

# Report on innovative validation processes

RO, PL, ES, TK, DE and IS



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## SYNTHESIS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

#### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the current state of development of initiatives aimed at increasing opportunities for recognition of prior learning in VOW-IPLM partners' countries. In the context of this report, recognition of prior learning refers to opportunities provided to individuals to have learning acquired through work and daily life assessed and validated on par with formal training and education. In particular, this report aims to highlight similarities and differences between VOW-IPLM partner countries regarding:

- legislative and regulatory frameworks as they pertain to formal recognition of prior learning – especially regarding how comprehensive frameworks are, i.e. to what extent do existing legislation and regulatory frameworks cover all possible RPL applications in the country?
- previous and ongoing initiatives,
- stakeholder views on, and involvement in, recognition of prior learning,
- hindrances to the implementation of systematic approaches to the recognition of prior learning,
- innovative approaches to the recognition of prior learning.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations aimed at ensuring that project objectives are realistic and likely to benefit all partners.

#### Background

The increasing emphasis on lifelong learning is intended to address challenges associated with changing labour markets and rapid technological change. Today's workers need to continuously update their skills and knowledge, since even the most specialised forms of knowledge are becoming a short-lived resource, due to the accelerating pace of change in the global economy. Lifelong learning is a direct response to these challenges and has brought about an explosion in the availability of a diverse range of formal and non-formal learning opportunities. Furthermore, awareness of the importance of informal learning has grown. Many employers and trainers and instructors have recognized individuals' prior learning to some extent. However, the lack of uniformity and transparency in existing approaches has limited their applicability. This has resulted in increased interest in formal methods for recognizing and documenting prior learning to ensure that employers, workers and trainers and instructors are able to accurately assess individuals' qualifications, skills and knowledge.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) has existed in some form in most European countries for decades and more. Most early initiatives grew organically within specific VET sectors relating to certified trades. These were initiated by employers needing a way to validate workers' skills in rapidly

changing labour markets. Some of the key properties of labour markets and training systems that early initiatives were intended to serve and supplement include:

- Long-term employment in specific sectors.
- Limited access to formal training.
- Relatively slow technological development.
- Relatively stationary labour force.

None of these hold true today. Labour markets are dynamic and workers mobile within, and between, specific professions; access to formal training has increased and is supplemented by a broad range of non-formal training opportunities; technological development is increasing at an exponential rate requiring constant updating of skills; and workers have few qualms about relocating to different regions or, even, countries for work. RPL initiatives need to take these changes into account to be able to serve their purpose. In particular, they need to be flexible in terms of what kinds of learning are recognized and they need to provide transparent certifications that are easily recognizable by employers and educational institutions.

The challenges are numerous but not insurmountable. Early RPL initiatives provide valuable insights despite their limitations in modern contexts. They demonstrate the importance of stakeholder involvement, employers in particular, the need for collaborative efforts between trainers and instructors, workers, employers and authorities, and relevance of local, regional and national contexts.

## Terminology

For the purpose of ensuring consistency of terminology we refer to the CEDEFOP European Training Thesaurus<sup>1</sup> to define several key concepts relating to current discourse on recognition of prior learning. Among these concepts are:

- *Recognition of prior learning (RPL):* (listed as *recognition of competences*) “equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences) (formal recognition) ; (b) The acknowledgement of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders (social recognition).”

There are several terms used in the same or similar manner as RPL, including *recognition of competences, validation of non-formal learning, accreditation of prior learning* and more. We consider all of these terms to be equivalent in the context of this report and they may be used interchangeably.

- *Learning:* “A cumulative process where individuals gradually internalise more and more complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) (Lave, 1997).”

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<sup>1</sup> CEDEFOP (2007). *The European training thesaurus*. Thessaloniki, GR: CEDEFOP. Retrieved from <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/ett/en/>.

As a general concept, learning is considered to be a process that leads to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that an individual is able to apply to situations that they encounter in their daily lives, work, or new learning experiences. Three key types of learning are defined according to the contexts in which the learning occurs. This typology of learning is considered to be definitive, i.e. it effectively describe all possible forms and dimensions of learning that individuals will encounter in their lifetimes.

- *Formal learning*: “Learning that occurs within an organised and structured context (formal education, in-company training, etc.), and that is designated as learning.”

Formal learning leads to officially recognised certificates, diplomas and qualifications. Formal learning environments are purposive, always involve at least one instructor, and have projectable outcomes.

- *Non-formal learning*: “Learning which is embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element. As opposed to formal learning, non-formal learning encompasses (a) what is sometimes described as semi-structured learning, that is learning embedded in environments containing a learning component (i. e. quality management) ; and (b) accidental learning resulting from daily life situations (including at the workplace) and defined below as informal learning.”

Non-formal learning occurs in structured learning environments that are outside of the formal educational system. Non-formal learning may lead to officially recognised certification or qualifications but not necessarily. Learning may take place in the workplace, in non-formal learning centres and in various social activities and organizations. Learning activities usually involve an instructor, mentor, leader, or equivalent. Outcomes are projectable but not necessarily measurable.

- *Informal learning*: “Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. Not confuse with non formal learning.”

Informal learning occurs as individuals go about their daily lives. Informal learning is generally neither intentional nor measurable and learners themselves may not even be aware of the learning that has taken place.

- *Lifelong learning*: “All purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences (European Commission, Cologne Summit).”

Lifelong learning is an important, although somewhat problematic, concept. Definitions of lifelong learning have varied considerably since the term first emerged in policy discourse several decades ago. At various times it has been used to refer to adult education, continuing education (i.e. any non-formal education occurring after completion of formal education), and most recently, as an all-encompassing phrase referring to all learning that occurs

throughout an individual's lifetime (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal).<sup>2</sup> Exacerbating this issue is the fact that the term is still used in these varying ways depending on the relevant context. For the purposes of this report, lifelong learning will be used as defined in the CEDEFOP European Training Thesaurus.

## Method

The primary documentary resources for this report include the individual country reports submitted by each of the project partners and the examples of best practice included in the VOW-IPLM Handbook. In addition, when clarification was needed various supporting documents were consulted, including the country reports from the 2010 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning published by CEDEFOP<sup>3</sup> and national policy and legal documents when available. The VOW-IPLM country reports took precedence over all supporting evidence consulted.

The documents were analysed to identify themes relating to relevant legislative and regulatory frameworks governing accreditation of learning in general and recognition of prior learning in the countries involved. The document analysis also focused on each country's capacity to implement programmes that would provide formal recognition of prior learning, including the existence of frameworks against which prior learning can be assessed, stakeholders involved in existing initiatives, and the existence of validating authorities. An overview of the themes included in the analysis are listed and described in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, M., Thayer, T., & Madyun, N. I. (2008). The evolution of the European Union's lifelong learning policies: An institutional learning perspective. *Comparative Education*, 44(4), 445-463.

<sup>3</sup> CEDEFOP (2010). *2010 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning*. Thessaloniki, GR: CEDEFOP. Retrieved from <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory-scope.aspx>.

**Table 1. Themes and guiding questions for document analysis.**

Theme	Guiding question
Legislation	Do legislation and regulations relating to the formal recognition of prior learning exist and what is their nature?
Qualifications Framework	To what extent do national qualifications frameworks facilitate or hinder the recognition of prior learning?
Occupational profiles	To what extent can nationally sanctioned occupational profiles be used to assess prior learning?
Stakeholder groups	Who are the primary stakeholders involved in recognition of prior learning? This theme concerns the parties that are involved with, or have an interest in, recognition of prior learning. These may include public authorities, educational institutions, employer organizations, trade unions and occupational councils.
Validating authority	What is required of validating authorities?
Types of learning:	What limitations are there, if any, to the type of learning that can be accredited?
	- Non-formal
	- Informal
Documentation	How is accredited prior learning documented?
Recognition by:	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?
	- Employers
	- Trainers/instructors
	- Other

In the following chapters a brief overview of the results of the analysis for each country report will be presented highlighting key elements in reported approaches to RPL.

## COUNTRY REPORTS

### ICELAND

Theme	Comments	
Legislation	Legislation and regulatory frameworks passed in 2008, 2010 & 2011.	
Qualifications and competency standards	Prior learning is assessed against the national qualifications framework which has been mapped to the European qualifications framework. Competencies are measured against learning outcomes as detailed in national curricula and/or occupational profiles.	
Stakeholder groups	The development of RPL in Iceland has primarily been led by the social partners, i.e. employer organizations and trade unions in broad collaboration with various stakeholders. The institutionalization of RPL has created links between governmental authorities, formal and non-formal educational institutions and various civic groups.	
Validating authority	The regulatory framework passed in 2011 (No. 1163/2011) clearly defines what organizations can validate prior learning and what is required of those organizations. Validating authorities must be recognized educational providers as described in current legislation governing upper-secondary education (No. 92/2008) and/or legislation governing adult education (No. 27/2010).	
Types of learning:	Legislation and regulations pertaining to RPL clearly state that all learning, including non-formal and informal learning shall be accredited as applicable.	
	- Non-formal	Yes
	- Informal	Yes
Documentation	Documentation of RPL depends on the context of the assessment. Where the assessment relates to the formal educational system, individuals are awarded credits that can be directly applied to their field of study. Their credits are entered into a national database that all upper-secondary schools use to maintain student records (INNA). Where the assessment relates to specific occupations or work contexts, individuals are awarded a certificate that clearly documents their qualifications in accordance with the expectations of employers.	
Recognition by:	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?	
	- Employers	Employers are not required to recognize any form of

		accreditation except in cases regarding certified trades. Since most accreditation that is intended to affect employment status is developed in direct partnership with employers, they generally accept documentation of RPL.
	- Trainers/instructors	All trainers and instructors are required to recognize prior learning that has been validated against the National Curriculum Guidelines for upper-secondary education and skills requirements for specific certified trades in accordance with current legislation and regulations.
	- Other	Credits awarded for prior learning that has been assessed against the National Curriculum Guidelines for upper-secondary education are equivalent to credits awarded in the educational system and should be recognized as such. The same applies to VET qualifications awarded on the basis of accredited prior learning.

### Legislative and regulative frameworks

Recognition of prior learning has been a priority for employer and employee organization for the past 10 years. Following several exploratory programs and studies commissioned by social partners and Icelandic authorities RPL is now included in legislation and regulations governing upper-secondary, vocational and adult education. Legislation passed in 2008 and 2010 mandates that individuals have opportunities to have prior learning accredited. Furthermore, accredited prior learning must be recognized in the formal educational system. Credits awarded through RPL can be applied to both vocational education and training and upper-secondary academic courses of study. The current National Curricular Guidelines for upper-secondary education stipulate that anyone commencing studies has the right to have their prior learning recognized and that awarded credits be applied to their program of study. Regulation implemented in 2011 clarifies practical aspects relating to the RPL, including the rights of individuals who choose to have their prior learning accredited, eligibility requirements for validators and the expected outcomes of validation.

The current legislation validates the efforts of various grassroots initiatives that were led by key stakeholders linked to employer organizations and trade unions. Early grassroots initiatives were motivated by developments in Norway (Competence Reform) and other Nordic countries. Thus, the overall framework in Iceland is largely consistent with developments in the other Nordic countries, which have influenced much of the EU-level development over the past decade.

### Qualifications and competency standards

How prior learning is assessed depends on the context of the assessment. Where certified trades are involved, qualifications are assessed against occupational standards published by the "Occupational Councils". These councils have strong links with the VET system and the trade councils and are responsible for setting educational standards for the VET system. Where traditional formal education

is involved, qualifications are certified against the National Curriculum Guidelines, the most current of which are formulated around outcomes-based learning. Where the purpose of the assessment is purely related to professional advancement, qualifications are assessed against occupational profiles. The formalization of occupational profiles other than those covered by the Occupational Councils is a fairly recent development. Several existing occupational profiles have been developed in early RPL projects, including the VOW and REVOW projects, and they are still evolving, mainly on an as-needed basis.

In terms of VET qualifications and competencies relating to formal education, the current standards are adequate and serve their purpose. The lack of existing occupational profiles, on the other hand, creates complications for RPL because in most cases profiles must be developed from scratch when the need arises.

### Validating authorities

As stipulated in current regulation regarding RPL, any organization that meets the requirements set out in the legislation on upper-secondary and adult education is a valid authority. This includes all public upper-secondary schools, both academic and vocational, recognized private upper-secondary schools, and all learning providers that have been certified according to the requirements as described in the legislation on adult learning.

All validating authorities must adhere to the procedural requirements described in current regulation on RPL.

### Types of learning that can be accredited

Current legislation and regulation pertaining to RPL unambiguously states that all learning can be accredited, including that gained through "formal education, work experience, work related training, non-formal education, adult education, civic engagement and individuals' life experiences." (Reg. No. 1163/2011). In practice what is validated will depend on the context of the validation and what qualifications are to be awarded.

### Documentation of prior learning

Individuals whose learning has been validated against the National Curriculum Guidelines for upper-secondary education are awarded school credits. Credits awarded as a result of RPL are equivalent to credits awarded by formal educational institutions. Individuals' credits are entered into the national database used by all upper-secondary schools to maintain student records and can be applied to current or future studies in the formal system. Formal educational institutions are required to recognize credits awarded as a result of RPL. The same applies to RPL in the VET system.

## GERMANY

Theme	Comments	
Legislation	No comprehensive legislative framework exists. There is some relevant legislation, such as national legislation pertaining to VET and legislation at Länder-level pertaining to access to higher education.	
Qualifications and competency standards	There is a history of maintaining well-articulated occupational profiles describing, in particular, the skills and knowledge needed for crafts and trades. These are updated regularly to reflect the current occupational landscape and changing skills requirements. Currently, there are roughly 350 occupational profiles. The German National Qualifications Framework (DQF) was implemented in May, 2013, and is mapped to the EQF. For many potential RPL contexts (in particular beyond the VET system) there are no existing standards.	
Stakeholder groups	Because of the wide variety of approaches and types of initiatives, it is not possible to describe stakeholder groups in general terms. Who the involved stakeholders are depends on the nature and purpose of the initiative. That being said, there is overall good involvement on the part of the social partners. Educational institutions are involved where applicable, i.e. in assessments that lead to school-equivalent accreditation.	
Validating authority	Due to the lack of a comprehensive legislative or regulatory framework, requirements for validating authorities depends on the context of an assessment and the particular initiative under which the assessment is performed.	
Types of learning:	The types of learning that are validated depend on the context of the assessment. Non-formal learning is nearly universally eligible for validation. The validation of informal learning is being explored in several on going projects.	
	- Non-formal	Yes
	- Informal	Under development
Documentation	RPL learning can, in some cases, lead to officially recognized qualifications in crafts and trades that are indistinguishable from qualifications earned through the educational system. In other contexts prior learning is primarily documented using portfolio methods and, in some cases, certificates.	
Recognition by:	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?	

	- Employers	Qualifications in crafts and trades that are awarded on the basis of RPL are universally recognized because they are equivalent to qualifications earned through educational programs. Other forms of documentation, portfolios in particular, are treated as personal documents that are evaluated by employers on an individual basis.
	- Educators	Educational institutions develop their own approaches to the evaluation of RPL (in accordance with regulations at the Länder-level where applicable).
	- Other	Aside from official qualifications, such as those in crafts and trades, there is no mechanism that facilitates the broad recognition of prior learning. Relevant parties evaluate documentation on an individual basis.

### Legislative and regulative frameworks

Germany presents a particularly complicated case due to the complexity of its educational system and the relationship between the Länder and the federal government in regards to legislation. Because of the way that competences concerning education and qualifications are distributed among political levels there is currently no comprehensive national legislative framework governing RPL. There is, however, some relevant legislation:

- at the national level - governing the RPL in vocational education and training (VET),
- and at the Länder-level - providing qualified workers access to higher education.

Despite the lack of a comprehensive legislative framework, there are various sectoral initiatives that provide some acknowledgement of prior learning. There is no guarantee that parties not directly involved in particular initiatives will recognize such acknowledgement.

Although there are no relevant comprehensive legislative frameworks, there is obviously a keen interest in RPL. In part, the lack of legislative frameworks has certain benefits. Several initiatives have been developed, many of which originate at the grassroots level. This may better ensure stakeholder buy-in than top-down approaches. However, it can also result in fragmented initiatives posing significant hurdles to having accredited learning recognized beyond the particular context in which accreditation was granted.

## Qualifications and competency standards

Outside of the VET system there is no standardized means to assess or document prior learning. A range of methods for documenting prior learning have been adopted in the various initiatives that currently exist. Aside from traditional certifications, such as those relating to the VET system and higher education, there is no guarantee that documented prior learning will be recognized by employers or educational institutions.

Germany has a long history of maintaining detailed descriptions of various professions, in particular those related to certified crafts and trades. These "occupational profiles" are constantly maintained and updated to reflect current occupations and the skills and knowledge required for them. Today, there are roughly 350 occupational profiles that form the basis for certification in the professions described and provide the standard against which prior learning is assessed for those professions. Thus, there exists a useful standard that can be expanded on to facilitate RPL for a broader range of professions.

The German qualification framework (DQF) was implemented in May, 2013. It is consistent with the European Qualification Framework.

## Validating authorities

Because there is no uniform national or sectoral legislative or regulatory framework governing RPL, validating authorities differ from one context to another. In the case of higher education, the universities are the sole validating authorities; in the case of VET, the "competent authorities" include Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of industry and commerce and Chambers of farming. Various initiatives involved in RPL recognize their own validating authorities and oversee their training.

## Types of learning that can be accredited

What type of learning is recognized depends on the context in which the RPL takes place. Non-formal learning is assessed in most existing systems and on going initiatives. Informal learning may be assessed under certain conditions (for ex. an individual taking the External students' examination must prove that they have been employed in the relevant occupation -or one related to it- for a period of no less than one and a half times the duration of the formal training required for that profession).

## Documentation of prior learning

Documentation of prior learning depends on the context in which the RPL takes place. In some cases prior learning results in, or grants access to, certification which is widely accepted, such as qualifications for certified occupations in VET and admission to higher education. Most RPL initiatives, however, use a portfolio approach to document prior learning. Portfolios are problematic since they can lack the transparency needed to have qualifications recognized by employers and educational institutions. Outside of the VET system, most documentation of prior learning is evaluated at the receiver's discretion on an individual basis with little or no officially guaranteed status.

## POLAND

Theme	Comments	
Legislation	No comprehensive legislative framework exists. Some initial steps have been taken, for ex. legislation passed in 2006 that allows for the validation of learning gained in the workplace.	
Qualifications and competency standards	A national qualifications framework is currently being developed and will be mapped to the European Qualifications Framework. Skills-based professions, i.e. crafts and trades, are managed by competent authorities and requirements are well defined. These standards are generally based on the assumption that skills are acquired in the formal educational system. Nevertheless, existing RPL initiatives make use of these standards. There is a lack of consistency across existing standards, which hinders transparency and transferability. Occupational profiles exist for over 250 profiles.	
Stakeholder groups	Much of the current development relating to RPL is initiated by public authorities. Various stakeholders are involved in current initiatives relating to RPL. Which stakeholders are involved in what activities depends on the nature of the activity and may include employers, employee organizations and educational institutions.	
Validating authority	There is currently no specific validating authority. Plans being developed envisage a central role for educational institutions both as certificate awarding bodies and as trainers of authorized validators.	
Types of learning:	The types of learning that are validated depend on the context of the assessment. The documentary evidence analysed describes validation of both formal and informal learning. However, the definition of informal learning in the Polish context differs somewhat from the commonly accepted definition.	
	- Non-formal	Yes
	- Informal	Unclear because of different definition.
Documentation	There are plans to provide formal documentation of accredited prior learning, including awarding credits equivalent to those awarded in the formal educational system. Currently, prior learning is documented through a variety of mechanisms depending on context.	
Recognition by:	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?	
	- Employers	Employers have demonstrated a particularly keen interest in RPL

		and seem very willing to recognize properly documented prior learning. RPL is seen as validation of the common practice of valuing employees' personal work and life experiences.
	- Educators	Educational institutions already recognize various forms of documentation of non-formal learning.
	- Other	Various forms of documentation of non-formal learning are already in use and are widely recognized.

### Legislative and regulatory frameworks

There is currently no legislative or regulatory framework regarding RPL in Poland. There is growing awareness of the need to provide opportunities for individuals to have their prior learning accredited and documented. Authorities have outlined their strategy to address this need and are working with various stakeholders to develop initiatives in line with current EU policy.

Despite the lack of formally established frameworks for the recognition of prior learning, there is, in general, a history of valuation of skills acquired in the workplace and other forms of non-formal learning. For ex., in the case of some crafts, there are mechanisms for having prior learning officially accredited and recognized on completion of certain examinations. This provides qualifications that are recognized by employers and authorities. Thus, there are valuable experiences that Polish authorities and stakeholders can build on. Nevertheless, there is some way to go before Poland establishes a comprehensive system for RPL.

### Qualifications and competency standards

Poland's existing qualifications framework is very thorough in terms of the professions that it describes. However, skills and professions are linked only to formal education and cannot be effectively mapped to non-formal and informal learning on the basis of existing standards. The development of a new qualifications framework is underway. The new framework will be mapped to the European Qualifications Framework. The new standards also include occupational profiles and over 250 profiles have already been completed. The new qualifications framework will be oriented toward learning outcomes, as is the trend throughout Europe, and will be more flexible in regards to non-formal and informal learning.

Despite the availability of the new standards, they have not been applied outside of the VET community due to the lack of any official regulation mandating their use. The labour market and other educational communities continue to rely on other standards. This leads to a lack of transparency and consistency in recognition of prior learning.

### Validating authorities

Because of the lack of a legislative or regulatory framework regarding RPL, there is likewise no official description of requirements for validating authorities for RPL. Current legislation does describe the

requirements that must be met for individuals to become members of examination committees in formal education (both VET and higher education). As is, the legislation is not applicable to the validation of prior learning. It may, however, be a useful model for future legislation specifically addressing prior learning.

### Types of learning that can be accredited

Current accreditation systems in Poland are only intended for validation of formal learning. Although prior experience is widely recognized and valued, there is no formal system for recognition of learning acquired outside of the formal educational system.

Regarding informal learning in particular, it is not entirely clear how it is regarded in Poland, either in the educational system or the labour market, because the definition provided in the national report differs significantly from the widely accepted definition. In the country report for Poland, informal learning is described as "*an attempt to attain new competences*" while the common definition encompasses *any* learning, both tacit and explicit, that occurs as an individual goes about their daily life, whether there is intent to gain new skills or not. This needs to be clarified for the Polish context.

### Documentation of prior learning

Prior learning is documented in a variety of ways depending on the context and can be based on any of several standards that are currently in use. As has been mentioned, this causes lack of transparency and transferability. There are plans to harmonize documentation including awarding credits equivalent to those awarded in the formal educational system.

## ROMANIA

Theme	Comments	
Legislation	Legislative and regulatory frameworks introduced since 1999 with recent amendments in 2011 govern all aspects of RPL.	
Qualifications and competency standards	There are several instruments that are used for assessing prior learning including the National Qualifications Framework (mapped to the EQF), occupational standards and competence standards.	
Stakeholder groups	The development of RPL in Romania has mainly been top-down, with authorities playing a central role. Social partners have played a lesser role.	
Validating authority	Centres of Competences Validation are responsible for validating prior learning. These are private and public organizations that have been authorized by the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ) (a public body). Individual evaluators are also certified by the NAQ.	
Types of learning:	Legislation and regulations pertaining to RPL pertain to both non-formal and informal learning.	
	- Non-formal	Yes
	- Informal	Yes
Documentation	Individuals receive an official Certificate of Competences issued under the name of the certification authority involved. Certification authorities include public agencies, universities and other valid institutions. Certificates are not uniform across all certifying authorities.	
Recognition by:	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?	
	- Employers	Employers are not required to recognize documented prior learning. However, there is growing interest among employers in RPL, which is likely to increase acceptance.
	- Educators	There is no mandated link between RPL and formal education. Educators are not required to accept validated prior learning. Educators, particularly in VET and higher education, have developed their own validation systems within current legislative

		and regulative frameworks that they do accept.
	- Other	Documentation of prior learning differs depending on the context. The lack of a uniform method of documentation is problematic. Some forms may be accepted in some sectors while others are not.

### Legislative and regulative frameworks

Romanian authorities have worked steadily over the past decade to develop legislative and regulative frameworks to support RPL. Early legislation provided the necessary foundation for developing instruments for RPL by clearly outlining authorities' expectations. More recent legislation and regulatory frameworks have provided clarification regarding practical aspects, including designating responsible organizations, outlining procedural requirements and linking accreditation to various qualifications and competency standards.

Romanian authorities have developed their legislative and regulatory frameworks for RPL in line with developments at the European level and existing frameworks are mostly consistent with current European policy. Consequently, there is a good level of consistency in their approach in that institutional capacity has been developed in tandem with the frameworks. However, because the approach has been mostly top-down, it is questionable whether existing measures are fully in line with the needs of key stakeholders; primarily employers, employee organizations and workers. The fact that relatively few have made use of the opportunity to have their prior learning recognized suggest that there is a disconnect between authorities' actions and the needs of workers and employers.

### Qualifications and competency standards

A comprehensive system of qualifications frameworks and occupational and competence standards have been developed to support RPL. These describe educational levels, skills associated with specific occupations and general and occupation-specific competences. Standards are developed by public authorities at the national level.

Standards depend to some extent on the context of the validation. There are, for ex., different standards for general competences, VET qualifications and higher education qualifications. There is some lack of transparency and transferability because of the use of various standards.

### Validating authorities

Romania has taken a very rigorous approach to authorizing validating authorities to ensure quality and capacity. Validating authorities must be certified by the National Authorities for Qualifications after proving that they meet the rigorous standards outlined in the current legislative and regulative framework.

## Types of learning that can be accredited

Current legislation and regulations stipulate that both non-formal and informal learning should be validated.

## Documentation of prior learning

Prior learning is documented in certificates issued by the validating certification authority. Thus, there is a uniform means of documenting prior learning. However, since validation standards are dependent on the validation context, the content of the documentation is not uniform. A certification authority in the VET sector may issue documentation that is only applicable in practice to that sector.

### SPAIN

Theme	Comments	
Legislation	Legislation and regulatory framework has been systematically built up since the early 2000s. Legislation passed in 2009 specifically establishes a national framework for the validation of work-based experience and non-formal learning.	
Qualifications and competency standards	The Spanish National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNCP) is the basis for all validation processes. It provides descriptions of competences and skills levels that prior learning is assessed against.	
Stakeholder groups	Much of the development of the framework for RPL has been driven by a top-down approach with authorities playing a central role in the establishment of frameworks, validation mechanisms and processes. involvement of social partners has been limited. However, several organisations, including social partner organisations, have participated in European pilot projects (primarily LdV) relating to RPL.	
Validating authority	Validation is coordinated by regional authorities and other public bodies. Validating authorities are either public agencies or committees established by authorities for the purpose of managing RPL services.	
Types of learning	Legislation and regulations pertaining to RPL clearly state that non-formal and informal learning can be validated.	
	- Non-formal	Yes
	- Informal	Yes
Documentation	RPL is validated against the national standard, CNCP. The CNCP is organised in modules, each of which represent a specific level of skill and knowledge and, therefore, constitute recognisable credits equivalent to those awarded for formal education. Individuals having their prior learning validated may receive qualifications equivalent to those issued for formal education or a partial qualification if they do not	

	meet all criteria.	
Recognition by	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?	
	- Employers	Documentation is based on the formal educational system, and in some cases equivalent to it, and is expected to be recognized by employers in the same way as formal qualifications.
	- Educators	The same applies to educators as employers.
	- Other	Documentation is expected to be widely recognised. For example, those who receive only a partial qualification as a result of RPL can use that documentation to partake in the training needed for a full qualification.

### Legislative and regulative frameworks

Spain has constructed a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework regarding RPL with legislation and decrees starting in 2001. The most recent development, Royal Decree 1224/2009, provides clarification regarding objectives, processes and institutional responsibility. Thus, Spanish authorities have now institutionalised most important aspects of RPL and made the process available to the public. However, in the Spanish experience we see a trend similar to other countries where the development of RPL has been primarily top-down with little involvement on the part of the social partners aside from isolated projects; there is a framework in place but use is very limited.

Although Spain has built up a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework at the national level, some Autonomous Communities (ex. the Basque and Catalan communities) have their own frameworks. There has been some cooperation by national authorities and the Autonomous Communities but the overlapping initiatives have, nevertheless, caused some difficulties.

### Qualifications and competency standards

A comprehensive qualifications framework and competence standard has been developed to support RPL (The CNCP). The CNCP is intended to facilitate RPL and is therefore very well tailored for that process. An interesting aspect of the CNCP is its modular constructed which allows for partial validation of competences against a nationally recognised standard. In contrast, some existing validation standards are based on qualifications as awarded by formal educational systems which are essentially “all-or-nothing”, i.e. the only option is full qualification resulting from completion of an entire training programme with no formal qualification resulting from partial completion. This may increase the attractiveness of RPL for beneficiaries by minimising the perceived potential for failure to measure up to rigid standards.

## Validating authorities

Validating authorities operate at the regional level but are coordinated at the national level (with the same exceptions regarding Autonomous Communities as already described). This allows regions to tailor efforts to specific labour market needs to some extent. This has, however, also hindered uptake of RPL by directing efforts toward limited professional categories.

## Types of learning that can be accredited

The current legislative and regulatory framework is intended to facilitate validation of both non-formal and informal learning.

## Documentation of prior learning

Prior learning is assessed against a national standard (the CNCP). The CNCP is modular such that it allows beneficiaries to receive documentation of competencies equivalent to full qualifications or partial qualifications. Full qualifications are documented in diplomas and certificates equivalent to those awarded through formal education. The available data does not indicate how partial qualifications are documented.

## TURKEY

Theme	Comments	
Legislation	Existing legislative and regulatory framework applies only to VET. More comprehensive framework is under development.	
Qualifications and competency standards	A national qualifications framework is currently being developed and will be mapped to the European Qualifications Framework. Occupational profiles are being developed. Currently over 70 profiles exist.	
Stakeholder groups	Social partners are closely involved with public agencies in current developments, including both qualifications frameworks and occupational profiles.	
Validating authority	Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) is coordinating the development of the RPL framework and is expected to be responsible for certifying validating authorities.	
Types of learning:	Current legislation covers both formal and non-formal learning. These can both be validated on equal grounds. Informal learning will be covered in the frameworks currently being developed.	
	- Non-formal	Yes
	- Informal	Not yet.
Documentation	Documentation of prior learning is still under development and it is not clear yet whether it will be equivalent to documentation issued within the formal educational system or not.	
Recognition by:	How is documented accredited prior learning received by employers, educational institutions and other relevant organizations?	
	- Employers	Since prior learning is expected to be validated against national standards, documentation should be easily recognizable by employers.
	- Educators	Assessment systems for formal education are currently under review. It is not clear how RPL and formal education will link to these.
	- Other	The same goes here as for employers: Documented prior learning should be recognizable for all relevant parties.

## Legislative and regulative frameworks

Legislation relating to the RPL has existed in Turkey for almost two decades. The existing legislation is very limited in scope as it applies only to VET. Furthermore, the documentary evidence examined suggests that prior learning is only assessed against apprenticeship training and not formal school-based components of VET programs. This is a serious limitation of the existing framework because one objective of RPL is to encourage individuals with little formal education to re-integrate with the educational system. Limitations regarding access to formal education provisions on the basis of accredited prior learning defeat this purpose. That being said, it is at this stage too early to pass judgement on existing legislative frameworks in Turkey. Current frameworks are works in progress and much remains to be done. The road forward looks very promising. Turkish authorities are working very closely with key stakeholders to develop legislative and regulatory frameworks, develop infrastructure and to raise general awareness of the importance of lifelong learning. Involvement in the VOW-IPLM project is likely to provide important and relevant insights for the Turkish partners.

## Qualifications and competency standards

Turkey's aim is to develop a comprehensive system for RPL that includes well-defined standards to facilitate validation of prior learning. Qualifications and competency standards are currently being developed with that aim in mind.

## Validating authorities

Although no system of validation has yet been implemented, the VQA is the agency responsible for validation processes and is expected to be the central validating authority.

## Types of learning that can be accredited

Non-formal learning is already accepted in some contexts. Frameworks and standards currently under development are expected to provide for the validation of both non-formal and informal learning.

## Documentation of prior learning

Like other aspects of the RPL system being developed, it is still unclear how prior learning will be documented.

## SYNTHESIS

The countries represented in the VOW-IPLM project represent a very diverse range of approaches to RPL. In all of these we see a range of strengths and challenges. Among the significant distinguishing features of the approaches described are:

- The nature of legislative and regulatory frameworks.
- Levels of stakeholder involvement.
- How prior learning is documented.

### Legislative and regulatory frameworks

Experiences in Iceland and Romania suggest that a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework that provides a clear mandate for the recognition of prior learning, defines the roles of relevant actors and outlines procedural requirements is an important precondition for a systematic approach to RPL. It could be argued that less legislation and regulation provide a level of flexibility that allows for diverse approaches to meet a variety of needs. However, experiences in the other countries, where frameworks are either lacking or non-existent, suggest that there is a high risk that this will lead to a hotchpotch of competing approaches, little transparency and non-transferable documentation. This is obviously something that is beyond the control of the VOW-IPLM partners. For Germany it is a particularly difficult issue because of the way that the German federal system works in regards to the governance of educational matters.

Although Iceland and Romania clearly benefit from their legislative and regulatory frameworks, we cannot assume that it is entirely due to the existence of the frameworks, as such. It is more likely that their frameworks enforce a level of uniformity that facilitates broad implementation and acceptance of RPL systems in societies that are socio-economically diverse. It is entirely conceivable that a similar level of uniformity could be achieved by other means, for ex. through active participation of social partners and other important stakeholders.

The VOW-IPLM project provides an opportunity to consider how pilot projects can be formulated to address some of the issues relating to legislative and regulatory concerns and strengths and weaknesses of uniform approaches. This would provide very valuable knowledge, in particular for those countries where comprehensive legislative and regulatory frameworks are unlikely to emerge. Experiences from the precursors to VOW-IPLM, both VOW and REVOW, can provide valuable insights as well.

### Stakeholder involvement

The documentary evidence examined suggests that stakeholder buy-in and involvement is critical to the success of RPL initiatives. Important stakeholders include employer organizations and individual employers, unions, regulatory bodies for crafts and trades, educational institutions (formal and non-formal) and authorities (local, regional and national). The development of RPL would benefit from a comprehensive and systematic stakeholder analysis to determine the appropriate role and potential influence of each party.

In the countries where RPL development has mostly followed a top-down approach, in particular Poland and Romania, adoption of existing measures has been slow, even where there is a well-developed infrastructure. In countries where development of RPL has been driven by the stakeholders, adoption has been more successful. Even Germany, with all of its complexities, suggests that stakeholder-driven initiatives are more likely to address immediate and perceived needs and, consequently, to be used by the beneficiaries that the initiatives are intended for. It is arguably better to have a broad range of unrelated approaches that are used than a uniform approach that is not.

### Documentation of prior learning

The purpose of RPL is to provide beneficiaries with clear, recognizable documentation of their non-formal and informal learning to present to potential employers or to provide access to opportunities for further formal education. The countries represented in VOW-IPLM have adopted two general approaches. The first is to issue special certificates that document prior learning, leaving it up to potential employers and educational institutions to decide how the documentation is evaluated. The second is to use existing credit systems that are already widely recognized to accreditate prior learning. In terms of transparency and transferability, countries using the latter approach have experienced fewer hindrances for beneficiaries' prospects for employment and further education, as it requires no additional effort on the part of the intended audience. In the case of the former, hindrances can be avoided with significant stakeholder buy-in and involvement. However, given the increasingly rapid change in work and educational environments, even with stakeholder buy-in, hindrances are likely to emerge at some stage without a broadly recognizable system of accreditation.

### Innovative pilot projects

Because of the variation of RPL support infrastructure in each of the VOW-IPLM partner countries, the innovativeness of individual pilot projects can only be assessed on the basis of the context in which those projects are implemented. What is innovative for one country may not be for another. For ex., strong social partner involvement may be innovative for Romania while it is not for Iceland. Furthermore, because of differences in national educational systems, some innovative aspects of one approach may not be feasible for other partners. For ex., the national-level approaches in Spain, Romania and Iceland, which are an obvious strength for the development of RPL in those countries, is unlikely to be actualized in a federal system, like that of Germany. Therefore, we have attempted to highlight specific features of each national context to make it possible for readers to identify innovative aspects of the various initiatives that have been piloted or implemented in each country. These can then be compared to the national contexts of other partner countries to gauge to what extent projects demonstrate potentially innovative qualities that may be useful for other countries.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the documents analysed for this report. They are intended to suggest ways that VOW-IPLM partners can meet their goals and increase the impact of the project.

## 1. Stakeholder engagement

VOW-IPLM partners' experience shows that one of the most critical factors in the success of RPL initiatives is stakeholder involvement. Who the relevant stakeholders are depends to some extent on the specific context of the project. However, there are some stakeholders that can be considered relevant across all contexts. The list below describes the potential significance of each stakeholder:

*Employers and employer organizations* - Employers are one of two primary intended audiences for RPL and their needs should, therefore, be one of the key factors driving the development of RPL systems. Although we can broadly generalize that employers' needs relate to transparency of workers' qualifications and skills, it should not be assumed that this covers everything. VOW-IPLM partners should directly involve employers as much as possible in their work to ensure that they are committed to using the resulting outcomes.

*Trainers and instructors* – Trainers and instructors are the second primary intended audience for RPL. RPL not only provides transparency regarding workers' real skills and qualifications, it also provides a pathway into further formal education. Trainers and instructors need to be able to accurately assess individuals' domain specific knowledge and map that to qualifications frameworks on which they base their certifications. In general, RPL initiatives that provide certification that is recognizable by both employers and trainers and instructors are the most advantageous for beneficiaries. However, it may be beyond the scope of VOW-IPLM partners to address both employers' and trainers and instructors' needs as this is likely more a matter requiring collaboration between both parties rather than one to be addressed in the context of the project. Nevertheless, the project could be considered as an opportunity to initiate dialogue between them.

*Authorities* - Authorities can be important in the construction of frameworks that provide uniformity for RPL initiatives by formalizing various aspects of validation systems and processes in legislation and regulations. VOW-IPLM partners should keep relevant authorities up-to-date with progress of the project and ensure that project outcomes are shared with them.

Other stakeholders will depend on partners' particular environment and relationships. All partners should consider performing a comprehensive stakeholder analysis to identify the most important actors relevant to their contexts and devise ways to either include them in the project, or to keep them informed of its progress.

## 2. Collaboration between existing initiatives

The experiences of the VOW-IPLM partners' countries show that the uniformity afforded by comprehensive legislative and regulatory frameworks benefits RPL initiatives. It is likely that the important factor here is not so much the existence of legislative and regulatory frameworks, but rather the uniformity that they provide. Since it is well beyond the scope of the project to directly affect legislation, partners can instead consider ways that they can increase uniformity of approaches within their contexts. In addition to partnering with relevant stakeholders, project partners should consider how they can increase collaboration between parties involved in developing RPL initiatives within their contexts. This could be an important step toward establishing dialogue on harmonization of approaches.

### 3. Standardizing and documenting prior learning

Partners should strive to ensure that standards and processes used for assessing prior learning are simple, straightforward and easily recognizable by beneficiaries. Having one's prior learning formally assessed can be a daunting experience. People have preconceptions about the value of their skills and knowledge that do not always conform to the gauges used by others. They may be concerned that their life experiences will be undervalued or that the assessment process will bring up memories of disappointing experiences in school. Whatever the reason, it is perfectly understandable that undertaking an assessment of prior learning can be a stressful experience.

Qualifications and occupational standards used for assessing prior learning should take account of the beneficiaries' perspective. They should be easy to understand and stated in a manner such that beneficiaries can clearly relate their own experiences to them. Furthermore, documentation of prior learning should make clear to beneficiaries what the outcomes of the assessment mean and their relevance, i.e. how the beneficiary will use the outcomes.

This will require close cooperation with stakeholders. It should be made clear to stakeholders what the purpose of RPL is and the importance of making them accessible to the intended beneficiaries. Standards should be kept to a bare minimum and use straightforward language, describing only those skills that are absolutely relevant to the certification being sought and stakeholders' needs.

