

**+ APL: More flexible VET systems
based on the assessment of prior learning**



**GUIDELINES ON RVCC METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS AS AN APL
INNOVATIVE MODEL**



Project number: 2012-1-PL1-LEO05-27424

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following document is based on the results of the work package 3 of +APL project, named “Implementation: RVCC piloting and guidelines”. Specific aims of this work package were, testing and evaluating RVCC methodology and tools in each partner country (Poland, Italy, Bulgaria, Germany and Spain) through a pilot session, and developing a guideline to boost the transferability to other European countries of RVCC methodology and tools as an APL innovative model. To succeed in this work package each partner country has accomplished a national pilot session with VET teachers/trainers/guidance professionals and has compiled a national pilot feedback and evaluation report. The national reports led to the development of a common guideline based on national piloting experiences with the aim of boosting the transferability to other European countries of RVCC methodology and tools as an APL innovative model for future APL professionals.

From national pilot evaluation reports have come relevant recommendations and indications as considerations about the methodology to build and train the future APL Staff, the interaction between various organizations involved and stakeholders, the organization of the whole APL process (human resources, financial issues, centralized/decentralized etc.), the reception and comprehension of the tools by people working in the field and, finally, the possibilities of implementation at local, regional or national level. Other key items that have been integrated in this document concerned the relevance of the methodology in national contexts, the comprehension of the process by operators, the effectiveness and innovation of the process, the profile of professionals to be involved in the APL staff, professions or groups that better fit (immigrants, unemployed, youngsters) the RVCC methodology and proposals for the improvement of the process.

2. PILOT WORKSHOPS PREMISES



In **Bulgaria**, as the recognition, validation and certification of competences is not a well-known process, the historical development and best practices at European level were



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presented to the participants. Special attention was given to the Portuguese approach and results from the implementation of the RVCC process at national level. The participants had the opportunity to explore each of the six main stages of the process through different schemes describing the purpose, the actors and duration of each stage. The different tools and products contained in the RVCC handbook were presented to all the VET professionals taken part in the national pilot. In the National pilot workshop in Bulgaria took part **18 participants**. All of them were chosen because of their expertise in the field of vocational education and training. Most of the participants were representatives of vocational high schools from different regions around Bulgaria. This decision was taken in order to get more complex overview about the existing information for the RVCC process in different parts of the country.



Regarding the situation in **Spain** is important to highlight that the Region of Andalusia is now implementing the process to accredit the professional experience of 7100 people in different fields. The call for persons who want be accredited ended last 25th September and they have trained the evaluators and advisors that will follow the process. For this reason it was the right moment to present the Portuguese APL system and the eventual transfer of innovation in Andalusia. Currently Andalusia has implemented the training of APL evaluators and advisers last August, has published the list of those professionals that may act as evaluators and advisers and is implementing the process to accredit competences. The option of the Spanish team was informing directly the policy and decision makers in Seville (regional Ministry of Education) who were in charge of the current APL system in Andalusia which is being implemented. In the National pilot workshop in Spain took part **12 participants**, which were experts from the Chamber of Commerce, consultants and representative of the andalusian institutions.



The **German** system is very much related to formal qualifications. Formal learning is highly appreciated by the system. For informal and non-formal learning, only the first approaches have come up during the last years. This means that there is a big variety of formal qualifications that do not exist in other countries. Basically, the German vocational system



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offers the “Externenprüfung”, the external examination of knowledge and skills for all professions that normally require about 3 years of vocational training. It has to be proved that a person worked in this profession 1.5 times the time of the regular vocational training time (in this case 4.5 years). It is recommended to attend a preparatory course and then the theoretical and practical part of the vocational exam can be passed. New approaches even start to certify parts of single vocational training/apprenticeships. During the recent years it became apparent that these “part-certificates” could help persons, e.g. if done during a period in prison, to integrate more easily in the labour market. These approaches follow basically a strategy that is quite similar to the +APL one. This means on one side that the topic is highly actual for the German labour market, and on the other side that the +APL process can be a good methodology to the guidance on learning opportunities in Germany although for the certification of skills there are even possibilities to obtain the official formal certificates of German authorities.

In the pilot workshop took part **16 participants** who had a very wide and often longtime experience in the field of working with vulnerable groups with a lack of formal qualifications. Therefore, the focus was put on the open discussion in order to collect feedback to the +APL methodology and tools from German experts in the field.



In **Poland**, the meeting was organised in the form of training and the **number of its participants was 36** which were career development professionals, vocational school teachers and vocational school headmasters. All participants familiarised themselves with the material in order to raise their awareness in the subject area of validation of non-formal and informal learning in vocational education and training systems. Topics taken up were the advantages and disadvantages of implementing the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning in vocational education and training systems and the problems that one may encounter when implementing the process. The participants got acquainted with a set of tools used in the process by Portuguese career development professionals. After the comprehensive presentations, an individual and group works, concerning the tools used by the Portuguese



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career development professionals, were carried out. In a second time, some of the participants (13 of them) have also been invited to a roundtable discussion in order to discuss in depth some significant topics such as the recognition of informal and non-formal competences, validation and certification of competences.



The **Italian** pilot workshops were aimed at informing, debating and evaluating the RVCC methodology and tools in order to compare the Italian system with the Portuguese one. Another aim was to adopt, if possible, some components of the last one to improve the national system concerning the recognition of competencies topic. The intention was to build a gradual awareness of the methodology and, in a later stage, finding a way to apply this method in Italy. This led to the decision of organizing a first informative debate in which a large public was involved. This session was aimed at having a first contact with experts, researchers, VET centres, institutions and common people in order to introduce them to the APL project and RVCC methodology and to identify the most appropriate subjects to work with in the following stages. The last two stages of the pilot were aimed at analysing the tools provided together with the RVCC methodology and studying the possibilities of include some of the RVCC process components into the Italian local systems. In the National pilot workshop in Italy took part **12 participants** in active debate and 40 people took part in the first informative session.

The main motivation for participating was linked to the possibility of making the local recognition of competencies systems more effective and “smarter”. In this perspective the comparison and integration of some components of the local Italian systems with other processes that seem to work in a more efficient way has been considered the best way to speed up their implementation.



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3. RESULTS AND FEEDBACKS



In **Bulgaria** the results of the analysis revealed that before the pilot workshop biggest part of the participants did not know about the RVCC process in Portugal. However some of them had a good knowledge on the process of validation of competence as an EU objective in the field of Lifelong learning. The initial expectations for getting familiar with the definition, phases and tools used in the RVCC process of all the participants were met at the end of the workshop. According to the questionnaires provided we can conclude that the selection of the topics covered during the workshop was relevant to the national context and the trainers possess sufficient level of knowledge about them. During the national pilot held in Bulgaria several main benefits were achieved: the participants got a clear idea about the RVCC process, its definition, historical development, main benefits and implementation at an European level and showed their willingness to disseminate the received theoretical materials and examples for practical exercises about the RVCC process among other VET professionals. Some valuable comments and recommendations about the implementation of the RVCC process in Bulgaria were received. Most active were the representatives of National working groups for the development of National System for Validation of Competences.

Some of the VET professionals share their opinion that the best form of CV that the future candidates for validation and certification of competences should use in their portfolio is EUROPASS as this format would be most convenient if the candidates want to use the same portfolio in countries different from Bulgaria. Some of the participants in the workshop also mentioned that linking the future RVCC process in Bulgaria with the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) will enhance the geographical mobility in the vocational education and training by increasing both the numbers and the duration of mobility exchanges. Combining the RVCC process with other European instruments will have as result improvements in recognition of competences and building mutual trust in the VET community.



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Regarding the **Spanish** pilot it is relevant to say that the expectations of the participants seem to be met; the motivation to take part in the session was high as Andalusia is in the middle of the accreditation process, as said before, and is willing to look at successful initiatives that could enrich their process; the participants showed a great interest in the data from Portugal (how many centres available, how many professionals, for how long has the process been implemented, total number of certifications, etc.) which were duly addressed; the participants assured that with this information they would present a proposal to the decision makers to facilitate the transferability of the model (whether total or in part). All the experts have also agreed that the process is linked to Europass (i.e. the CV of the “willing to be accredited” needs to be presented in Europass format) and to ECVET.

The overall methodology in Spain is national: regions do publish their calls to both accredit the people and train their professionals. It doesn't seem to be possible to implement the system at local level, only at national (general directions, legislation, tools and even general training) and regional level (real implementation of the accreditation process). Concerning the comprehension of the operators, regional operators know well the process. It is just the general public or even the companies who seem not to understand well the concept (competencies in Spain have been in the system for over 20 years but culturally are not well understood yet). Finally, the type of professionals to be involved in the APL project target groups are those mentioned at national level: evaluators and advisors.



Taking into account the **German** pilot session, it can be stated that the +APL tools as they are freely available at least during the project lifetime have advantage towards established methodologies, such as KODE® or ProfilPass for career guidance and learning opportunities. For certification and examination of prior learning experiences, it is recommended to follow the formal paths of certification wherever possible. Other well-known European tools, such as Europass, could also contribute to the +APL process. During the pilot sessions, it turned out that for career guidance the translated RVCC tools could be used.



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However, minor adaptations have had to be made such as replacing the special expressions related to the Portuguese system (STU, CU, etc.) with appropriate German expressions.

The +APL process for the German context will have migrants as one of the target groups as many of them will lack of formal qualifications. In other cases, the +APL methodology could be part of a career guidance process in order to recognize and assess prior learning experiences. In Germany, there are not for all professional careers formal and certified qualifications. In particular, for these professional fields which +APL provides a suitable methodology for the assessment of prior learning.



In **Poland**, career development professionals, vocational school teachers and vocational school headmasters are trying to apply and associate the methodology with creation of the clients' Individual Action Plan IAP (Indywidualny Plan Działania IPD). In Poland, it is a practice widely used in employment and psychological counselling offices.

The seminar included a discussion concerning the Portuguese experience and possibilities of using it in the Polish reality, in particular, how to implement the recognition of informal and non-formal learnings in Poland, how to assign a collection of competences to a particular profession and how to organise the work of the appropriate institutions in the process of competence certification resulting from work experience.

Most of the participants considered the methodology proposed appropriate for the Polish labour market. However, the general opinion was that it should be combined with the IAP methodology and other local tools should be included, in order to contribute to the faster and easier implementation of the project's objectives in Poland. IAP makes it easier for the unemployed to create Individual Action Plans and their subsequent implementation. This method in a new, revised version, is the result of the experience of counsellors from 49 Polish employment offices who, by means of counselling process, helped more than 7500 unemployed to create Individual Action Plans which allowed them to find jobs.



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Concerning the **Italian** pilot experience, the active cooperation with the subjects involved points out the concrete possibility of a follow up to the pilot. Some of the people involved (the representative of the Siena Province, responsible for the coordination of the employment centres and the Ente Senese Scuola Edile VET centre) revealed a concrete interest in experimenting some of the adapted RVCC tools and in knowing more about the sustainability of the Portuguese system. The methodology to build the APL future staff should be developed by Regional Authorities as they are in charge of the professional training and awarding of qualifications. Some Regions, as emerged, are working in this direction and are designing specific professional profiles that will be dedicated to support the recognition of competencies process. The interaction between various organizations is well considered by all of the participants, but it should be underlined the possible criticality that may represent the identity (private/public) of the agency that supplies the training. There is a concrete possibility to implement the methodology at local and regional level. The workshop sessions have highlighted a huge interest of the operators and local institutions in the process.



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4. CRITICALITIES



Regarding the implementation of the validation and certification of competences in **Bulgaria** some questions were raised. Most of them were addressed to the financing of the activities foreseen in the RVCC process. As at the time, the current legislation in Bulgaria there is not statutory definition for the process of validation of competences in the vocational education and the financing possibilities. Some of the participants wondered how the different activities described in the handbook will be funded. Furthermore, some of the participants noted that in accordance with the current requirements of Bulgarian legislation documents of recognition of professional qualifications may be issued only in relation to professions, for which state educational requirements have been adopted.



In **Spain** the participants request further information on what is the cost (not only material) of the RVCC process implementation in Portugal, also in terms of staff working and hours devoted to the process and what are the specific profiles and training that the actors of the process in Portugal have received.

Ultimately the main critical aspect mentioned by the participants was the lack of funding, even in terms of availability of human resources in the centres to reach the coverage in Portugal.



Concerning the **German** experience, the aspect which was most negative was one comment that, “there is a need of modifying the tools to make them more adequate for the German education market”. The result of the German piloting sessions is positive apart from the above mentioned restrictions that are given by the German system, legal regulations or common practice in the country.



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In **Italy** considering in particular the last session, it emerged that the most critical aspect, as mentioned before, is the sustainability of the whole process. Financial issues should be clarified: the opportunity of public/private cooperation is considered possible, but it needs to be defined in detail to understand the limits of this cooperation. The process must be decentralized as the Italian VET system is delegated to Regions as explained above. Another critical factor in this path is to make the public aware of the possibilities of the recognition and validation of their own informal and non-formal experiences. Another issue is that the competencies are defined at wideband and without the support of an expert from the specific job sector. Regarding the sustainability of the process, it has been considered the possibility of a public/private integrated system with the aim to distribute the costs among different subjects. One of the experts involved in the final workshop observes finally that passing through so many stages and so many actors in the RVCC process is on one side a guarantee of the quality and transparency of the process. However, on the other side, it may cause also some difficulties in the candidate as s/he has to face to many situations that he may not understand completely and, so, feel uncomfortable in the middle of the process.



Concerning the pilot experience in **Poland** no relevant criticalities have been pointed out. The only suggestion for achieving a better implementation of the system in Poland was to combine it with already existing tools as the Individual Action Plan.



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5. SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflection of the idea of validation of knowledge, skills and competences, acquired through informal and non-formal learning in the national strategies in the field of professional and vocation education and training.• Existence of previous initiatives (National and EU funded) related to the topic of assessments and certification of prior learning.• Opportunities for validation of the qualifications of persons trained outside the formal system of vocational education and training.• +APL with the RVCC process provides a thorough methodology to the context of assessment of prior learning.• +APL methodology can be used in career guidance for different	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Currently the applicable forms of identification and recognition of non-formal and informal learning are not legally defined.• The opportunities for validation of the qualifications of persons trained outside the formal system of vocational education and training are related to a minimum of work experience in the profession.• Current lack of financial resources due to the economic recession.• Lack of understanding of the process (or even what a competence is) from many of the sectors involved.• There's no centrality of the subject in the policies of employment and training.• Difficulties inherent in the culture of the country.



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educational stakeholders.

- +APL methodology is not only applicable to all professional profiles but also to different national and international systems
- The competencies certification can be a starting point for planning of training activities tailored to retrain the employee and prepare to apply for a job changing.
- Reduction of training costs.
- Reduction of training courses duration, customizing and targeting it to the needs of the individual and the needs of the market.
- Upgrading of enterprises, improving productivity, quality and competitiveness of labour markets.

- Companies have not much interest in assisting the public sector in the competencies certification.



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OPPORTUNITIES

- Adaptation of the system for recognition of prior learning is very important in order to facilitate the access of unemployed people to the labour market.
- Improve the access of disadvantaged groups to the labour market and to have better transparency.
- The +APL methodology can be used for special target groups, such as: migrants with competences but no formal qualifications (it is also important that these persons start working as soon as possible rather than passing a formal training. In this case, the certification of parts of competences or professional profile is an enormous advantage), people working in jobs that have no official professional profile.
- The certification process requires skilled human resources, prepared to bring out the evidence, putting people at the centre

THREATS

- Slow legislative system in the country.
- Despite the progress made, the initiatives in the field of validation of prior learning are either in initial phase or their results have not been implemented in order to create a functioning system for validation of professional competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learnings.
- Due to the lack of experience, a proper cost-benefit analysis of the methods used is currently not possible.
- Continuity of non availability of funding and staff available.
- Voluntariness of the process, experienced as an obligation by the citizen and not as a choice.
- Sustainability of the financial costs of the process.



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of the process and supporting it.

- There is the need for evaluators of technical skills, tools and machinery which helps to test them, in the event that the evidence presented is not sufficient to lead to a certification, then a support companies.
- Training in skills assessment with a subjective approach, if necessary, following the model already established in other countries.



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