exams, examination, simulation, interview. In Iceland, as preferable evaluation tools are indicated interview, portfolio, examination, self-assessment, pre-survey, practice exams, onsite-observation, and in Italy are practice exams, examination, simulation, pre-survey, self-assessment, portfolio, interview.

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<sup>56</sup> Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. (2019). Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Cedefop (2009), Ibid. See above Table 3.

<sup>58</sup> Cedefop (2009), Ibid. See above Table 3.

<sup>59</sup> Cedefop (2009), Ibid. See above Table 3.

**Table 17. Methodological guidelines for transparency tools**

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>17. Transparency tools</b></p> <p>17.1. Which transparency tools do you think would be more appropriate to address the needs of the target group with fewer opportunities?</p> <p>17.2. Could you prepare your own list of transparency tools indicating which aspect of the learning experience they capture?</p> <p>17.3. Could you specify the steps of the validation process based on the transparency tools you have chosen?</p>	<p>Please indicate which transparency tools you consider more appropriate to address the needs of the target group with fewer opportunities.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please prepare your own list of transparency tools that best suits your university, and the target groups it addresses, indicating which aspect of the learning experience they capture.</p> <p>Please specify the steps of the validation process based on the transparency tools you have chosen. You can follow the example above showing the validation steps of prior non-formal learning based on the portfolio.</p>

### **III. The methodological framework for the recognition of prior learning to be piloted at partner universities**

At this final stage, the design of the methodological framework to recognise prior learning in higher education is completed. Having developed a *common ground based on common European principles* that allows participant universities to coordinate their efforts, we have developed *concrete steps and specific guidelines that implement common principles* that can be adapted and applied to different systems of recognition of prior learning. *Concrete examples* are also given with the guidelines based on real facts provided by the findings of the APELE Intellectual Outputs. The optimal use of all relevant material, namely the *EU Council Recommendation Principles 2012 on the validation of non-formal learning*, the good practices on validated prior learning, the study 2011 on *basic principles of recognition of skills*, the European Commission study 2016 on obstacles to recognition, and the findings of *APELE Intellectual*

Outputs, allowed for a better understanding of the methodological framework for the validation of prior learning.

Therefore, we provide here the whole methodological framework for the validation of prior learning in order to be piloted and adapted by the participant universities. Their experiences will contribute both to the development of validation procedures tailored to their needs and specificities and to the finalization of the common methodological framework for the validation of prior learning in higher education.

### Methodological Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning

Defining the steps	Guidelines
<p><b>1. Validation arrangements</b></p> <p>1.2. Are there validation arrangements for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in your country to recognise prior learning for admission to higher education (HE)?</p>	<p>Please specify if there are validation arrangements for HEIs to recognise prior learning for admission to HE.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If yes, please specify what validation arrangements are in place.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>None of the four partner countries has a recognition system of an official procedure for the accreditation of prior experiential learning. Iceland has the legal basis allowing universities to admit individuals who have skills corresponding to the university's qualification requirements. However, recognition of prior learning for admission to higher education is not implemented.</p>
<p><b>2. Validation strategies</b></p> <p>2.1. Are there validation strategies, i.e., legal framework or policies that establish validation initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access HE?</p>	<p>Please specify if there are validation strategies to establish initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access HE.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If yes, please specify the policy framework and the validation strategy.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Across European countries validation strategies are included within strategic frameworks on lifelong learning or with the development of National Qualification Frameworks (NQF).</p>

<p><b>3. Pilot a validation initiative and integrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning</b></p> <p>3.1. If your university is piloting a validation initiative, what does it take to integrate into the strategy for recognition of prior learning?</p> <p>3.2. What are the legal and administrative requirements, i.e., law, ministerial decision, university decision to define the competent departments?</p>	<p>Please specify what does it take for your university to ingrate a validation initiative into the strategy for recognition of prior learning.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify the legal and administrative requirements.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>In the partner countries, admission requirements are regulated (DK) or there are national exams to access HEIs (GR). In Denmark, specific criteria need to be established to give access to HE to individuals who did not fulfil the required access criteria. In Iceland, there is matriculation examination, but each university has own rule of recognition. In Italy, universities enjoy autonomy, they also administer and decide on entrance admissions.</p>
<p><b>4. Validation outputs</b></p> <p>4.1. Do validation arrangements define validation outputs?</p> <p>4.2. If so, do they provide award of full formal qualifications, of parts of qualifications in the form of credits, modules or exemptions, or of non-formal qualifications?</p> <p>4.3. If not, what validation outputs would be most appropriate for your university?</p>	<p>Please specify whether validation arrangements define validation outputs.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If so, please specify if they provide full formal qualifications or parts of qualifications.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If not, please specify they validation outputs you consider as most appropriate for your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Most countries allow for the award of parts of qualifications and give access to formal programmes through validation. This is the most common output in higher education.</p>
<p><b>5. Four stages of validation</b></p> <p>5.1. Do validation arrangements define or need to define all four stages of validation, i.e.,</p>	<p>Please specify if validation arrangements define or need to define all four stages of validation</p>

<p>identification, documentation assessment and certification?</p> <p>5.2. Do some stages of validation need to be more emphasised than others in certain areas?</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if some stages of validation need to be more emphasised than others in certain areas</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Identification and documentation aim to provide feedback to the learning process and support access to formal programmes. Assessment and certification aim to formalise and certify learning outcomes and are often used in formal education for obtaining Qualifications.</p>
<p><b>6. Involvement of stakeholders</b></p> <p>6.1. Is the involvement of all relevant stakeholders ensured in validation initiatives?</p> <p>6.2. Is there a need to involve different types of stakeholders in different validation functions?</p>	<p>Please specify if the involvement of all relevant stakeholders is ensured in validation initiatives.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if different types of stakeholders need to be involved in different validation functions.</p> <p>This is expected to be specified by each partner organisation.</p>
<p><b>7. Funding sources</b></p> <p>7.1. What funding sources are available or needed for validation?</p>	<p>Please specify the funding sources that are available or needed for validation</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The most common source is the national public funding. It is rarely to have a specific state budget for validation. It is also common that individuals pay a fee for validation.</p> <p>In partner countries, Greek and Icelandic Universities are public funded, while Danish and Italian Universities require fees for admission, tuition etc. for non-EU/EEA nationals. There are no fees for Danish or EU nationals.</p>
<p><b>8. Accessibility to guidance and counselling</b></p> <p>8.1. Is guidance and counselling readily accessible in your university?</p> <p>8.2. Which department of the university is responsible for ensuring access to information, guidance and counselling?</p>	<p>Please specify whether guidance and counselling are readily accessible to your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify which department of the university is responsible for ensuring access to information, guidance and counselling.</p> <p>-----</p>

<p>8.3. How regularly is information, guidance and advice provided at your university?</p>	<p>Please describe how regularly information, guidance and counselling is provided at your university</p> <p>-----</p> <p>In all of the participating partner countries, a number of barriers could be identified. For instance, websites in Greece provide information on HEIs requirements in Greek. In the rest of the countries, while website in English provide information, students often experience cultural and linguistic barriers, like in Denmark. In Iceland, may be difficult to access information and help centres. Access to Italian HEIs is limited for refugees.</p>
<p><b>9. Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and validation procedures</b></p> <p>9.1. What should be the aim and content of information, guidance and counselling?</p> <p>9.2. To what extent is information, guidance and counselling incorporated into the validation process?</p> <p>9.3. Are there specific provisions on how to provide information, guidance and advice on the validation process, opportunities and benefits to candidates?</p> <p>9.4. Who is providing information, guidance and counselling to applicants for validation at your university?</p>	<p>Please specify the aim and content of information, guidance and counselling in your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify to what extent information, guidance and counselling is incorporated into validation process.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please describe the provisions that may exist or envisage on how to provide information, guidance and advice on the validation process, opportunities and benefits to candidates.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please indicate who is providing information, guidance and counselling to applicants for validation at your university</p> <p>-----</p>
<p><b>10. Links of validation arrangements with NQF</b></p> <p>10.1. How and to extent the NQF in your country provides reference for validation of non-formal learning?</p>	<p>Please specify how and to what extent the NQF in your country provides reference for validation of non-formal learning.</p> <p>-----</p>

<p>10.2. Which qualifications in the NQF can be obtained through validation of non-formal learning?</p> <p>10.3. Are links of validations arrangements with NQF sufficiently clear?</p> <p>10.4. If not, what you should be done to ensure the links of validation with NQF?</p>	<p>Please specify to which qualifications in the NQF can be obtained through validation of non-formal learning</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please describe whether links of validation arrangements with NQF are clear or not.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>If not, please describe what additional actions are required to ensure the links of validation with NQF, i.e., specific criteria, ministerial or university decisions etc.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p><b>11. Compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards</b></p> <p>11.1. Is the validation process based on uniform, predefined and commonly agreed standards?</p> <p>11.2. Is the validation process based on the standards set in educational curricula and/or occupational profiles?</p> <p>11.3. Is there a specific procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards at your university?</p>	<p>Please specify whether validation process is based or will be based on uniform, predefined and commonly agreed standards.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if the validation process is based on the standards set in educational curricula and/or occupational profiles.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please describe the specific procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards at your university.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p><b>12. Professional competences of validation practitioners</b></p> <p>12.1. What are or should be the profile, qualifications and professional competences of validation practitioners?</p> <p>12.2. Are there specific requirements for the participation of academics, experts or other</p>	<p>Please specify the profile, qualifications and professional competences of validation practitioners.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please indicate any specific requirements that are needed for the participation of academics, experts or</p>

<p>members of the university in validation procedures?</p> <p>12.3. Are there any provisions, possibilities or forms of entitlement to professional training for validation practitioners?</p>	<p>other members of the university in validation procedures.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify if there are any provisions, possibilities or forms of entitlement to professional training for validation practitioners.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p><b>13. Transparent quality assurance measures</b></p> <p>13.1. Has your university established its own quality assurance procedure on validation?</p> <p>13.2. Can the existing quality assurance framework be applied to validation?</p> <p>13.3. Do you think that specific quality assurance settings would be more appropriate to validate prior learning?</p>	<p>Please specify if your university established its own quality assurance procedure on validation.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please explain if and how the existing quality assurance framework can be applied to validation.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please present your opinion and explain why you think that specific quality assurance settings would be more appropriate to validate prior learning or not.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p><b>14. Synergies between validation and credit systems</b></p> <p>14.1. How can your university establish synergies between validation and credit systems?</p>	<p>Please explain how your university can establish synergies between validation and credit systems in order to better reflect the equivalence of standards to those of qualifications obtained through formal education.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p><b>15. Use of validation by groups with fewer opportunities</b></p> <p>15.1. What validation initiatives will you design at your university based on the needs analysis of</p>	<p>Please present your ideas about the validation initiatives that would better respond to the needs analysis of the target groups at your university. Also,</p>

<p>the target groups related to the recognition process?</p> <p>15.2. What type of skills and which target groups will you address with the envisaged validation initiative?</p> <p>15.3. What are the validation stages and procedures you intend to apply at your university?</p> <p>15.4. How do you plan to scale-up this validation initiative and ingrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning for people with fewer opportunities?</p>	<p>explain how you will use the information on the background, motivations and expectations, preferences and educational needs.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify the types of skills and the target groups that you will address with the envisaged validation initiative at your university.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify the validation stages and procedures you intend to apply at your university</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Please specify how you plan to scale-up this validation initiative and ingrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning for people with fewer opportunities.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>According to the findings of the target group needs analysis, their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and Higher Education. Their preference for the level of the recognition process is unanimously in all four countries at the national level.</p> <p>The motives for continue to study in higher educations is to have personal satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society and improve social life.</p> <p>The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.</p>
<p><b>16. Skills audits</b></p> <p>16.1. Do you think that skills audits could be a useful tool for</p>	<p>Please express your opinion about skills audits and whether could be a useful tool for upskilling pathway of people with fewer opportunities.</p>

<p>upskilling pathway of people with fewer opportunities?</p>	<p>-----</p>
<p><b>17. Transparency tools</b></p> <p>17.1. Which transparency tools do you think would be more appropriate to address the needs of the target group with fewer opportunities?</p> <p>17.2. Could you prepare your own list of transparency tools indicating which aspect of the learning experience they capture?</p> <p>17.3. Could you specify the steps of the validation process based on the transparency tools you have chosen?</p>	<p>Please indicate which transparency tools you consider more appropriate to address the needs of the target group with fewer opportunities.</p> <hr/> <p>Please prepare your own list of transparency tools that best suits your university, and the target groups it addresses, indicating which aspect of the learning experience they capture.</p> <hr/> <p>Please specify the steps of the validation process based on the transparency tools you have chosen. You can follow the example above showing the validation steps of prior non-formal learning based on the portfolio.</p> <p>-----</p>

## Part C. Methodology for the recognition of prior learning – Synthesis of national reports on the pilot procedure

### I. The context and specific dimensions of the pilot procedure for the recognition of prior learning in partner universities

The pilot procedure has been implemented by the partner universities, specifically the University of Akureyri (Iceland), University of Patras (Greece), Università Degli Studi Di Bari Aldo Moro and Armes Progetti (Italy), and University of Copenhagen (Denmark). The pilot phase followed the discussion and final decisions taken by the partners at the Bari meeting on October 6-7, 2021, where they agreed on the above common methodology for prior learning recognition based on the results from IO1, IO2, IO3, and IO4. The aim of the pilot procedure was to apply the results of APELE and to specialise this methodology taking into account the different legal frameworks

of the partners and using portfolios as an evaluation tool, in order to enhance access to higher education for those having fewer formal qualifications.

The pilot procedure took place in November and December 2021, where all partner universities faced the Covid-19 emergency resulting in new restrictions and local lockdowns all over Europe. As a result, the carrying out of a pilot procedure in person was impossible and, thus, it was agreed between the partners to organize the pilot procedure based on the results of national research teams in IO3 and IO4. The following is a summary of the context and specifics of the pilot procedure regarding validation, as applied by each partner university. For an accurate recording of the procedure, we present the main points as described in the APELE national reports on Output 5 prepared by the partner universities.

#### a. The Danish National Report – University of Copenhagen

In Denmark, **the University of Copenhagen** created the Evaluation and Ranking Committee consisted by the project partner and two academic employees to perform the pilot evaluation on the basis of the portfolios produced in connection with IO4. Ten (10) people participated in the pilot procedure, falling in the category of “people with fewer opportunities”, either due to their migrant background or due to lack of a school diploma. The participants had also contributed to IO3 (analysis of user needs) and had expressed their interest in the project APELE and its further development. The pilot took place at the University of Copenhagen, on the premises of the Faculty of Law. According to the Danish National Report<sup>60</sup>, evaluators scored the candidates’ portfolios using a scale of 1 to 10, and the grades were then compared and linked to the levels in the Danish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, which is based on the European Qualification Framework. The evaluation method was proposed and agreed upon by all members of the Evaluation and Ranking Committee. On the designated day of the pilot, the Committee examined each portfolio in depth, assessing the candidates’ knowledge, skills, and competences. The score was given after a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each portfolio and conceded by all the members of the Evaluation and Ranking Committee. The Evaluation and Ranking Committee studied the portfolios of the participants and proposed a suitable study programme for each candidate<sup>61</sup>.

Following the pilot procedure, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee noted some considerations about the validation procedure within the Danish educational context to be taken into account<sup>62</sup>:

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<sup>60</sup> Adamo, S. (2022). APELE Report - Output 5. Guidelines on Methodology for Recognition of Prior Learning - Pilot Procedure. Danish National Report. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

<sup>61</sup> Adamo, S. (2022). Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Adamo, S. (2022). Ibid

- i. The portfolios do not always allow evaluating the motivation of the candidates, which is pivotal for the successful completion of university studies.
- ii. The portfolios being a self-assessment instrument bear an intrinsic danger of overestimation of own competences or even fraud. A possible rectification of this aspect could be to include a test alongside the portfolio, which could confirm the possession of the skills and competences indicated by the candidates.
- iii. A broad variety of experts (professors, administrative personnel, and other relevant professions/practitioners) would need to be able to part of the validation procedure, as the educational needs are very broad amongst the Danish target group.
- iv. It would be beneficial to offer the validation procedure not only in Danish, but also in other languages (i.e. English, but also Arabic or French).
- v. There would need to be some coordination between the different Higher Education institutions in Denmark, as the participants prefer national accreditation. This may be difficult to realize. A possibility would be to start developing working groups amongst different Higher Education institutions to focus further on inclusion of the target group and accreditation of informal learning to work towards such a procedure.
- vi. The experts should be informed about the purpose, structure, complexity of evaluating both formal and informal learning, and they should have the necessary knowledge as regards the relevant competencies of the candidate. There should be a screening of knowledge, skills and competencies before the procedure in order to match the experts/evaluators. This is crucial for validity and reliability of the procedure.
- vii. The assessment needs to be cost-efficient, and the costs should be covered by the State, since the target group is people with fewer opportunities.
- viii. It may be of relevance to offer specific courses for the target group to help them prepare for the Quota 2 system of access, as this system is already implemented and leaves room for recognition of experiential learning for access to university studies.

#### **b. The Greek National Report – University of Patras**

In Greece, **the University of Patras (UPAT)** started the pilot procedure with the presentation of the APELE project results in order to discuss the guidelines of methodology with the national authorities. Though responded positively, the authorities pointed out that the process of changing national legislation to adopt a national prior learning recognition system was not the priority for the time being. Despite these obstacles, the UPAT team moved on to the piloting procedure with a special focus on the evaluation process. A Ranking committee was established with the participation of one representative from each of the seven schools of UPAT (Schools of Natural Sciences, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities and social sciences, Economics and

Business administration, Agricultural Studies, Health Rehabilitation sciences) with main objective to proceed with recognition activities. Regarding validation arrangements, a commonly agreed internal procedure was established in the university, where NQF was the measure for recognition system and especially the learning outcomes<sup>63</sup>.

Fourteen (14) people participated in the pilot procedure with fewer opportunities and specifically without a school diploma. The majority of participants had contributed to IO 3 (need analysis) and IO 4 (portfolio), and they had expressed the will to be further involved and participate in the final stage of APELE. Their participation was free of charge and the cost was covered by the contribution of UPAT. The pilot took place in UPAT facilities and online tools were adopted due to Covid 19 situation. According to the Greek National Report<sup>64</sup>, the Ranking committee studied the portfolios of the participants and proposed the scientific field for each candidate. A representative of the committee contacted the candidates, using online tools, and informed them about the field where they can proceed for recognition of their prior learning. Of the 14 candidates, 11 agreed and followed the procedure.

An Evaluation Committee was set consisting of one expert on adult education, two experts on the examined field. The evaluation method that was proposed and agreed by all members of the committee was written exams and more specific the model of graduate admission exams was adopted. Despite the difficult circumstances of covid 19, this method was accepted by all, including the candidates, as it enhances quality assurance and promotes validity and reliability<sup>65</sup>.

On the designated day of the written examination, the Evaluation Committee was met 2 hours earlier. The experts of the Committee who teach the subject under consideration at the same time proposed six subjects and the Ranking Committee selected three of them. Then a selection by lottery took place and the one subject was the one where the candidates were examined<sup>66</sup>. All necessary measures to ensure the inviolability of the procedure have been taken, while particular support was offered by a member of the Greek team of APELE to the candidates and the Evaluation Committee to make the procedure comfortable and Covid-19 free.

In relation to validation procedure, the Greek National Report<sup>67</sup> highlights that there is no institution that can provide a certificate and recognition that could be used as a credential for entering higher education institutions. This specific piloting was a chance for UPAT staff and for candidates to participate in activities relating to the recognition of prior learning. The ranking committee put standards according to NQF and the participants released in which level their

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<sup>63</sup> Kasola, S. & Karalis, Th. (2022). APELE Report - Output 5. Guidelines on Methodology for Recognition of Prior Learning - Pilot Procedure. Greek National Report. Patras: University of Patras.

<sup>64</sup> Kasola, S. & Karalis, Th. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Kasola, S. & Karalis, Th. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kasola, S. & Karalis, Th. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Kasola, S. & Karalis, Th. (2022). Ibid.

qualifications are. A certification signed by the Ranking committee but with no legal power was given to all participants.

### c. The Icelandic National Report – University of Akureyri

In Iceland, **the University of Akureyri** has had very strict admission requirements and often only accepted applications from candidates with a high school diploma. Individuals, who do not have access to information about their previous studies for various reasons e.g. refugees or individuals who have not completed traditional learning path where excluded from the access. According to the Icelandic National Report<sup>68</sup>, the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences tried for some years to diversify its students' body and take up within the APELE project the piloting of a study to facilitate the access of students with fewer opportunities. The pilot procedure will take place in the University of Akureyri in the spring of 2022, in the framework of three study programs at the department of School of Humanities and Social Sciences on media studies, social science, and modern studies. The faculty has agreed to set up an evaluation committee with the participation of experts on each of the three study programs, office director of School of Humanities and Social Sciences, representative from the Office of Student Counselling and the project manager of the APELE project.

As presented in the National Report<sup>69</sup>, the committee will be responsible for the piloting process and will work according to an evaluation plan that takes into account quality assurance. The applicants will be valuated based on their personal portfolio and other documents that they may submit additionally. The outcome of the evaluation procedure will be expressed into scores in the piloting project. The participants will be offered a workshop for writing their personal portfolio, based on the results of the APELE project. The faculty decided to split the accreditation process into two steps in the first years, first piloting the admission for people with fewer opportunities and if this is done successfully, the faculty will also develop on the basis of the outcome of APELE accredit prior learning<sup>70</sup>.

The committee members have as a part of the preparation consulted with specialist in the field of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Iceland as they have great knowledge, skills, and extensive experience on the recognition of prior learning, which can be applied to the piloting process at the university level. The participants to the piloting process will be people with fewer opportunities who do not have a matriculation exam or other diploma at third level. The number of participants is estimated at about 20 applicants and about 5-10 candidates. In the spring of

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<sup>68</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022). APELE Output 5. Guidelines on Methodology for Recognition of Prior Learning - Pilot Procedure. Icelandic National Report. Iceland: University of Akureyri.

<sup>69</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022).Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022).Ibid.

2022, additionally to the usual application form of the three study programs, there will be the option to fill out a personal portfolio that will be used as an evaluation tool for admission. To ensure the best result applicants will be offered resources, additional to the workshops, to help them with the recording of the portfolio<sup>71</sup>.

According to the Icelandic National Report<sup>72</sup>, applicants who want to participate in the piloting project will need to give their consent on taking part in the follow up procedure of the piloting process. After the applicants have been evaluated and their application approved or denied it is very important that the outcome of the process is documented into the student system as usually. That should be done on the same grounds as other admitted students. A follow up process will be put in practice so the piloting will give the best information and opportunities to develop this process.

In relation to validation procedure, it is highlighted that the Act on Public Universities no. 85/2008 gives the University of Akureyri the legal power to adapt rules and valuation methods to admit students with fewer opportunities. However, as mentioned in the National Report<sup>73</sup>, although the public universities do have the legal power to admit students based on their prior learning, a national certification at university level is needed so the University of Akureyri can certify prior learning. This piloting process is a chance for the university to establish and develop an initiative for further recognition of prior learning to access higher education in Iceland.

#### **d. The Italian National Report – University of Bari and ARMES Progetti**

In Italy, **the University of Bari** was able to organize bilateral face to face meetings with the persons responsible for the Center for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.), during which the portfolios elaborated for the IO4 were evaluated and the methodology tested. According to the Italian National Report<sup>74</sup>, the Italian legislative situation makes impossible to introduce the APELE portfolio among the tools and paths to access higher education in Italy without having a higher school diploma. However, it has been possible to implement the evaluation procedure of the APELE Portfolio at the Center for lifelong learning (C.A.P.) of the University of Bari, as it promotes lifelong learning processes and the certification of skills acquired in formal and informal contexts for EU and non-EU citizens, with particular reference to refugees and asylum seekers.

Two meetings were organized, during which the APELE team of the University of Bari and of Armes Progetti illustrated the APELE methodology and presented the portfolios compiled during

<sup>71</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022).Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022).Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). APELE Report - Output 5. Guidelines on Methodology for Recognition of Prior Learning - Pilot Procedure. Italian National Report. Italy: University of Bari and ARMES Progetti.

the implementation and testing phase (IO4). As mentioned in the National Report<sup>75</sup>, a total of ten portfolios were presented, collected by ten people with fewer opportunities, three of whom were Italian and seven were migrants. The majority of people who filled out the portfolios are between 30 and 60 years old and the majority are women.

The complete analysis of the APELE Portfolio confirmed that in Italy there is no law that allows access to university without having a higher school diploma. The only exception is made for refugees and asylum seekers who can use the university corridor promoted by UNHCR that uses the Refugee Qualifications Evaluation (CNVQR) at the Center for Information Mobility and Academic Equivalences (CIMEA)<sup>76</sup>. Moreover, the APELE Portfolio is structured in such a way that allows a pertinent assessment of the competences of the people who compile it, but lacks a path for the hetero-evaluation. On the other hand, the APELE Portfolio facilitates the clarification of formal, and non-formal skills, and can encourage individuals' self-reflection around the learning experiences conducted in non-school contexts.

The portfolio as a whole was evaluated positively during the two meetings. According to the National Report<sup>77</sup>, the result of the evaluation phase carried out at the University of Bari highlighted that the APELE portfolio could be promoted as an orientation tool for enrollment in university courses of study as well as a tool for the accreditation of 12 ECTs for extracurricular experiences of high cultural value for students who are enrolled at the University of Bari. Awaiting for a new Italian law, the Portfolio could become a tool used within the path of self-evaluation developed by the C.A.P. and could be further improved by adding a path of hetero-evaluation.

In relation to validation procedure in Italy, there is no procedure defined and managed at the national level for the validation of competences acquired at non-formal and informal level, i.e. there is no institutional recognition of them. With regards to access to higher education studies, according to the Italian legislation, no university can provide a recognition/certificate of competencies acquired during prior learning that can be used to access higher education studies. Besides, there are good practices conducted at the national level by universities members of the University Network for Lifelong Learning<sup>78</sup>.

The experimentation carried out at the University of Bari by the Center for Lifelong Learning is an example on the national territory of how refugees with significant experiences of non-formal and informal learning are supported to pursue education. The C.A.P. advises and guides the refugees to prepare a documentation for obtaining a recognition of formal, informal and non-formal skills, which can start a possible path of accreditation and professional qualification or a path to access higher education studies at the University of Bari for students who have a refugee

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<sup>75</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). Ibid.

status<sup>79</sup>. The preliminary work carried out by the CAP allows adults without a diploma to decide whether to continue in the certification pathway operated by the Region.

## II. Comparison of methodological points for the recognition of prior learning in partner countries

In this section, a comparative analysis will be presented that summarises the main guidelines developed by the partner universities for the application of the 17 common methodological principles in their national systems for the recognition of prior learning. To simplify the comparative analysis, some points of the guidelines will be listed, as a detailed comparative table is presented in the Annex.

### 1. Validation arrangements

The validation arrangements that are designed, piloted or implemented by the partner universities in the respective countries for the recognition of prior learning to access higher education are presented in the following table.

**Table 18. Comparison of guidelines for validation arrangements**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
Denmark has a system for recognition of prior learning for entering Higher Education: the “Quota 2 system”.  Potential candidates to Higher Education can apply on the basis of their high school diploma and other experiential learning.  The Quota 2 system is structured in three steps:	Greece has not a system for recognition of prior learning for entering Higher education.  Legal arrangements need to be agreed at the national level as all universities are under public law.  UPAT has no internal recognition system that’s why the APELE UPAT team came in common agreement with the administrative and academic structures and established an internal pilot procedure inside the university where NQF was	Iceland has the legal basis allowing universities to admit individuals who have skills corresponding to the university’s qualification requirements.  However, certification of prior learning for admission to higher education is not implemented in Iceland.	In Italy, there is no defined and legally recognized procedure for the validation of prior learning by the Universities.  Universities are not authorized to recognize prior learning to give access to Higher Education Studies.  There are, however, the C.A.P., Centres of Lifelong Learning and the Italian University Network for Lifelong Learning (RUIAP) that offer guidance and consulting

<sup>79</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). Ibid.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A test held at the University facilities.</li> <li>- A written interview on three essay questions</li> <li>- A local, faculty-based Quota 2 committee will evaluate and score the candidates.</li> </ul> <p>The final ranking is based on a general evaluation of 1) the result of the Quota 2 test, 2) the result of the written interview, and 3) the grade from the qualifying exam.</p>	<p>the measure for the recognition system.</p>		<p>services to encourage the recognition of prior learning.</p> <p>Relevant public and institutional practices that exist in Italy are limited to a territorial level or are non-institutionalized validation practices.</p>
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Based on the above comparison of guidelines regarding validation arrangements, we find that in two countries, namely in Denmark and Iceland, the system provides the legal basis that allows universities to admit individuals with fewer qualifications. The key to validation arrangements is the evaluation of individuals' corresponding skills in accordance with university's qualification requirements or faculty criteria. It seems that Denmark has a more structured system of a three-level examination that supports the final ranking assigning the study places, while Iceland does not have a prior learning certification system. On the other hand, Greece and Italy do not have in place the necessary legal regulations that could allow the recognition of prior learning for access to higher education. Yet, the pilot phase in Greece showed that internal procedures in universities can be commonly agreed, using NQF as the reference measure for the recognition of prior learning. Moreover, guidance and consulting services or existing public and institutional practices in Italy can encourage the recognition of prior learning even if they are not institutionalised validation practices.

## 2. Validation strategies

As expected from the previous comparison, there are no specific validation strategies in general in terms of legal regulations or policies that could establish validation initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access higher education.

**Table 19. Comparison of guidelines for validation strategies**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
Yes. Please refer to the description in the Danish national report for IO1.	As there is no legal framework in Greece NQF was used.	There are no formal validation strategies in place nationally. In the piloting process an evaluation frame will be developed that is based on the framework used on third level and the skills necessary for admission to the three study programs.	In Italy there is no legal framework for the recognition of formal and informal prior learning to access Higher Education. Informal prior learning can be recognized by the Regions through special procedures. The Universities can recognize within each course of study, 12 course credits (ECTS) to prior learning, but only for those who have a valid diploma to access HE. The Law n. 92/2012 has stressed the need of a shared system of recognition and validation of skills <sup>80</sup> , within which 32 Italian universities have created a network to initiate the recognition and validation of skills.

Exception is made in the case of Denmark, where HEIs determine the criteria and use the quota 2 systems through which applicants can be admitted in higher education. Another exception can be found in Italy, where informal prior learning can be recognised by the Regions through specific procedures. In addition, there has been a legal provision (Law n. 92 of 2012) in Italy stressing the need of a shared system of recognition and validation of skills, which encourage 32 universities to create a network and promote in their settings initiatives for the recognition and validation of skills. On the contrary, Greece and Iceland do not have formal validation strategies except from an evaluation frame that could use respectively either NQF as a measure or specific criteria for admission to study programs.

### **3. Pilot a validation initiative and integrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning**

The pilot procedure implemented by the partner universities have led to constructive findings that reveal existing weaknesses in the educational systems of partner countries, but also suggest what has to be done to integrate a piloting validation initiative into the strategy for recognition of prior learning.

<sup>80</sup> Scardigno, A. F., Manuti, A., & Pastore, S. (2019). Migranti, rifugiati e università. *Prove tecniche di certifica*.

**Table 20. Comparison of requirements to integrate a validation initiative into the strategy for recognition of prior learning**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>The University of Copenhagen as a public university could conduct a piloting procedure for recognition of prior learning for accessing university under the scope of the research project APELE.</p> <p>However, a legal amendment to the Act on University would be necessary in order to adopt and implement such a validation procedure.</p> <p>Concerning legal and administrative requirements, please refer to the Danish national report for IO1.</p>	<p>The University of Patras is a higher educational institution acting under public law. That means that at the research level activities, such as piloting of recognition in prior learning for entering in higher education, can take place but the implementation of this procedure must be approved by the competent ministry and a relevant law must be passed to implement it. In Greece, there are national exams to access higher education. This is secured by ministerial decisions but also by common acceptance in the consciousness of the people.</p>	<p>The legal basis is present and not a barrier. Members of the Icelandic APELE team presented the piloting initiative at a faculty meeting where the piloting was given one year.</p> <p>In Iceland, there is matriculation examination or another examination at third level, but each university has own rule of recognition and can admit a person that holds the same level of maturity, experience and knowledge required by the university.</p>	<p>The University Aldo Moro of Bari provides through the C.A.P. a consultancy and counselling services that support the refugees in the certification and accreditation of skills acquired in prior formal and informal learning. These are piloting procedures recognized as good practices for refugees and are not integrated within the University of Bari. For the integration of these procedures it is necessary to involve, in addition to the refugees, migrants and individuals who for various reasons, have interrupted their university studies and intend to resume them.</p>

According to the Table above completed by the partner universities, the legal and administrative requirements for integrating a validation initiative into a prior learning recognition strategy are more clearly defined in the case of Denmark and Iceland. In both countries, universities have an autonomy to set their own rules and criteria for the evaluation, recognition and admission of the individuals who have the skills corresponding to the university requirements. Nevertheless, in both countries the legal amendment to the Act on University and the certification of prior learning are additional requirements that must be adopted. In Greece and Italy, existing legal provisions define strictly the rules of access to higher education for those with formal qualifications. Therefore, specific legal requirements need to be promoted in order to institutionalize the existing pilot initiatives or practices of evaluation, validation and recognition of prior learning for those who have fewer formal qualifications.

#### 4. Validation outputs

A crucial element of validation arrangements refer to validation outputs and, in particular, to what extent they are defined and if they provide an award of full formal qualifications, of parts of qualifications in the form of credits, modules or exemptions, or non-formal qualifications.

The Table below shows that the absence of legal provisions and formal validation strategies is the main obstacle to clearly defining validation outputs.

**Table 21. Comparison of arrangements defining validation outputs**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
As already mentioned, there are currently no provisions in the law that allow for validation arrangement and outputs.	As it is referred previously, in Greece the whole validation procedure is not supported by the legislative framework.	As is referred previously there are no formal validation strategies in place nationally on university level in Iceland.	<p>The validation of formal and informal learning done at the regional level, and therefore outside the university, allows a person to take part in high school exams. Once the exams have been successfully passed and the person/student has obtained the diploma it is possible to be enrolled in Higher Education Studies (University). It is the Fornero Law, Article 4, that allows the recognition of training credits and the certification of learning however acquired<sup>81</sup>.</p> <p>Once a person/student has obtained the diploma and has completed the enrollment at the University, up to 12 course credits (ECTS) can be recognized for the selected university course.</p>

In Denmark, Greece and Iceland, the absence of legal provisions and formal validation strategies does not allow the promotion of validation arrangements and the definition of validation outputs. In Italy, formal and informal learning validation arrangements are provided at the regional level and allow individuals to take high school exams and, if successful, to enroll in higher education. However, validation arrangements at university level are limited to the recognition of course credits.

#### 5. Four stages of validation

Another issue that needs to be defined in validation arrangements concerns the four stages of validation, i.e., identification, documentation, assessment, and certification. Some countries

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2012;92-art4-com16>, Last retrieved 18.01.2022.

place more emphasis on some of the above stages, such as the evaluation because of the importance of ensuring impartiality and credibility. During the pilot phase, it appeared that some countries could not take all stages of validation, while others could implement all stages and suggest an additional one.

**Table 22. Comparison of arrangements defining the four stages of validation**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>During the pilot implementation, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee was able to define and perform two stages of validation, namely documentation and assessment.</p> <p>There is no need to emphasise some stages than others in certain areas.</p>	<p>At the pilot implementation, all four stages were implemented</p> <p>There is no need to emphasise some stages than others in certain areas.</p>	<p>Not all stages of validation can be taken at this time.</p> <p>Yes, this will become clearer in the process of the piloting.</p>	<p>According to the evaluation of the APELE Portfolio - made at the Centre for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.) of the University of Bari, the validation steps are fine.</p> <p>Also, according to the evaluation made by the C.A.P. it would be necessary to add to the APELE Portfolio a phase of hetero evaluation.</p>

In particular, Denmark could define and perform two stages of validation, namely the documentation and assessment. Iceland also considers that not all stages of validation can be taken during the pilot process, which will clarify which of the stages need more emphasis.

On the opposite side, Greece and Italy could implement all stages of validation, while an additional phase of hetero evaluation is suggested by the Italian partner to be included in the APELE Portfolio.

## 6. Involvement of stakeholders

The involvement of all relevant stakeholders in validation initiatives and the need to involve different types of stakeholders in different validation functions are two crucial issues that need to be taken into consideration.

**Table 23. Comparison of arrangements to ensure the involvement of stakeholders**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>The involvement of stakeholders could not be ensured.</p> <p>During the pilot implementation, only academics took part in the activities of the Evaluation and Ranking Committee.</p> <p>Perhaps the Evaluation and Ranking Committee would benefit from having members of the administration who are student counsellors as well as stakeholders from industry where the students may work after the completion of their studies.</p>	<p>The involvement of stakeholders could not be ensured.</p> <p>The Graduate admission exams procedure can ensure that the most relevant expert of the field will be part of the ranking committee as well as part of the evaluation committee.</p>	<p>Many relevant stakeholders are involved to ensure quality and trust of the procedure.</p> <p>Yes, again this will become clearer in the process of the piloting.</p>	<p>In Italy, currently, there are only good practices that have been implemented by universities hosting Centers for Lifelong Learning, as the University of Bari Aldo Moro. In this case the stakeholders are involved but it is not a national legislative procedure.</p> <p>In Italy, only the Regions have intervened at the normative level on certification systems for professional training and have produced experiences in the field of valorization of formal and informal learning but also in this case there is no national framework that coordinates the efforts made by the Regions</p> <p>The C.A.P. of the University of Bari involves the stakeholders in the implementation of the good practices for the validation of prior formal and informal learning.</p>

However, it was not possible for the majority of the partners to ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders at this stage of the pilot validation procedure. In Denmark, only academics were involved in the Evaluation and Ranking Committee, but it became clear that the participation of student counsellors and stakeholders from industry would be beneficial. Also in Greece, only the most relevant experts of the field could participate in the ranking committee and the evaluation committee. In Iceland, the involvement of many stakeholders is necessary to ensure the quality of the validation procedure. Similarly in Italy, the stakeholders are involved, but there is no a national legislative procedure or a national coordination framework even when the regions are involved in the certification process.

## 7. Funding sources

In regard to funding sources that are available or needed for validation, it should be noted that the majority of partner universities, namely the Danish and Greek Universities and the Icelandic University of Akureyri, are acting under public law and, therefore, all funding sources come from the state.

**Table 24. Comparison of arrangements regarding funding sources for validation**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
As Danish universities are publicly funded, all funding sources should be made available via public resources.	Greek Universities are under public law, so all funding sources are coming from the state.	The University of Akureyri is under public law, so all funding sources comes from the state.	Universities would need additional state or private funding to be able to provide a service for validating prior formal and informal learning.

On the contrary, Italian universities would need additional state and private funding for validation, but specific funding sources are not indicated. Overall, funding sources are not further specified at this stage of the pilot validation procedure.

## 8. Accessibility to guidance and counselling

A prerequisite for the effective implementation of validation is to ensure guidance and counselling that should be readily accessible in universities.

**Table 25. Comparison of arrangements regarding guidance and counselling**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
Guidance and counselling are offered both through several webpages/e-guidance sites, and through dedicated offices.  The University of Copenhagen provides information regarding access to its educational programmes via the Guidance and Admissions Office	Guidance and counselling are not offered.  UPAT provides information through the Department of Employment, Career, and Liaison.	Regarding RPL at university level, no, but on other matters yes. The Faculty of Social Sciences, the office of School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the office of Student Counselling at the university will offer guidance and counselling to	The University of Bari Aldo Moro, in addition to the Center for Lifelong Learning, hosts an Operational Unit for Study Orientation, which depends on the Directorate for Research, Third Mission and Internationalization. This Operational Unit is responsible for incoming and ongoing orientation procedures.  Both the C.A.P and the Operational Unit for Study

<p>("Optagelse" and "KU studentercenter"). The University of Copenhagen provides information, guidance, and advice on a continuous basis throughout the year.</p>	<p>Each student can contact the CAIS office and meet an expert after the appointment.</p>	<p>students in the validation process. In the piloting applicants can also seek help from the pilot contacts for assistant in the admission process. Students can always contact the Office of Student Counselling for a meeting or advice, in person or online.</p>	<p>are open every day except Saturdays and public holydays.</p>
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In the Danish and Italian partner universities, information, guidance and advice is regularly provided through the Guidance and Admission Office of the University of Copenhagen or through the C.A.P. and the Operational Unit of Bari Aldo Moro. In Iceland, the university will offer guidance and counselling to students in the validation process. In Greece, the University of Patras provides information through the Department of Employment, Career, and Liaison. Guidance and counselling are not offered.

### 9. Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and validation procedures

When information, guidance and advice on the validation process, opportunities and benefits to candidates are incorporated into the validation process, all participants are motivated and validation results can be successful. For this reason, the aim, the content and how to provide information, guidance and advice on the validation process should be clearly defined.

**Table 26. Comparison of arrangements regarding information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and validation procedures**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>The aim of information, guidance and counselling should be to assist the candidates in efficiently recording their qualifications, in order to be able to create a portfolio.</p> <p>The candidates would need</p>	<p>An expert/supervisor is needed to record the qualifications of the candidate and build together a portfolio.</p> <p>The candidate needs to be guided in the proper path for recognition.</p>	<p>The aim should be to assist the applicant to record and build their portfolio in the best way possible.</p> <p>It will be incorporated into the piloting validation process and is very important so that the applicant can</p>	<p>The counselling services offered by the University of Bari to the students should guide the potential students to identify competences and promote a self-assessment and auto evaluation of their potentialities to pursue an education path. The C.A.P. implements a three-phase counseling process that represents the operational model of the</p>

<p>guidance in assessing a suitable path for recognition of their prior learning, and a suitable study programme that matches their competences.</p> <p>Currently, there are no specific provisions on information regarding this particular type of validation.</p>	<p>At the moment there are no such provisions due to the legislative framework.</p> <p>please see previous answers regarding the legislative framework. In case the whole procedure for entrance in the higher education institutions will be changed, UPAT has the appropriate services and facilities to provide information to potential applicants</p>	<p>be guided in the proper path for recognition.</p> <p>At the moment there are no such provisions at university level as it has not been implemented at that level.</p> <p>The RPL has not been implemented ad national level in Iceland. In the piloting process regarding information, guidance, and counselling for validation at the University of Akureyri please see points 8.2 and 8.3.</p>	<p>center. The three phases are: 1. Prediagnostic phase; 2. Diagnostic phase; 3. Conclusive phase. At the end of the path, the C.A.P. releases a summary document that certifies the participation in the assessment process and related outputs.<sup>82</sup></p> <p>The information, guidance, counselling and soft skills assessment offered by the C.A.P. are not incorporated into the validation process but they are useful in orienting users towards lifelong learning paths and/or validation by the Apulia Region.<sup>83</sup></p> <p>The Center for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.) of the University of Bari implements an operational model developed by the center itself.</p>
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Based on the above Table, we find that there is an agreement between the partners that information, guidance and counselling should guide and assist the candidates in identifying, recording and self-evaluating their qualifications, in order to build a portfolio. However, there are no specific provisions for information on validation process due to deficiencies in the legislative framework.

The counselling process offered by the Center for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.) of the University of Bari is more concretely presented in three distinct phases, but it is not incorporated into the validation process.

<sup>82</sup> Scardigno, A. F., Manuti, A., & Pastore, S. (2019). Migranti, rifugiati e università. *Prove tecniche di certifica*. Pag.73-77

<sup>83</sup> Idem Pag. 73

## 10. Links of validation arrangements with NQF

To ensure clear links of validation arrangements with NQF, concrete reference should be provided in the NQF for validation of non-formal learning, as well as for the qualifications obtained through this type of validation.

**Table 27. Comparison of arrangements regarding links of validation arrangements with NQF**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>The Danish Qualification Framework/NQF provides reference for validation as regards the description of the levels of competences, which can give access to different types of educational programmes.</p> <p>Qualifications in the NQF can give validation of non-formal learning an official recognition to access Higher Education.</p> <p>The scoring of candidates can be adapted to the various levels in the NQF. The Evaluation and Ranking Committee used a scale of 1-10 and linked it to the levels used in the Danish NQF.</p>	<p>There is no such reference neither for validation of non-formal learning nor for relevant qualifications</p> <p>An intervention in the legislative framework is needed.</p>	<p>There is no such reference.</p> <p>Please see the answer to 10.1.</p> <p>Please see the answer to 10.1.</p> <p>Needs to be implemented at national level for the public HEIs before links of validation with NQF can be established.</p>	<p>The Italian education and training system is fragmented: there is multilevel governance, with both national and regional authorities involved in designing and awarding qualifications. Italy's national qualifications framework (NQF) was adopted in January 2018. The Italian NQF has eight levels and its level descriptors are knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility. The development of the NQF responds, among others, to a need of integrating the different qualifications systems; improving the legibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications of the national and regional systems; and aiding geographic and professional mobility at national and European levels.<sup>84</sup> Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications through the procedures implemented by the Regions. Simplification of the Italian legislative system and merging of the skills' validation bodies into a single structure.</p>

According to the above Table, the Danish Qualification Framework/NQF provides reference for validation as regards the description of the levels of competences, and qualifications in the NQF can give validation of non-formal learning an official recognition to access Higher Education. On

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/italy-national-qualifications-framework-finalised>, Last retrieved 20.01.2022

the contrary, in Greece and Iceland, there is no such reference neither for validation of non-formal learning nor for relevant qualifications, which indicates the need of a legislative intervention.

In Italy, the recent development of the NQF responds to the need of integrating the different qualifications systems, but a simplification of the Italian legislative system and merging of the skills' validation bodies into a single structure are needed. Yet, specific references in the NQF for validation of non-formal learning, as well as for the qualifications obtained through this type of validation are not presented in the case of Greece and Italy.

### 11. Compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards

The validation process and qualifications should be based on commonly agreed standards set in educational curricula and/or occupational profiles. This compliance should be the result of a clearly defined procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards.

**Table 28. Comparison of arrangements regarding the compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>During the pilot implementation, the validation process was based on uniform, predefined and jointly agreed standards among the Evaluation and Ranking Committee members.</p> <p>During the pilot implementation, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee was focused on assessing the candidates both as regards requirements for educational curricula and for occupational profiles after completed studies.</p> <p>There is no specific procedure. This is due to the fact of validation standards not being included in the legislation for access to university.</p>	<p>At the pilot implementation presented here, yes.</p> <p>In the case of pilot implementation, special attention was put into the alignment with this issue.</p> <p>No at the moment, due to the legislative framework restrictions.</p>	<p>Yes, in regards of to the pilot implementation.</p> <p>Yes, in the case of pilot implementation, special attention was put into the alignment with this issue.</p> <p>Not at the moment, but in this piloting process the group has taken into account such procedures that have been developed at third level.</p>	<p>No, the validation process does not have predefined standards. In addition to the European and national standards, it is necessary to deal with the Regional Standards for the Description, Training, Recognition and Certification of Competencies (RQSP) developed by each Italian Region.</p> <p>Italian universities offer a guidance and counselling service that is different from university to university. Therefore, there is no uniform/national validation procedure. The University of Bari through the CAP implements specific methodology described in point 9.1.</p>

The approach of partner universities to the compliance of validated qualifications with commonly agreed standards varies. In Denmark, the pilot validation process implemented by the University of Copenhagen was based on jointly agreed standards among the Evaluation and Ranking Committee members. Moreover, candidates were assessed in terms of requirements for educational curricula and for occupational profiles. However, there is no specific procedure due to the lack of legal provisions on validation standards. Similarly in Greece, the pilot process implemented by the University of Patras was based on commonly agreed standards among the Evaluation Committee. Yet, due to legislative framework restrictions there is no specific procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards. In Iceland, special attention was put into to the alignment with commonly agreed standards, but only in the case of pilot implementation. Finally, in Italy the validation process does not have predefined standards, while regional standards for the description, training, recognition and certification of competencies should be taken into account.

## 12. Professional competences of validation practitioners

The profile, qualifications and professional competences of validation practitioners require particular attention as specific provisions or forms of entitlement to professional training may be needed.

**Table 29. Comparison of arrangements regarding professional competences of validation practitioners**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
Validation practitioners should be able to evaluate the competences broadly and be able to see a possible match between a candidate's skills and the requirement for the Higher Education applied.	Validation practitioners must have the skills and the ability beyond the type of evaluation to check and objectively judge the knowledge, abilities, and skills of the examinee. That's why they have to be familiar with the subject but also to have the ability to recognize the general qualifications.	Validation practitioners must have the skills and ability to assess and objectively judge the knowledge, abilities, and skills of the examinee. That's why they must be familiar with the subject but also to have the ability to recognize the general qualifications.	The assessment and validation process should involve experts with strong empathic and listening skills. More, these experts should have extensive and proven experience (at least ten years of experience) in the field of the competencies to be certified and have knowledge and expertise in the assessment and validation methods.
Academics and other experts should be familiar with criteria for admission to university that are not based on formal recognition, e.g. in	Has to be familiar with adult education principals as the candidates have a specific characteristic.	Have knowledge on validation procedures. Be an expert in the field that is applied for. Be familiar with adult education and the	In Italy there are no specific requirements because there is no legal basis for activating

<p>Denmark the Quota 2 system and the principles it is based upon.</p> <p>Not at the present moment.</p>	<p>Academics have the proper characteristic for validation practitioners as they have experience in their field and additional experience in a different type of validation.</p>	<p>needs and specific characteristics of the validation's candidates' group.</p> <p>The evaluation committee of the piloting process is academics and experts that have the proper characteristic for validation practitioners as they have experience in their field and additional experience in a different type of validation.</p>	<p>validation procedures within universities.</p> <p>In Italy there are specific courses for the evaluation and certification of competences that enable individuals be included into the regional list of experts. These courses do not train experts for validating academic experiences.</p>
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The profile of validation practitioners is clearly presented by the partner universities as those who should be able to evaluate the competences broadly and, thus, they should have strong empathic and listening skills, and extensive and proven experience. They should also be familiar with criteria for admission to university and different type of validation. However, there are no specific provisions, courses, or forms of entitlement to professional training.

### 13. Transparent quality assurance measures

The quality and efficiency of the validation process should be ensured either by the existing quality assurance framework or specific quality assurance settings more appropriate to validate prior learning.

**Table 30. Comparison of arrangements regarding transparent quality assurance measures**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>Currently there is no specific method for validation and therefore no quality assurance procedure. As regards the Quota 2 system, the quality assurance is multi-levelled and includes the review of the work of the Faculty-based Quota-2 committee by the Guidance and Admission Office.</p>	<p>There is no specific method for validation that's why UPAT was used on piloting the model of graduate admission exams.</p> <p>Yes, the existing quality assurance</p>	<p>No, it has not, there for this piloting project is a perfect opportunity for the university to develop on.</p> <p>No, but hopefully there will be after this piloting project.</p>	<p>In Italy there is no such procedure because validation by universities is not possible, however the CAP of the University of Bari has obtained important international recognition of its quality assurance procedure for</p>

<p>If validation was to be introduced, another level of quality assurance should be put in place, and/or agreed with the Guidance and Admissions Office at the University of Copenhagen.</p> <p>A second-level quality assurance setting should assess and confirm the Committee's work on validation of prior learning.</p>	<p>framework can be applied.</p> <p>Of course, an additional setting for quality assurance can be adopted.</p>	<p>Yes, an additional setting for quality assurance can be adopted.</p>	<p>validation of prior learning.<sup>85</sup></p> <p>In case Italy would adopt a law, allowing universities to organize and implement this procedure, it would be mandatory for this procedure to be transparent, certified and take into consideration the European legislation in this matter.</p>
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In the partner countries, there is no specific method for validation and therefore no specific quality assurance procedure. Quality assurance measures are generally in place and the existing quality assurance framework can be applied. However, as indicated in the above Table, an additional setting of quality assurance for the validation of prior learning can be required, agreed and adopted.

#### 14. Synergies between validation and credit systems

Synergies between validation and credit systems could be established in universities by using the NQF, the existing credit system ECTS and a common validation system.

**Table 31. Comparison of arrangements regarding synergies between validation and credit systems**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>A correspondence between validation and the levels described in the NQF, as adopted in the present piloting, could be an example of synergy.</p>	<p>An idea is to use NQF with the existing credit system ECTS.</p>	<p>This will be the next step if or when admission has been made possible.</p>	<p>This is not a problem that can be solved by a single university. It would be required an educational system for Higher Education Studies where the method of calculating credits would be common at a national and also European or international level. This system would allow the adoption of a common system for the recognition of credits and also a common validation system among different countries.</p>

<sup>85</sup> (<https://www.uniba.it/centri/cap/notizie/il-c.a.p.-di-uniba-riceve-a-barcellona-il-vince-validation-award-2019>, Last retrieved 18.01.2022

## 15. Use of validation by groups with fewer opportunities

Here, the main questions look for validation initiatives designed by the partner universities based on the needs analysis of the target groups. In addition, they look for the type of skills to be addressed with the envisaged validation initiative, the validation stages and procedures, as well as the plan to scale-up this validation initiative and ingrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning for people with fewer opportunities.

**Table 32. Comparison of arrangements regarding validation initiatives for people with fewer opportunities**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>The University of Copenhagen will mainly continue to make use of the Quota 2 system for recognition of experiential learning.</p> <p>The Quota 2 system evaluates and includes all informal skills and competences that are currently not encompassed by traditional study programmes. The target group within the group of people with fewer opportunities could be migrants and refugees who want to pursue Higher Education in Denmark.</p> <p>Currently it is not possible to apply the validation stages at the University of Copenhagen, due to legislative constraints.</p> <p>A broad strategy for recognition would spread the knowledge about the portfolio as a validation procedure among the target</p>	<p>Those implemented in the project.</p> <p>Mainly skills acquired with informal education.</p> <p>Those presented in this report, under the precondition of alterations in the legislative framework.</p> <p>According to the findings of the target group needs analysis, their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and Higher Education. Their preference for the level of the recognition process is unanimously in all four countries at the national level. The motives for continuing to study in higher education are to have personal satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a</p>	<p>Those implemented in the project.</p> <p>Mainly skills acquired with informal education.</p> <p>Those presented in this report, under the precondition of alterations that could be made when getting feedback from the process and the applicants themselves.</p> <p>According to the findings of the target group needs analysis, their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and Higher Education. Their preference for the level of the recognition process is unanimously in all four countries at the national level. The motives for continuing to study in higher educations are to have personal</p>	<p>The APELE project could extend the counselling service provided by the C.A.P. to the refugees to other disadvantaged groups of people. It could be a piloting exercise implemented by the C.A.P. and targeted to people who are interested in pursuing university studies.</p> <p>The team of the University of Bari and Armes Progetti have elaborated and presented a proposal to the University and the Municipality of Bari (culture and sport department) for further evaluating the needs of the geographically remote areas of Puglia and use the APELE Portfolio as a tool of self-assessment and guidance for the continuation of university studies of people with fewer opportunities.</p> <p>During the validation of the portfolio done with the President of C.A.P. Prof. F. Scardigno, it has been told about the possibility of experimenting (piloting) the APELE Portfolio at</p>

<p>group, in order to improve their preparation before applying to access Higher Education via the Quota 2 system in Denmark.</p>	<p>lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society, and improve social life. The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.</p>	<p>satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society, and improve social life. The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.</p>	<p>the University of Bari in the university courses and in the internal committees of the university for the recognition of 12 ECTS. APELE Portfolio could be a useful tool for the empowerment of the most fragile students. The portfolio lacks the hetero-assessment part. So an extra stage should be added to the portfolio about hetero-assessment before using it at the University of Bari.</p> <p>During the academic year 2022/23 the University of Bari will promote a pilot project for the use of the APELE Portfolio procedure. The APELE Portfolio will be used in some universities courses, to promote the awareness of competencies gained during formal and informal learning and the empowerment of vulnerable students enrolled in the first semester of the first year of university studies.</p>
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This Table is a clear demonstration of how constructively the pilot process has been implemented by the partner universities to validate the skills of people with fewer qualifications and support their access to higher education. In particular, the University of Copenhagen will continue to make use of the Quota 2 system for recognition of experiential learning. Although validation stages cannot be applied due to legislative constraints, abroad strategy for recognition would spread the knowledge about the portfolio and the validation procedure.

Also in Greece and Iceland, the pilot process could be the proper validation initiative to meet the needs of the target groups with fewer qualifications. This validation initiative would mainly address skills acquired with informal education and would take into account the motives of the target groups to study in higher education.

Finally, in Italy the counselling service provided by the C.A.P. to the refugees and to other disadvantaged groups of people could be extended and targeted to people who are interested in pursuing university studies. Moreover, the validation initiative could use the APELE Portfolio as a tool of self-assessment and guidance for the continuation of university studies of people with fewer opportunities. As mentioned in the Table, the Portfolio will be used in some universities' courses, to promote the awareness of competencies gained during formal and informal learning and the empowerment of vulnerable students.

## 16. Skills audits

Skills audits could be a useful tool for upskilling pathway of people with fewer opportunities.

**Table 33. Comparison of arrangements regarding skills audits**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
Yes, skills audits could be helpful to make potential candidates aware of their (informal) qualifications and competences.	Yes, it would be useful as participants would have the opportunity to self-assessment. With the guidance of a specialist, they may discover unconscious qualifications that they may have.	Yes, this can give the participant the opportunity to self-assess, see themselves in a different light and hopefully grow their confidence. With the guidance of a specialist, they may discover unconscious qualifications that they have.	The skills audit is a very useful tool in the counselling process. It enables the learners to take stock of themselves and their professional and educational situation. Especially for people with few opportunities, the skills audit could be an opportunity to review and value their professional and life experiences, focus on their knowledge and skills and identify an educational target for improving their professional career and life expectations.

As shown in the above Table, there is a unanimous attitude that skills audits can help potential candidates to be aware of their informal qualifications and have the opportunity to self-assessment. The skills audit could also offer the opportunity to people with fewer formal qualifications to review and value their professional and life experiences, focus on their knowledge and skills and identify an educational target for improving their professional career and life expectations.

## 17. Transparency tools

Appropriate transparency tools can help to better address the needs of the target group with fewer opportunities and specify the aspect of the learning experience they capture and the steps of the validation process.

**Table 34. Comparison of arrangements regarding transparency tools**

Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p>To ensure transparency, a validation procedure should ensure anonymity of the portfolios and a possibility to review and appeal the grounds of the final assessment.</p> <p>Evaluation and Ranking Committee, portfolio, written exams, anonymity, guidance pre-evaluation, and possibility of review and appeal of the final score/assessment post-evaluation.</p> <p>The Evaluation and Ranking Committee had an open discussion, and the assessment was based on unanimous vote. The portfolio evaluated were anonymized.</p>	<p>Tools that ensure validity and reliability.</p> <p>Ranking Committee, Evaluation Committee, Portfolio, written exams, personal details of participants was covered, two evaluators.</p> <p>Ranking committee and evaluation committee consisted of different persons.</p> <p>The test subjects were chosen the same day of the written exams after lottery. The personal data of the participants was covered. The score of the evaluators was covered.</p>	<p>Tools that ensure validity and reliability.</p> <p>Personal portfolio and an evaluation committee.</p> <p>The evaluation committee consists of experts in different factors of the evaluation process. They are experts on each of the three study programs, office director of School of Humanities and Social Sciences, representative from the Office of Student Counselling and the project manager of the APELE project. They will evaluate the applicants</p>	<p>It would be useful to have general guidelines valid at national level even if recognition has to be done locally. It would also be useful to have well-organized selection procedures with evaluators from the university departments.</p> <p>Transparency tools list:</p> <p><b>National guidelines:</b> they allow for a homogeneous and transparent methodology for both examinees and evaluators. The guidelines should also identify the selection criteria for evaluators, the committee that selects the evaluators and the evaluation/validation procedures.</p> <p><b>Register of evaluators</b> within each university. This tool ensures the selection of skilled and trained evaluators in the various specific areas.</p> <p><b>Register of results</b> to be included in the national educational system. The registry allows recognition of results at national level by setting up of a database for gathering the certificates obtained at the end of the validation process. Selection of evaluators among those ones included in the</p>

		<p>for admission based on an evaluation procedure that will be set into practice in the spring of 2022</p>	<p>evaluator registry. The selection process should follow the criteria defined in national guidelines. Candidate selection procedures defined in the national guidelines.</p> <p><b>Evaluation of the candidates</b> (4 steps) defined in the national guidelines with a final recognition (certificate) of the results valid at national level and included in the register of results.</p>
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A wide range of transparency tools are presented by the partner universities. They cover the validation procedure, the function of the Evaluation and Ranking Committee, the portfolio, the assessment methods based on written exams for the candidates, as well as on an open discussion unanimous assessment vote.

The portfolio and other personal data are anonymized and protected. Moreover, a homogeneous and transparent methodology needs to be adopted for both examinees and evaluators, while tools that ensure validity and reliability are preferred.

Finally, the existence of general guidelines valid at national level along with well-organized selection procedures and the evaluation of candidates defined in the national guidelines with a final recognition of the results valid at national level would further enhance transparency of recognition and validation processes.

### III. Conclusions: Strengths and weaknesses of prior learning recognition procedures

The pilot implemented by the partner universities, namely the University of Akureyri (Iceland), University of Patras (Greece), Università Degli Studi Di Bari Aldo Moro in cooperation with Armes Progetti (Italy), and University of Copenhagen (Denmark), aimed at specifying the methodology for recognition of prior learning taking into account the different legal frameworks and using portfolios as an evaluation tool, in order to enhance access to higher education for those having fewer formal qualifications. Based on the national reports, the partner universities came to the following conclusions.

In Denmark, the legal setting does not allow portfolios to give direct access to university studies. However, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee was able to evaluate and score the portfolios of people with fewer opportunities as if they were in person evaluations. Self-assessment

appears to be a useful tool, especially when assessing informal learning and interests that cannot be attested via diplomas or certificates. Considering though the difficulty for some participants to score themselves, it would be a good idea to put a system in place in order to support the students after they enter higher education<sup>86</sup>.

The pilot findings concluded that the portfolio should be accepted by the competent authorities to be employed along with the Quota 2 system. Moreover, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee can be oriented to this type of procedure for the evaluation of experiential prior learning as a base for entering university. Overall, the participation of the Evaluation and Ranking Committee in the Portfolio's activities and an additional test of skills could ensure accuracy and transparency<sup>87</sup>.

In Greece, due to legislation obstacles piloting focused on the evaluation phase where the model of graduate admission exams was adopted. A Ranking committee was responsible for the rank of candidates. An Evaluation committee evaluated and scored the manuscripts. A recognition according to NQF was done and a commemorative certificate was given to the participants. The completion of the pilot process led us to the need to adopt the necessary legal provisions in order to promote recognition procedures in Greece. Additional measures are required to inform competent bodies for the development of similar procedures, disseminate internal information and promote the recognition of prior learning, organise workshops of academics and researchers, and provide further information regarding EQF and NQF<sup>88</sup>.

In Iceland, the Act on Public Higher Education no.85/ 2008 gives the University of Akureyri ground to permit the piloting process of APELE project. It opens new possibilities for applicants that are without formal examination and want to apply to the three study programs that are available through this pilot. Those that do get admitted will have the same opportunities as any other student to finish the three-year bachelor's degree from any of the three study programs that they choose to enter at the University of Akureyri. It needs to be noted that although the University of Akureyri can admit students based on their prior learning the school cannot certify their prior learning as RPL has not been implemented on national level. The piloting project was approved by the faculty of the University of Akureyri for one year and will follow students from spring of 2022 to spring of 2023<sup>89</sup>.

In Italy, the Università Degli Studi Di Bari Aldo Moro and Armes proposed the APELE Portfolio to the attention of the experts of the C.A.P. of the University of Bari. The experts appreciated the APELE Portfolio as a tool for enhancing transparency of prior learning. The CAP experts believe that the APELE Portfolio could be a useful tool for developing the possibility of self-assessment,

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<sup>86</sup> Adamo, S. (2022). Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Adamo, S. (2022). Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Kasola, S. & Karalis, Th. (2022). Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Meckl, M. & Úlfarsdóttir, A. K. (2022).Ibid.

self-direction and empowerment in culturally fragile individuals. They also have pointed out the absence of a national regulation about the accrediting prior learning at Italian universities. The C.A.P of the University of Bari during the evaluation phase has suggested to add to the APELE Portfolio a section on hetero-evaluation. The addition of the hetero-evaluation phase is considered necessary for using the APELE Portfolio at the University of Bari as one of the tools for the certification of experiential skills<sup>90</sup>.

The comparative analysis of the methodological guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in the different settings of the partners allow us to conclude the following:

Concerning validation arrangements, the system in Denmark and Iceland provides the legal basis that allows universities to admit individuals with fewer qualifications. The key to validation arrangements is the evaluation of individuals' corresponding skills in accordance with university's qualification requirements or faculty criteria. On the other hand, Greece and Italy do not have in place the necessary legal regulations that could allow the recognition of prior learning for access to higher education. Yet, the pilot phase in Greece showed that internal procedures in universities can be commonly agreed, using NQF as the reference measure for the recognition of prior learning. Moreover, guidance and consulting services or existing public and institutional practices in Italy can encourage the recognition of prior learning even if they are not institutionalised validation practices.

In general, there are no specific validation strategies that could establish initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access higher education. Exception is made in the case of Denmark, where HEIs determine the criteria and use the quota 2 systems through which applicants can be admitted in higher education. Another exception can be found in Italy, where informal prior learning can be recognised by the Regions through specific procedures. Greece and Iceland do not have formal validation strategies except from an evaluation frame that could use respectively either NQF as a measure or specific criteria for admission to study programs.

The legal and administrative requirements for integrating a validation initiative into a prior learning recognition strategy are more clearly defined in the case of Denmark and Iceland. In both countries, universities have an autonomy to set their own rules and criteria for the evaluation, recognition and admission of the individuals who have the skills corresponding to the university requirements. In Greece and Italy, existing legal provisions define strictly the rules of access to higher education for those with formal qualifications. Therefore, specific legal requirements need to be promoted in order to institutionalize the existing pilot initiatives or practices of evaluation, validation and recognition of prior learning for those with fewer formal qualifications.

In Denmark, Greece and Iceland, the absence of legal provisions and formal validation strategies does not allow the promotion of validation arrangements and the definition of validation outputs.

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<sup>90</sup> Gallelli, R., Renna, P., Amari, M. & Laurelli, C. (2022). Ibid.

In Italy, formal and informal learning validation arrangements are provided at the regional level and allow individuals to take high school exams and, if successful, to enroll in higher education. However, validation arrangements at university level are limited to the recognition of course credits.

During the pilot process, not all stages of validation could be applied with the exception of Greece and Italy. Moreover, it was not possible for the majority of the partners to ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders at this stage of the pilot validation procedure. All partners agree that information, guidance and counselling should guide and assist the candidates in identifying, recording and self-evaluating their qualifications, in order to build a portfolio. However, there are no specific provisions for information on validation process due to deficiencies in the legislative framework and, thus, not incorporated into the validation process. Furthermore, specific references in the NQF for the validation of non-formal learning, as well as for the qualifications obtained through this type of validation are not presented in the case of Greece and Italy. Due to legislative framework restrictions, there are no specific procedures in the partner countries for setting and agreeing on common validation standards.

Overall, the APELE project has provided a clear demonstration of how constructively the pilot process has been implemented by the partner universities to validate the skills of people with fewer qualifications and support their access to higher education. In particular, the University of Copenhagen will continue to make use of the Quota 2 system for recognition of experiential learning. Although validation stages cannot be applied due to legislative constraints, a broad strategy for recognition would spread the knowledge about the portfolio and the validation procedure. Also in Greece, the pilot process could be the proper validation initiative to meet the needs of the target groups with fewer qualifications. This validation initiative would mainly address skills acquired with informal education and would take into account the motives of the target groups to study in higher education. In Italy, the counselling service provided by the C.A.P. to the refugees and to other disadvantaged groups of people could be extended and targeted to people who are interested in pursuing university studies. The validation initiative could use the APELE Portfolio as a tool of self-assessment and guidance for the continuation of university studies of people with fewer opportunities.

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## Annex I: Comparative table of methodological points for the recognition of prior learning in partner countries

Defining the steps	Guidelines in Denmark	Guidelines in Greece	Guidelines in Iceland	Guidelines in Italy
<p><b>1. Validation arrangements</b></p> <p>1.1. Are there validation arrangements for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in your country to recognise prior learning for admission to higher education (HE)?</p>	<p>Denmark has had a system for recognition of prior learning for entering Higher Education for a long time, the “Quota 2 system”. Potential candidates to Higher Education who do not meet the formal admission requirement can apply on the basis of their high school diploma and other experiential learning. The Quota 2 system is structured in three steps. Firstly, the candidates have to pass a test held at the University facilities. The test consists of a linguistic part and a mathematical-logical part, and it is the same for all candidates to all faculty study programmes. The test lasts two hours and consists of 60 - 70 tasks, each of which contains between one and nine questions. In total, the applicants have to answer around 200 questions. Secondly, the applicants must participate in a written interview, answering three essay questions specifically developed to meet the criteria for each faculty, which fall under five categories: study</p>	<p>Greece has not a system for recognition of prior learning for entering Higher education. legal agreements and arrangements need to be agreed in the national level as all universities are under public law. UPAT has no internal recognition system that’s why the APELE UPAT team came in common agreement with the administrative and academic structures and established an internal pilot procedure inside the university where NQF was the measure for the recognition system.</p>	<p>Iceland has the legal basis allowing universities to admit individuals who have skills corresponding to the university’s qualification requirements. However, certification of prior learning for admission to higher education is not implemented in Iceland.</p>	<p>In Italy, to date, at national level there is no defined and legally recognized procedure for the validation of prior learning that is implemented by the Universities. In practice, universities are not authorized to recognize prior learning in order to give access to Higher Education Studies. There are, however, centers such as the C.A.P. within the University of Bari that offer guidance and consulting services to encourage the recognition of prior learning, and the Italian University Network for Lifelong Learning (RUIAP) that intends to promote the development of lifelong learning in Italian universities as an active contribution to the knowledge society and they offer guidance and counseling services. Public and institutional practices for the recognition of competencies that exist in Italy are limited to a territorial level (regional or local) or are non-institutionalized validation practices.</p>

	<p>potential, professional competences, professional motivation, knowledge about Higher Education, and communication skills.</p> <p>Thirdly and finally, a local, faculty-based Quota 2 committee (consisting of a member of the tenured faculty, a member from the guidance team in administration, and a student representative) will evaluate and score the candidates as a whole. The final ranking assigning the study places is based on a general evaluation of 1) the result of the Quota 2 test, 2) the result of the written interview, and 3) the grade from the qualifying exam.</p>			
<p><b>2. Validation strategies</b></p> <p>2.1. Are there validation strategies, i.e., legal framework or policies that establish validation initiatives for the recognition of prior learning to access HE?</p>	<p>Yes. Please refer to the description in the Danish national report for IO1.</p>	<p>As there is no legal framework in Greece NQF was used.</p>	<p>There are no formal validation strategies in place nationally. In the piloting process an evaluation frame will be developed that is based on the framework used on third level and the skills necessary for admission to the three study programs.</p>	<p>2.1 In Italy there is no legal framework for the recognition of formal and informal prior learning to access Higher Education. Nowadays informal prior learning can be recognized by the Regions through special procedures. The Universities can recognize within each course of study, 12 course credits (European University Credits, ECTS)) to formal and informal prior learning. The recognition takes place through investigations carried out by</p>

				<p>specific commissions within each course of study. This kind of recognition is possible only for those people who have already a valid diploma to access higher education studies.</p> <p>The Law 28 June 2012 n.92 – or The Fornero Law - has stressed the issue of validation and certification of skills in the specific sector of Higher Education. For the first time in Italy, the Law n. 92 has stressed the need of a shared system of recognition and validation of skills<sup>91</sup>. Thanks to this law, 32 Italian universities have created a network ( Rete Universitaria Italiana per l' Apprendimento Permanente<sup>92</sup> - RUIAP) to initiate in the university settings the first initiatives of recognition, validation and certification of skills.</p>
<p><b>3. Pilot a validation initiative and integrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning</b></p>	<p>The University of Copenhagen is a public university under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science. As such, it was possible to conduct a piloting procedure for recognition of prior learning for accessing</p>	<p>The University of Patras, like all Greek universities, is a higher educational institution offering education at the university level under public law. That means that at the research level</p>	<p>The legal basis is present and not a barrier. Members of the Icelandic APELE team presented the piloting initiative at a faculty meeting where the piloting was given one year.</p>	<p>3.1 The University Aldo Moro of Bari provides through the C.A.P. a consultancy and counselling services that support the refugees in the certification and accreditation of skills acquired in prior formal and</p>

<sup>91</sup> Scardigno, A. F., Manuti, A., & Pastore, S. (2019). Migranti, rifugiati e università. *Prove tecniche di certifica*.

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.ruiap.it/> Last retrieved 20.01.2022

<p>3.1. If your university is piloting a validation initiative, what does it take to integrate into the strategy for recognition of prior learning?</p> <p>3.2. What are the legal and administrative requirements, i.e., law, ministerial decision, university decision to define the competent departments?</p>	<p>university under the scope of the research project APELE. However, a legal amendment to the Act on University would be necessary in order to adopt and implement such a validation procedure. Please refer to the Danish national report for IO1.</p>	<p>activities, such as piloting of recognition in prior learning for entering in higher education, can take place but the implementation of this procedure must be approved by the competent ministry and a relevant law must be passed to implement it.</p> <p>In Greece, there are national exams to access higher education. This is secured by ministerial decisions but also by common acceptance in the consciousness of the people</p>	<p>In Iceland, there is matriculation, examination or another examination at third level, but each university has its own rule of recognition and can admit a person that holds the same level of maturity, experience and knowledge required by the university.</p>	<p>informal learning. These are piloting procedures recognized as good practices for refugees and are not integrated within the University of Bari. For the integration of these procedures it is necessary to involve, in addition to the refugees, migrants and individuals who for various reasons, have interrupted their university studies and intend to resume them.</p> <p>3.2 See answer point 2</p>
<p><b>4. Validation outputs</b></p> <p>4.1. Do validation arrangements define validation outputs?</p> <p>4.2. If so, do they provide an award of full formal qualifications, of parts of qualifications in the form of credits, modules or exemptions, or non-formal qualifications?</p>	<p>As already mentioned, there are currently no provisions in the law that allow for validation arrangement and outputs.</p>	<p>As it is referred previously, in Greece the whole validation procedure is not supported by the legislative framework.</p>	<p>As is referred previously there are no formal validation strategies in place nationally on university level in Iceland.</p>	<p>4.1 The validation of formal and informal learning done at the regional level, and therefore outside the university, allows a person to take part in high school exams. Once the exams have been successfully passed and the person/student has obtained the diploma it is possible to be enrolled in Higher Education Studies (University). It is the Fornero Law, Article 4, that allows the recognition of training</p>

<p>4.3. If not, what validation outputs would be most appropriate for your university?</p>				<p>credits and the certification of learning however acquired<sup>93</sup>.                  4.2 Once a person/student has obtained the diploma and has completed the enrollment at the University, up to 12 course credits (ECTS) can be recognized for the selected university course.                  4.3 See answer at point 4.2</p>
<p><b>5. Four stages of validation</b>                  5.1. Do validation arrangements define or need to define all four stages of validation, i.e., identification, documentation assessment and certification?                  5.2. Do some stages of validation need to be more emphasised than others in certain areas?</p>	<p>During the pilot implementation, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee was able to define and perform two stages of validation, namely documentation and assessment.                   No.</p>	<p>At the pilot implementation, all four stages were implemented                   No.</p>	<p>Not all stages of validation can be taken at this time.                   Yes, this will become clearer in the process of the piloting.</p>	<p>5.1 According to the evaluation of the APELE Portfolio - made at the Centre for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.) of the University of Bari, the validation steps are fine.                   5.2 Also according to the evaluation made by the C.A.P. it would be necessary to add to the APELE Portfolio a phase of hetero evaluation.</p>
<p><b>6. Involvement of stakeholders</b></p>	<p>No. During the pilot implementation, only academics took part in the</p>	<p>No. The Graduate admission exams procedure can ensure that the most relevant expert of</p>	<p>Many relevant stakeholders are involved to ensure quality and trust of the procedure.</p>	<p>6.1 In Italy, currently, there are only good practices that have been implemented by universities</p>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2012;92~art4-com16>, Last retrieved 18.01.2022

<p>6.1. Is the involvement of all relevant stakeholders ensured in validation initiatives?</p> <p>6.2. Is there a need to involve different types of stakeholders in different validation functions?</p>	<p>activities of the Evaluation and Ranking Committee.</p> <p>Perhaps the Evaluation and Ranking Committee would benefit from having members of the administration who are student counsellors as well as stakeholders from industry where the students may work after the completion of their studies.</p>	<p>the field will be part of the ranking committee as well as part of the evaluation committee.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>Yes, again this will become clearer in the process of the piloting.</p>	<p>hosting Centers for Lifelong Learning, as the University of Bari Aldo Moro.</p> <p>In this case the stakeholders are involved but it is no a national legislative procedure.</p> <p>In Italy, only the Regions have intervened at the normative level on certification systems for professional training (for example: Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Lombardy, Umbria, Sardinia, Veneto, Lazio, Valle D'Aosta and Marche) and have produced experiences in the field of valorization of formal and informal learning but also in this case there is no national framework that coordinates the efforts made by the Regions</p> <p>6.2 The C.A.P. of the University of Bari involves the stakeholders in the implementation of the good practices for the validation of prior formal and informal learning.</p>
<p><b>7. Funding sources</b></p> <p>7.1. What funding sources are available or needed for validation?</p>	<p>As Danish universities are publicly funded, all funding sources should be made available via public resources.</p>	<p>Greek Universities are under public law, so all funding sources are coming from the state.</p>	<p>The University of Akureyri is under public law, so all funding sources comes from the state.</p>	<p>7.1 Universities would need additional state or private funding to be able to provide a service for validating prior formal and informal learning.</p>

<p><b>8. Accessibility to guidance and counselling</b></p> <p>8.1. Is guidance and counselling readily accessible in your university?</p> <p>8.2. Which department of the university is responsible for ensuring access to information, guidance and counselling?</p> <p>8.3. How regularly is information, guidance and advice provided at your university?</p>	<p>Yes, guidance and counselling are offered both through several webpages/e-guidance sites, and through dedicated offices. Please refer to the Danish national report for IO1 for a thorough description of the guidance and counselling offers available in Denmark.</p> <p>The University of Copenhagen provides information regarding access to its educational programmes via the Guidance and Admissions Office ("<i>Optagelse</i>" and "<i>KU studentercenter</i>").</p> <p>The University of Copenhagen provides information, guidance, and advice on a continuous basis throughout the year.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>UPAT provides information through the Department of Employment, Career, and Liaison.</p> <p>Each student can contact the CAIS office and meet an expert after the appointment.</p>	<p>Regarding RPL at university level, no, but on other matters yes.</p> <p>The Faculty of Social Sciences, the office of School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the office of Student Counselling at the university will offer guidance and counselling to students in the validation process.</p> <p>In the piloting timeframe applicants can also seek help from the pilot contacts for assistant in the admission process. Students can always contact the Office of Student Counselling for a meeting or advice, in person or online.</p>	<p>8.1. The University of Bari Aldo Moro, in addition to the Center for Lifelong Learning, hosts an Operational Unit for Study Orientation, which depends on the Directorate for Research, Third Mission and Internationalization. This Operational Unit is responsible for incoming and ongoing orientation procedures.</p> <p>8.2. See answer 8.1</p> <p>8.3. Both the C.A.P and the Operational Unit for Study are open every day except Saturdays and public holidays.</p>
<p><b>9. Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and validation procedures</b></p> <p>9.1. What should be the aim and content of information,</p>	<p>The aim of information, guidance and counselling should be to assist the candidates in efficiently recording their qualifications, in order to be able to create a portfolio.</p> <p>The candidates would need guidance in assessing a suitable path for recognition of their prior learning, and a suitable study</p>	<p>An expert/supervisor is needed to record the qualifications of the candidate and build together a portfolio.</p>	<p>The aim should be to assist the applicant to record and build their portfolio in the best way possible.</p> <p>It will be incorporated into the piloting validation process and is very important so that the applicant can be guided in the proper path for recognition.</p>	<p>9.1 The counselling services offered by the University of Bari to the students should guide the potential students to identify competences and promote a self assessment and auto evaluation of their potencialities to pursue an education path. The C.A.P. implements a three-phase counseling process that represents the operational model of the center.</p>

<p>guidance and counselling?</p> <p>9.2. To what extent is information, guidance and counselling incorporated into the validation process?</p> <p>9.3. Are there specific provisions on how to provide information, guidance and advice on the validation process, opportunities and benefits to candidates?</p> <p>9.4. Who is providing information, guidance and counselling to applicants for validation at your university?</p>	<p>programme that matches their competences.</p> <p>Currently, there are no specific provisions on information regarding this particular type of validation.</p> <p>Please refer to answer above at 9.3 (for general guidance, see answer at 8).</p>	<p>The candid needs to be guided in the proper path for recognition.</p> <p>At the moment there are no such provisions due to the legislative framework.</p> <p>Please see previous answers regarding the legislative framework. In case the whole procedure for entrance in the higher education institutions will be changed, UPAT has the appropriate services and facilities to provide information to potential applicants</p>	<p>At the moment there are no such provisions at university level as it has not been implemented at that level.</p> <p>The RPL has not been implemented at national level in Iceland. In the piloting process regarding information, guidance, and counselling for validation at the University of Akureyri please see points 8.2 and 8.3.</p>	<p>The three phases are: 1. Prediagnostic phase; 2. Diagnostic phase; 3. Conclusive phase. At the end of the path, the C.A.P. releases a summary document that certifies the participation in the assessment process and related outputs.<sup>94</sup></p> <p>9.2 The information, guidance, counselling and soft skills assessment offered by the C.A.P. are not incorporated into the validation process but they are useful in orienting users towards lifelong learning paths and/or validation by the Apulia Region.<sup>95</sup></p> <p>9.3 The C.A.P. implements an operational model developed by the center itself.</p> <p>9.4 The Center for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.) of the University of Bari.</p>
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<sup>94</sup> Scardigno, A. F., Manuti, A., & Pastore, S. (2019). Migranti, rifugiati e università. *Prove tecniche di certifica*. Pag.73-77

<sup>95</sup> Idem Pag. 73

<p><b>10. Links of validation arrangements with NQF</b></p> <p>10.1. How and to extent, the NQF in your country provides reference for validation of non-formal learning?</p> <p>10.2. Which qualifications in the NQF can be obtained through validation of non-formal learning?</p> <p>10.3. Are links of validations arrangements with NQF sufficiently clear?</p> <p>10.4. If not, what you should be done to ensure the links of validation with NQF?</p>	<p>The Danish Qualification Framework/NQF provides reference for validation as regards the description of the levels of competences, which can give access to different types of educational programmes.</p> <p>Qualifications in the NQF can give validation of non-formal learning an official recognition to access Higher Education.</p> <p>The scoring of candidates can be adapted to the various levels in the NQF. The Evaluation and Ranking Committee used a scale of 1-10 and linked it to the levels used in the Danish NQF.</p>	<p>There is no such reference.</p> <p>Please see the answer to 10.1.</p> <p>Please see the answer to 10.1.</p> <p>An intervention in the legislative framework is needed.</p>	<p>There is no such reference.</p> <p>Please see the answer to 10.1.</p> <p>Please see the answer to 10.1.</p> <p>Needs to be implemented at national level for the public HEIs before links of validation with NQF can be established.</p>	<p>10.1 The Italian education and training system is fragmented: there is multilevel governance, with both national and regional authorities involved in designing and awarding qualifications.</p> <p>Italy's national qualifications framework (NQF) was adopted in January 2018. The Italian NQF has eight levels and its level descriptors are knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility. The development of the NQF responds, among others, to a need of integrating the different qualifications systems; improving the legibility, transparency and comparability of qualifications of the national and regional systems; and aiding geographic and professional mobility at national and European levels.<sup>96</sup></p> <p>10.2 Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications through the procedures implemented by the Regions.</p> <p>10.3 No</p> <p>10.4 Simplification of the Italian legislative system and merging of</p>
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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/italy-national-qualifications-framework-finalised> Last retrieved 20.01.2022

				the skills' validation bodies into a single structure.
<p><b>11. Compliance of validated qualifications with agreed standards</b></p> <p>11.1. Is the validation process based on uniform, predefined and commonly agreed standards?</p> <p>11.2. Is the validation process based on the standards set in educational curricula and/or occupational profiles?</p> <p>11.3. Is there a specific procedure for setting and agreeing validation standards at your university?</p>	<p>During the pilot implementation, the validation process was based on uniform, predefined and jointly agreed standards among the Evaluation and Ranking Committee members.</p> <p>During the pilot implementation, the Evaluation and Ranking Committee was focused on assessing the candidates both as regards requirements for educational curricula and for occupational profiles after completed studies.</p> <p>No. This is due to the fact of validation standards not being included in the legislation for access to university.</p>	<p>At the pilot implementation presented here, yes.</p> <p>In the case of pilot implementation, special attention was put into the alignment with this issue.</p> <p>No at the moment, due to the legislative framework restrictions.</p>	<p>Yes, in regards of to the pilot implementation.</p> <p>Yes, in the case of pilot implementation, special attention was put into the alignment with this issue.</p> <p>Not at the moment, but in this piloting process the group has taken into account such procedures that have been developed at third level.</p>	<p>11.1 No, the validation process does not have predefined standards. In addition to the European and national standards, it is necessary to deal with the Regional Standards for the Description, Training, Recognition and Certification of Competencies (RQSP) developed by each Italian Region.</p> <p>11.2 No, see answer 11.1</p> <p>11.3 Italian universities offer a guidance and counselling service that is different from university to university. Therefore, there is no uniform/national validation procedure. The University of Bari through the CAP implements specific methodology described in point 9.1.</p>
<p><b>12. Professional competences of validation practitioners</b></p> <p>12.1. What are or should be the profile,</p>	<p>Validation practitioners should be able to evaluate the competences broadly and be able to see a possible match between a candidate's skills</p>	<p>Validation practitioners must have the skills and the ability beyond the type of evaluation to check and objectively judge the knowledge, abilities, and skills of</p>	<p>Validation practitioners must have the skills and ability to assess and objectively judge the knowledge, abilities, and</p>	<p>12.1 The assessment and validation process should involve experts with strong empathic and listening skills. More, these experts should have extensive and proven</p>

<p>qualifications and professional competences of validation practitioners?</p> <p>12.2. Are there specific requirements for the participation of academics, experts or other members of the university in validation procedures?</p> <p>12.3. Are there any provisions, possibilities or forms of entitlement to professional training for validation practitioners?</p>	<p>and the requirement for the Higher Education applied.</p> <p>Academics and other experts should be familiar with criteria for admission to university that are not based on formal recognition, e.g. in Denmark the Quota 2 system and the principles it is based upon.</p> <p>Not at the present moment.</p>	<p>the examinee. That's why they have to be familiar with the subject but also to have the ability to recognize the general qualifications.</p> <p>Has to be familiar with adult education principals as the candidates have a specific characteristic.</p> <p>Academics have the proper characteristic for validation practitioners as they have experience in their field and additional experience in a different type of validation.</p>	<p>skills of the examinee. That's why they must be familiar with the subject but also to have the ability to recognize the general qualifications.</p> <p>Have knowledge on validation procedures. Be an expert in the field that is applied for. Be familiar with adult education and the needs and specific characteristics of the validation's candidates' group.</p> <p>The evaluation committee of the piloting process is academics and experts that have the proper characteristic for validation practitioners as they have experience in their field and additional experience in a different type of validation.</p>	<p>experience (at least ten years of experience) in the field of the competencies to be certified and have knowledge and expertise in the assessment and validation methods.</p> <p>12.2 In Italy there are no specific requirements because there is no legal basis for activating validation procedures within universities.</p> <p>12.3 In Italy there are specific courses for the evaluation and certification of competences that enable individuals be included into the regional list of experts. These courses do not train experts for validating academic experiences.</p>
<p><b>13. Transparent quality assurance measures</b></p> <p>13.1. Has your university established its own quality assurance procedure on validation?</p>	<p>Currently there is no specific method for validation and therefore no quality assurance procedure. As regards the Quota 2 system, the quality assurance is multi-levelled and includes the review of the work of the Faculty-based Quota-2</p>	<p>There is no specific method for validation that's why UPAT was used on piloting the model of graduate admission exams.</p>	<p>No, it has not, there for this piloting project is a perfect opportunity for the university to develop on.</p>	<p>13.1 In Italy there is no such procedure because validation by universities is not possible, however the CAP of the University of Bari has obtained important international</p>

<p>13.2. Can the existing quality assurance framework be applied to validation?</p> <p>13.3. Do you think that specific quality assurance settings would be more appropriate to validate prior learning?</p>	<p>committee by the Guidance and Admission Office.</p> <p>If validation was to be introduced, another level of quality assurance should be put in place, and/or agreed with the Guidance and Admissions Office at the University of Copenhagen.</p> <p>A second-level quality assurance setting should assess and confirm the Committee's work on validation of prior learning.</p>	<p>Yes, it can.</p> <p>Of course, an additional setting for quality assurance can be adopted.</p>	<p>No, but hopefully there will be after this piloting project.</p> <p>Yes, an additional setting for quality assurance can be adopted.</p>	<p>recognition of its quality assurance procedure for validation of prior learning.<sup>97</sup></p> <p>13.2 See answer 13.1</p> <p>13.3 In case Italy would adopt a law, allowing universities to organize and implement this procedure, it would be mandatory for this procedure to be transparent, certified and take into consideration the European legislation in this matter.</p>
<p><b>14. Synergies between validation and credit systems</b></p> <p>14.1. How can your university establish synergies between validation and credit systems?</p>	<p>A correspondence between validation and the levels described in the NQF, as adopted in the present piloting, could be an example of synergy.</p>	<p>An idea is to use NQF with the existing credit system ECTS.</p>	<p>This will be the next step if or when admission has been made possible.</p>	<p>14.1 This is not a problem that can be solved by a single university. It would be required an educational system for Higher Education Studies where the method of calculating credits would be common at a national and also European or international level. This system would allow the adoption of a common system for</p>

<sup>97</sup> (<https://www.uniba.it/centri/cap/notizie/il-c.a.p.-di-uniba-riceve-a-barcellona-il-vince-validation-award-2019>)

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				the recognition of credits and also a common validation system among different countries.
<p><b>15. Use of validation by groups with fewer opportunities</b></p> <p>15.1. What validation initiatives will you design at your university based on the needs analysis of the target groups related to the recognition process?</p> <p>15.2. What type of skills and which target groups will you address with the envisaged validation initiative?</p> <p>15.3. What are the validation stages and procedures you intend to apply at your university?</p> <p>15.4. How do you plan to scale-up this</p>	<p>The University of Copenhagen will mainly continue to make use of the Quota 2 system for recognition of experiential learning.</p> <p>The Quota 2 system evaluates and includes all informal skills and competences that are currently not encompassed by traditional study programmes. The target group within the group of people with fewer opportunities could be migrants and refugees who want to pursue Higher Education in Denmark.</p> <p>Currently it is not possible to apply the validation stages at the University of Copenhagen, due to legislative constraints.</p> <p>A broad strategy for recognition would spread the knowledge about the portfolio as a validation procedure among the target group, in order to improve their preparation before applying to access Higher</p>	<p>Those implemented in the project.</p> <p>Mainly skills acquired with informal education.</p> <p>Those presented in this report, under the precondition of alterations in the legislative framework</p> <p>According to the findings of the target group needs analysis, their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and Higher Education. Their preference for the level of the recognition process is unanimously in all four countries at the national level.</p>	<p>Those implemented in the project.</p> <p>Mainly skills acquired with informal education.</p> <p>Those presented in this report, under the precondition of alterations that could be made when getting feedback from the process and the applicants themselves.</p> <p>According to the findings of the target group needs analysis, their educational level explains to a certain degree the high motivation percentage for pursuing APEL and Higher Education. Their preference for</p>	<p>15.1 The APELE project could extend the counselling service provided by the C.A.P. to the refugees to other disadvantaged groups of people. It could be a piloting exercise implemented by the C.A.P. and targeted to people who are interested in pursuing university studies.</p> <p>15.2 The team of the University of Bari and Arnes Progetti have elaborated and presented a proposal to the University and the Municipality of Bari (culture and sport department) for further evaluating the needs of the geographically remote areas of Puglia and use the APELE Portfolio as a tool of self-assessment and guidance for the continuation of university studies of people with fewer opportunities.</p> <p>15.3 During the validation of the portfolio done with the President of</p>

<p>validation initiative and ingrate it into the strategy for recognition of prior learning for people with fewer opportunities?</p>	<p>Education via the Quota 2 system in Denmark.</p>	<p>The motives for continuing to study in higher educations are to have personal satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society, and improve social life. The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.</p>	<p>the level of the recognition process is unanimously in all four countries at the national level. The motives for continuing to study in higher educations are to have personal satisfaction and gain knowledge on the subject and, to a lesser extent, to get a degree, be accepted in the local society, and improve social life. The comparative report concludes that, although it is a group of people with fewer opportunities, from very different backgrounds, facing different difficulties and barriers, they are motivated and ready to change their future based on entering higher education.</p>	<p>C.A.P. Prof. F. Scardigno, it has been told about the possibility of experimenting (piloting) the APELE Portfolio at the University of Bari in the university courses and in the internal committees of the university for the recognition of 12 ECTS. APELE Portfolio could be a useful tool for the empowerment of the most fragile students. The portfolio lacks the hetero-assessment part. So an extra stage should be added to the portfolio about hetero-assessment before using it at the University of Bari.</p> <p>15.4 During the academic year 2022/23 the University of Bari will promote a pilot project for the use of the APELE Portfolio procedure. The APELE Portfolio will be used in some univerities courses, to promote the awarness of competencies gained during formal and informal learning and the empowerment of vulnerable students enrolled in the first semester of the first year of university studies.</p>
<p><b>16. Skills audits</b> 16.1. Do you think that skills audits could be</p>	<p>Yes, skills audits could be helpful to make potential candidates aware of</p>	<p>Yes, it would be useful as participants would have the opportunity to self-assessment.</p>		<p>16.1 The skills audit is a very useful tool in the counselling process. It enables the learners to</p>

<p>a useful tool for upskilling pathway of people with fewer opportunities?</p>	<p>their (informal) qualifications and competences.</p>	<p>With the guidance of a specialist, they may discover unconscious qualifications that they may have.</p>	<p>Yes, this can give the participant the opportunity to self-assess, see themselves in a different light and hopefully grow their confidence. With the guidance of a specialist, they may discover unconscious qualifications that they have.</p>	<p>take stock of themselves and their professional and educational situation. Especially for people with few opportunities, the skills audit could be an opportunity to review and value their professional and life experiences, focus on their knowledge and skills and identify an educational target for improving their professional career and life expectations.</p>
<p><b>17. Transparency tools</b>                  17.1. Which transparency tools do you think would be more appropriate to address the needs of the target group with fewer opportunities?                   17.2. Could you prepare your own list of transparency tools indicating which aspect of the learning experience they capture?                   17.3. Could you specify the steps of the validation process based on the</p>	<p>To ensure transparency, a validation procedure should ensure anonymity of the portfolios and a possibility to review and appeal the grounds of the final assessment.</p> <p>Evaluation and Ranking Committee, portfolio, written exams, anonymity, guidance pre-evaluation, and possibility of review and appeal of the final score/assessment post-evaluation.</p> <p>The Evaluation and Ranking Committee had an open discussion, and the assessment was based on unanimous vote. The portfolio evaluated were anonymized.</p>	<p>Tools that ensure validity and reliability.</p> <p>Ranking Committee, Evaluation Committee, Portfolio, written exams, personal details of participants was covered, two evaluators. Ranking committee and evaluation committee consisted of different persons. The test subjects were chosen the same day of the written exams after lottery. The personal data of the participants was covered. The score of the evaluators was covered.</p>	<p>Tools that ensure validity and reliability.</p> <p>Personal portfolio and an evaluation committee.</p> <p>The evaluation committee consists of experts in different factors of the evaluation process. They are experts on each of the three study programs, office director of</p>	<p>17.1 It would be useful to have general guidelines valid at national level even if recognition has to be done locally. It would also be useful to have well-organized selection procedures with evaluators from the university departments.</p> <p>17.2 Transparency tools list:  <b>National guidelines:</b> they allow for a homogeneous and transparent methodology for both examinees and evaluators. The guidelines should also identify the selection criteria for evaluators, the committee that selects the evaluators and the evaluation/validation procedures.  <b>Register of evaluators</b> within each university. This tool ensures the selection of skilled and trained</p>

<p>transparency tools you have chosen?</p>			<p>School of Humanities and Social Sciences, representative from the Office of Student Counselling and the project manager of the APELE project. They will evaluate the applicants for admission based on an evaluation procedure that will be set into practice in the spring of 2022.</p>	<p>evaluators in the various specific areas.  <b>Register of results</b> to be included in the national educational system. The registry allows recognition of results at national level by setting up of a database for gathering the certificates obtained at the end of the validation process.  17.3 Selection of evaluators among those ones included in the evaluator registry. The selection process should follow the criteria defined in national guidelines.  Candidate selection procedures defined in the national guidelines.  <b>Evaluation of the candidates</b> (4 steps) defined in the national guidelines with a final recognition (certificate) of the results valid at national level and included in the register of results.</p>
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