Peer learning activity in the context of the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

How to make visible and value skills and competence of refugees: Exchanging national approaches and experiences

28-29 April 2016. The Hague, Netherlands

SUMMARY REPORT
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Day 1 – National Approaches</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Setting the PLA Context</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>National Approaches - 1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Group Discussions - 1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>National Approaches - 2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Group Discussions - 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Day 2 – European level Guidelines, Resources and Tools</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>EU Resources, Guidelines and Tools</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Group Discussions - 3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Overall Conclusions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Final Agenda</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.0 Day 1 – National Approaches

1.1 Introduction

On 28 and 29 April 2016, a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was held in Den Haag. It focused on “how to make visible and value skills and competence of refugees, by exchanging national approaches and experiences”.

The PLA was organised in cooperation between the Dutch National Coordination Point ECVET, the Dutch National Coordination Point NLQF, the European Commission, and Cedefop. The PLA was hosted in Building of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER), Bezuidenhoutseweg 60, 2594 AW Den Haag.

The purpose of the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was to examine and exchange experiences on approaches which have been developed at local, national and European level to make visible and value refugees’ skills and competences. Based on presentations of cases at the country to city levels, the PLA looked at existing tools at the different phases of identification, documentation, assessment and certification of skills, and discussed the needs and options for creating synergies in their further development.

This report summarises the discussions that took place during the PLA. It is intended to support the work of the Commission and participants in the PLA in disseminating the results of the activities of the PLA to countries’ stakeholders and other social partners.

The report is structured according to the main topics of the PLA and draws on a range of presentations and country cases that formed the PLA.

1.2 Setting the PLA Context

Susanne Lonscher-Räcke, European Commission, DG Employment and Marijke Dashorst, National Coordination Point ECVET and NLQF, The Netherlands welcomed the participants. They introduced the background challenge of the migration crisis and overall challenges for the PLA participants to discuss in the context of the skills and competences of refugees. The large numbers of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe represent a significant challenge to existing national validation and guidance systems, which had not been designed specifically to deal with the current situation. Existing initiatives and solutions in this area were often uncoordinated, and the extent to which solutions had been developed was unevenly distributed between and within countries.

Regarding these challenges, the purpose of the PLA was to share views and experiences on how to address the skills and competences of refugees:

1. Which are the target groups for skills and competence identification, documentation and certification?
2. Do different target groups have different needs?
3. When should the process be activated and put into practise?

The PLA was invited to clarify what coordination and solutions at EU level that could support validation and guidance activities at national, regional and local level.

Setting the scene – conceptual and practical challenges

Jens Bjornavold, Cedefop, summarised the main themes and issues that had been presented in the background paper of the PLA. The large numbers of refugees arriving in Europe represent a complex challenge that require high capacity solutions to have their skills and competences identified and
validated in order to be integrated and contribute actively to the economy and society. The identification and validation of skills and competences is a complex process, which can include several stages:

1. **Identification** of refugees’ knowledge, skills and competences;
2. **Documentation**;
3. **Assessment**; and
4. **Certification** and formal recognition.

There are many challenges involved in the different stages. A key question is at what stage the identification process should be activated, and what target group it should address? Should the identification only include those refugees permitted to stay in a country, or should it apply to ever refugee at the point of arrival into Europe?

The identification of refugees’ skills and competences also requires a consideration of language needs, cultural background and, in some cases, a lack of and formal written documentation. Consequently, methods for identification should be flexible enough to deal with the ‘unexpected’. The challenges may require identification methods that balance initial self-reporting with guidance and counselling.

The documentation and assessment of skills and competence involve separate challenges providing evidence. Assessment implies that an individual should perform according to requirements set by a certified official standard. A key question is whether the standards should be skills standards of the immigration country or the country of origin?

The certification and formal recognition involve administrative challenges, ensuring portability of the certified skills. Furthermore, the formal certification of skills requires transparency and trust of the assessment process. Looking across Europe, a key question is to what extent formal procedures are in place and what coordination that is required at local, regional, national and EU-level. The European Commission can facilitate exchange of experiences, and can contribute with common tools and conceptual approaches to support the validation systems at national level. The European strategy on validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2012 may provide a conceptual framework in this context.

### 1.3 National Approaches - 1

After the introduction and ‘scene-setting’, the PLA was then informed by case studies at the national level.

**Sweden: The Swedish programmes for refugees**

Joel Hellstrand from the unit for integration and introduction, Swedish Public Employment Service, Stockholm, presented the Swedish programmes for refugees. The number of asylum seekers arriving in Sweden has tripled from about 50,000 in 2013 to over 60,000 in 2015.

The new immigration policy will be active from June 2016. On arrival in Sweden refugees will be provided with a temporary residence permit, and the time taken between then and being granted a full residence permit can be up to 15 months. Therefore the new policy allows refugees to start the process as soon as they seek asylum.

The Swedish public employment service (PES) is responsible for the refugee introduction program. The maximum duration of the programme is 24 months and it includes language training (Swedish) for immigrants, and activities that are relevant based on the skills and qualifications of the new arrival.

Recently there was an increase of participants in the introduction program, including an increasing share of those with higher education qualifications. Furthermore, there is an increasing inflow of applicants for valuation of foreign qualifications.
The introduction programme includes ‘fast tracks’ for immigrants, especially for pharmacists, doctors, nurses, construction engineers, chefs, butchers, teachers and painters which are in high demand on the Swedish labour market. Social partners and PES are involved in constructing fast tracks, which include a chain of activities such as self-assessment, profession-specific language training, internships, trade fairs, on the job skill assessment, bridging courses or vocational training, self-assessment, internships, profession specific language training.

A focussed approach is needed to reply quickly to the labour market.

It can be a challenge to compare the qualifications of immigrants to Swedish standards.

Therefore, the identification of skills is flexible and open including the assessment of non-formal and informal skills and competences.

1.4 Group Discussions - 1

After the presentations from Cedefop and Sweden the PLA participants divided into three groups discussing the question:

- “How to identify the skills and competences of refugees?

The key messages from the group discussions were:

- **Language skills support is important in the initial phase of identification**

Language skills and language support are very important in the first phase of skills mapping, as refugees do not have the language of the host community necessary to translate their skills and experiences. Group assessment could be a viable method in the early phase of identification of skills as some refugees with language skills then can help to provide information on other refugees. Self-assessment of skills may be important in the first phase of identification where there is very little information or formal documents on the refugees. However, self-assessment should be combined with other methods, such as group assessment.

The initial identification should not only focus on the refugees’ skills and past experiences, but also their aspirations as to what job or profession they would like to have in the labour market.

- **Flexible and responsive administrative systems and procedures addressing refugees should be in place**

The large numbers of refugees arriving make it important that administrative systems and procedures for skills mapping are in place and that there is a coordination of the initiatives on local, regional and national level. Some Member States have permanent administrative systems in place addressing refugees, while other Member States focus more on ad-hoc systems. The Dutch system divides the refugees into two groups: those refugees who have formal documents, and refugees without them. Previously, the Dutch validation procedure was conducted only in Dutch but now is also undertaken in English and Arabic. Austria has initiated a pilot programme to identify the skills of refugees. Ireland has an on-line skills recognition system where, depending on which country you come from, any person can go on-line and check the international classification of their qualifications and have print to use when they apply for work.

Administrative functions and support systems for refugees are often fragmented and may need more coordination, and there is a lack of ‘readiness’ in the systems to provide holistic solutions to the needs of refugees. The mapping of refugees’ skills and competences to enable labour market integration is only one issue, which must be coordinated with other initiatives of social and cultural integration, help and education facilities for children etc.

- **Skills and competences of refugees cannot only be assessed against the qualification standards of the host country**

---

This involves understanding the systems of validation of skills and qualifications of others countries, which have very different cultures and education systems. If we only judge and assess them based on European and EU MS qualification requirements then we may not identify the full potential value of their core competences. Usually, the level of higher education is better informed by formal documentation of qualifications compared to lower education. Refugees with lower education tend to have many undocumented qualifications, many developed through learning by doing. Hence, the procedures for recognition of skills and competences should be flexible and open to explore competences developed through non-formal learning.

- **Different refugee challenges are operating differently across Europe**

European countries face very different numbers of refugees and challenges related to their arrival. Some countries, such as Italy, Greece and Hungary, are ‘transit’ countries where large numbers of refugees arrive, but want to go to other countries as quickly as possible. In Greece, many refugees refuse to participate in any education or skills development because they want to go on. However, now and in the future, it is expected that they will have to remain longer and therefore it is envisaged that Greece may need to initiate some introductory programmes.

- **Sharing of information and expertise on education systems of the refugees countries of origin**

In order to establish validation systems at national level, more information is needed on the education/qualification systems of the country of origin. For example on Syria and Afghanistan, and how the qualifications can be compared to those of the host country. Such information has already been developed at national level in some countries and some of it is available in English. For example, the Dutch centre working with recognition of qualifications EP-Nuffic has an online guide on the education systems in a wide range of countries\(^2\). European level coordination could support the dissemination and exchange of such information between the countries, and through developing a European guide. Furthermore, a lot of information on systems of recognition/validation of competences in various countries could be gathered and shared. The sharing of existing links of such information and experience was regarded as urgent.

1.5 **National Approaches - 2**

**Germany: Validation of skills of refugees at school level, in transition to VET and the labour market, towards Higher Education**

Erik Hess, department for VET, German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, presented the German approach to validation of skills of refugees in transition to VET and the labour market. The German validation system is based on a cooperation of a wide range of actors of Federal and Länder governments including local authorities, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Federal Employment Agency (BA), businesses, social partners, and universities.

The vocational orientation for refugees programme (BOF) was launched by BMBF in cooperation with BA and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH). The objective of the program is to prepare up to 10,000 refugees for a dual apprenticeship training scheme within the skilled trades sector using inter-company vocational training centres. In addition, the pilot project “Validation of non-formal and informal learning” (Valikom) has been launched for the period 2015-2018 by BMBF, involving the umbrella organisations of the chambers DIHK and ZDH.

A guiding principle in the German approach is to use and adapt proven instruments and programmes. Hence, the German programme, “Educational chains” (Bildungsketten) which aims to guide young people into VET and prevent them dropping out from school, is now also extended to help young refugees who are still of school age.

The Valikom project is building on the participation of Chambers as competent bodies (vocational training act, BBiG) and avoids setting up a parallel world outside the regular VET system. The project

---

refers to the prevailing training regulations and occupational profiles and the certificate issued indicates the extent to which the skills are equivalent to the ones gained under the vocational training act. The project addresses not only low skilled adults working in Germany but also employees with a diverse background who wish to access the system of further training.

A key challenge in the validation process is to define a frame of reference and to develop neutral assessment instruments that are not culturally biased, and which measure clearly what is being assessed.

For example, a machine operator in advanced European manufacturing has to be experienced in ICT application in work tasks, while this may not the case for a machine operator from a very different business environment and education system. Therefore, the validation procedure is an incremental approach, which systematically explores and assesses people’s skills and competences in relation to work tasks of specific qualifications and occupations. This is important to ensure transparency, validity, quality, recognition and transfer of credits and a proper document.

Germany: Identification and documentation professional skills acquired through experience

Michael van der Cammen, Area Manager of migration and refugees, German Federal Public Employment Service presented procedures and tools for documentation of professional skills of refugees acquired through experience.

A key characteristic and challenge of the refugees arriving in Germany, is that most of the unemployed refugees (82%) are without formal vocational qualification. Traditionally, the identification of skills has been limited to formal qualification pathways to facilitate integration into adequate jobs. However, as the German labour market relies heavily on formal education and vocational certificates, this means that some of their potential skills are not made visible and that most refugees end up in positions not directly suited to their competences.

Therefore, the PES in Germany has launched a project to improve the visibility of non-formally and informally acquired vocational skills. The project applies technology-based skills-identification procedures (“tests”) for job-related skills in order to provide improved counselling to low-skilled workers and to integrate them into the labour market. The skills identification is based on image and video-based tests for one or more professions combined with counselling on test feedback, further training and appropriate job placement. For example, the test for a car repair professional displays pictures of technical parts of a car combined with multiple test questions about whether the part is correctly fixed. The test takes about 2-3 hours. Separate sector experts who know the curriculum of a given qualification have developed all tests. The results of the tests are assembled on a common IT-platform, which can be accessed by all local job counsellors.

Non-formal, professional qualifications are assessed in a way that ensures compatibility with job placement process - usability of the test results is essential. The employers’ reception of the test instrument has been positive, and they are interested in hiring refugees who have demonstrated ability to do certain work tasks. The trade unions, however, do not regard the tests as equivalent to formal qualifications.

The Netherlands: Credential evaluation

Stan Plijnaar, SBB Cooperation organisation for VET and labour market, presented the Dutch system (“credential evaluation”) for validating skills of refugees in the Netherlands. SBB is an organisation for Dutch VET organisations, and is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education. The main tasks of SBB is the accreditation of education programmes and work placement companies, and the development and maintenance of qualifications. SBB is also doing labour market research and provide advice for connecting VET and the labour market.

Credential evaluation is organised by IDW, a joint structure for credential evaluation in the Netherlands (SBB and EP-Nuffic) funded by the Ministry of Education. The Information Centre for
Credential Evaluation (IDW³) is a joint digital front office working in close cooperation with competent authorities for professional recognition.

Credential evaluation divide refugees into two strands: one for refugees with formal documents, and one for refugees without documents. Refugees with formal documents have their skills identified via an application form called “Diplomawaardering” (credential evaluation). The evaluation is based on the level and professional rights in the country of origin, such as the duration of the training programme, list of courses and subjects, compared with the Dutch VET-system.

Refugees without formal documents use an application form “Indicatie Onderwijsniveau⁴” (education level indicator) which was developed in 2013-2014 by labour market and educational stakeholders. Refugees are eligible for this procedure if they come from a list of high-risk countries. The refugee is tested in asylum centres, and the educational background of the refugee is reconstructed based on self-reported information. The refugees do not go through some practical demonstration of their skills. To prevent fraud, experts in the respective countries of origin check the consistency of the provided information. SBB and EP-Nuffic have databases with background information on education systems in the countries of origin. A diploma is issued for each study/education programme the refugee has completed in the country of origin. If the refugee has completed two education programmes then he or she has to apply for separate diplomas for these. In 2015, 938 applications for Indicatie Onderwijsniveau were received and in 2016 (Jan-Feb) 555 applications. Until now, the total number of Indicatie Onderwijsniveau issued is 22.

In order to be integrated as citizens and obtain the total integration diploma, refugees have to go through the “inburgering procedure”, which includes three examinations in Dutch language, knowledge of Dutch society and labour market orientation. The inburgering procedure takes three years, and it is expected that the procedure will increase the number of applications for the “Indicatie Onderwijsniveau”.

**Netherlands: How to make visible and value skills and competence of refugees?**

Sala Besic, strategic advisor from City of Eindhoven, presented the project proposal "Talent4work" under the programme Urban Innovative Actions of the European Structural Funds, which develops a new approach to the integration procedure for refugees in the south of the Netherlands. The new approach is based on parallel integration instead of the traditional, sequential approach. The key rationale of the parallel approach is that by focusing simultaneously on housing, language acquisition, training and work, public authorities will minimise the amount of valuable time lost in integrating asylum migrants. A long, sequential integration process tend to increase the risk of unemployment. For example, only 25% of the Somali group of asylum seekers are in employment after 15 years on the labour market. Therefore, it is important to reduce the time between the start of asylum seeking and the integration on the labour market.

The City of Eindhoven made the experience that early collection of information on the refugees’ educational background and work experience was important to their labour market integration. Therefore, the TALENT4WORK project aims at changing the integration into a three-step procedure, in which work is addressed as the first step as soon as relevant information about experience and education can be collected. Simultaneously, language and integration support is offered during the asylum procedure.

The second step is identification, assessment and validation of competences and skills of the refugees against the standards of the Dutch labour market. The instruments for assessment and validation of competences are developed in close cooperation with businesses and other stakeholders. In this assessment process, the refugees are split into three categories according to their level of labour market match. The first group, called “first match”, includes refugees with formal qualifications for example engineers who, if validated, can start working immediately. The second group is much larger, including refugees who can participate in their labour market but who need

---

³ [http://www.idw.nl/](http://www.idw.nl/)
⁴ [http://www.idw.nl/orientatie-arbeidsmarkt.html](http://www.idw.nl/orientatie-arbeidsmarkt.html)
additional education and training to be qualified for specific occupations. The third group is the “no match” category of refugees who have no formal qualifications and who also lack language skills.

Gaps between the Dutch labour market and the competences of the refugee are analysed by labour market specialists of City of Eindhoven and closed by tailor-made educational modules. The modules are developed in cooperation with three educational institutions: Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Summa College, and ROC Ter Aa. The third step is matching of the competences of asylum migrants with vacancies in the labour market.

In the discussion after the presentation, it was commented that it is important to develop partnerships to cooperate on a parallel integration procedure and to set up an effective communication and information system for the refugees and all partners involved. It was also commented that integration cannot be the sole responsibility of the individual but must be supported and coordinated by public authorities in partnership with organisations and employers.

1.6 Group Discussions - 2

After the first two presentations the PLA participants divided into three groups discussing the questions:

- “How to validate the skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings?”
- “How to certify?”
- “What should be the requirement to the responsible bodies?”

The key messages from the discussion were:

- **The validation of skills and competences should take be place in in a step-wise manner, with different methods and purposes at each step**

The first step, identification of skills, should be based on self-reporting where a refugee is asked to describe their educational background and work experiences. The municipality would be the relevant authority to handle this step, and some of the procedure may be done online. The second step is to assess skills and competences by tests. Professionals with good insight into the curricula and qualifications needed should do the development of the tests. Hence, a PES may not be the right institution to do develop the tests. The third step is the validation of skills, which may be done by the Ministry of Education or bodies such as chambers of commerce.

It was also discussed whether participation in validation of competences and skills should be voluntary or obligatory. It was not considered necessary to oblige refugees to go through validation processes, although it is beneficial to their integration on the labour market. In reality however, refugees may be forced to participate in the validation process, as this may be a condition for receiving welfare benefits if they are unemployed.

- **The first identification of skills is very important to initiate the recognition process at the earliest possible stage, in order not to lose the potentials of the refugees’ skills and competences**

Experience shows that the risk of unemployment increases the more time refugees are inactive during the asylum seeking process. The early identification of skills and collection of information that the refugees have on themselves should be simple, low-cost and based on self-reporting. In contrast, the subsequent validation of skills is a more complex procedure, which require more advanced expertise, test methods and resources. The Swedish and German examples on assessment of skills and skills levels through internships or video-based tests of specific work tasks, were viewed as being viable methods of validation. It was regarded as very important to document and disseminate such tools, methods and procedures in order to avoid that other countries have to reinvent the same processes.

- **There is a need for exchange of accurate and updated information on education systems in the refugees’ countries of origin**
The EU-level could help to facilitate the exchange of such information and experiences, particularly where resources exist (such as the Nuffic one noted above). Similarly, there is a need to learn of initiatives at the local level, as for example the Dutch project in Eindhoven.

- **The development of systems for identification and validation of non-formal skills need to be adapted to each country’s existing systems, experience and needs**

Some countries, for example the Netherlands, already have advanced procedures in place for identifying non-formal skills. Other countries, such as Germany, which has a more formal system of validation involving the social partners and the dual system, now need to develop testing systems that address non-formal skills.

It was also discussed how a testing system should be organised. One approach is a centralised system where one authority at national level does the testing and first collection of information, which subsequently is distributed to other parties/bodies involved in the process of integration. Another approach is a more decentralised system, where the validation is handled at local level by the municipality in partnership with organisations and educational institutions. The Eindhoven example was mentioned as an example of the latter approach.

- **The validation of refugee skills and competences to help them into the labour market, should be regarded as part of a wider integration process into society**

The integration into society also requires commitment to European culture and values and the willingness to integrate.
Day 2 started with two presentations of guidelines and tools from the European Commission intended for identifying and validating the skills and competences of refugees. The first presentation covered the ENIC-NARIC network which has developed a guide for credential evaluators to recognise the qualifications held by refugees. This was followed by proposals related to Europass, with the development of a common European tool which can be used to identify and document refugee skills and competences.

Academic Recognition of Qualifications of Refugees (the ENIC-NARIC network)

Mette Moerk Andersen, European Commission DG EAC presented the NARIC network, which was established in 1984 and included in the first Erasmus programme in 1987. The network aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the participating countries of the Erasmus+ Programme. The NARIC network covers the EU Member States, the EFTA/EEA and the EU acceding countries and candidate countries (Iceland, FYRO Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey). All NARIC member countries have designated national centres, the purpose of which is to assist in promoting the mobility of students, teachers and researchers by providing advice and information concerning the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study undertaken in other States. The main users of this service are higher education institutions, students and their advisers, parents, teachers and prospective employers.

Some of the participating countries in the network have signed the background document of the Lisbon Convention of 2011. The Convention includes the principle that each Party shall recognise the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for the purpose of access to higher education programmes, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access. (LRC art. VII & guidelines Directive 2011/95/EU).

ENIC-NARIC is a joint initiative including ENIC, the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region, and NARIC, the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union. ENIC-NARIC launched a Toolkit project, running from 2016-2018. The project developed a guide for credential evaluators to recognise the qualifications held by refugees. The toolkit include guidelines, E-learning modules, background information on education systems of many different countries and tools for credential evaluation of refugee’s skills and competences.

The guide provides concrete advice on how institutions/authorities at any level step-by-step can establish a standardised, accessible, fair and transparent procedure for applicants without documentation. The main steps are:

- Prepare a background paper that describe the completed education pathway, including academic credentials, professional background and qualifications, work experience and other competencies. Documents and supporting evidence provided by the applicant (when available) and supporting information on the educational system should also be included in the background paper;
- Evaluate qualifications based upon the background paper and confirm the information gathered;
- Arrange additional steps (if necessary) that confirms/validates the skills, such as:

o Organise examination/test that allow the demonstration of acquired knowledge, competencies and skills;

o Perform an interview, involving experts to question the applicant, gathering additional contextual information;

o Use a sworn statement, confirmed by a legal authority;

- Complete the evaluation process by determining the evaluation outcome, depending on the intended recognition purposes, for example admission to new studies or further studies; and,

- Issue an official document (if necessary) which outlines the recognition decision, based on the evaluation purpose and validity period.

The Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) which helps Erasmus+ participants improve their knowledge of the language in which they will work, study or volunteer abroad has been opened to refugees. Around 100,000 licences for language assessments and language courses (€4M budget) will be available over the next three years.

Finally, there is the European website on integration which includes information on policies, facts and figures and analyses in the field.

**Identifying and documenting refugees’ skills with a European tool – a Skills Profiler for asylum seekers**

William O’Keefe, Commission, DG EMPL, presented a Skills Profile Tool for Newly-Arrived Third Country Nationals. He introduced the main elements of Europass, which was launched in 2005. Its main documents and templates include Europass CV and European Skills Passport, Language Passport, Europass Mobility, Certificate Supplement and Diploma Supplement.

Within the context of Europass, the plan is to develop a common European tool which can be used to identify and document refugees’ skills and competences. The tool is intended to be used by employment and integration services etc. in receiving/host countries. The tool may be used as part of other subsequent activation, integration and support activities.

At the time of the PLA the tool was in working draft, main modules being:

- Personal Information such as name, birthplace and date, citizenship, family, state of health, living situation and expectations/goals for the future;

- Skills Identification, including basic skills, numeracy, literacy, digital skills and language skills based on self-assessment against CEFR, mother tongue and other languages;

- Job Related Skills. Specific skills related to particular categories of employment or professional roles related to labour market;

- Education and Training. Information on courses taken, awards and qualifications gained, examinations and transcripts provided, and information on education system; and

- Advice and Next Steps. For example, advice on skills needs and further education training and up-skilling, employment and integration. Referrals can be provided to other organisations and support tools.

The European tool is intended to be a flexible tool, which cater to different national circumstances. It is up to the Member States how they will apply the tool and how the will combine it with existing procedures. The tool does not provide authentication or verification of documents, but rather is an electronic portfolio, which ensures that information and documentation can be collected and shared in a consistent and portable way. The tool will be housed on Europass website and accompanied with

---

6 [http://erasmusplusols.eu/](http://erasmusplusols.eu/)

7 [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/)

guidelines for completion and links to relevant information. The first template will be launched in conjunction with Skills Agenda for Europe.

2.2 Discussion

After the two presentations, PLA participants discussed the issues raised.

Some participants did not see an added value of the tool as they have already implemented their own tools, others questioned whether the tool contributes with new elements, which cannot be managed within the existing Europass templates or other CV-tools available at national level. The need to have a more focussed and practical tool was emphasised. Other participants found the tool potentially relevant, especially for the first phase of identification of skills and gathering information, while the subsequent phases of assessment and validation require more detailed methods and tests at national level. It was regarded that an important value of the Europass tool would be to provide a document which that refugees can take with them (electronically and physically) as they travel to their final destination.

Today, too many refugees tend to start all over again and again providing information and documentation during the integration process, particularly when they face new authorities and institutions as they move across European countries. Hence, the Europass tool could enhance continuity in the gathering of information and documentation, and support mobility. This was regarded as particularly important in “transit countries” such as Greece, where refugees tend move from place to place, while the authorities have very little information on them. During this period, Europass could be a valuable tool to collect bits of information, which, some participants suggested, could updated be made accessible in an electronic database. Other participants warned that such an electronic database would raise serious issues of data protection, as it would include sensitive personal information on health data etc.

Another theme of the discussion was to what extent refugees would be able to use the tool and fill in the templates on their own, for example by self-reporting. Among the PLA participants, the tool was regarded as requiring solid personal guidance and counselling of the refugees in order to ensure consistency and quality of the information gathered.

It was also emphasised that the current refugee crisis make it very urgent that a common tool is completed soon. It was added that skill validation systems should not only view refugees as employees, but also as entrepreneurs who could run their own businesses. Some refugees may have experiences as business or shop owners, which can be used for start-ups. Furthermore, the collection of information refugees’ skills and competences should not only relate them to the skill needs of the labour market, but also focus on the refugees’ own aspirations, goals and plans for the future.

2.3 Group Discussions - 3

After the first two presentations, the PLA participants divided into two groups discussing the question:

- How to create synergies across countries and at European level?

The key points emerging were:

- **European countries face very different challenges and widely varying numbers of refugees**

Some countries, such as Italy, Greece and Hungary, are “transit countries” challenged by incoming refugees who want to continue to other destinations, while other countries, such as Germany and Sweden receive large numbers of refugees who wants to stay. These countries are in urgent need of efficient tools and administrative procedures for validation that can deal with large numbers of refugees and matching tools to integrate them into the labour market. In contrast, some European countries, for example Ireland, have a moderate numbers of refugees.
Although facing different challenges, all countries need some tools for identification and validation of skills. Even “transit countries” were the refugees refuse to stay, need some tools for systematic collection of information and the counselling refugees. In the future, it is envisaged that the refugees will have to stay for longer in “transit countries”. If the “transit countries” organise an initial collection of information on the refugees, that could help the countries of destination, for example Germany, because the refugees would be better prepared from the point of entry. The general view is that the first identification of skills and competences must take place at an early stage, and not let it await the completion of asylum seeking procedure which can take several years. If this time is lost, then it can increase the risk of unemployment.

- **There is much variation in administrative procedures in place at national level**

There are great differences between the European Member States in the systems and administrative procedures they have in place to identify and validate skills and competences of refugees, especially regarding non-formal learning. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, have already developed databases with information on education systems of the refugees’ countries of origin. Such databases can be a useful source of information in relation to credential evaluation of qualifications. Consequently, there would be value added at European level in a coordinated exchange of updated information on tools, methodology and existing validation systems developed at national level. This would help countries avoid to ‘invent the same wheel’, and could save resources. Furthermore, the exchange of tools and methodology would enhance the development of consistent validation concepts and recognition of documentation across countries.

- **Self-reporting and self-assessment are relevant approaches in the first stage of early identification of skills where there is little information on the refugees**

In contrast, subsequent stages of assessment and documentation of skills and skill levels linked to certain occupations and professions require more detailed advanced methods based on sector expertise in order to ensure trust and credibility of the documentation and certification. These latter stages also require more resources and guidance than the early identification, and therefore they may typically address refugees who have received residential permission.

- **Tools for identification and documentation of skills should address both the needs of government administrations and the needs of the refugees**

The needs of administration and the refugee are both legitimate interests to take into account. Documentation can help the refugees by providing a portable skills portfolio, which they can use for labour market and education purposes. At the same time, the documentation needs to be structured and consistent for administrative use and exchange of information. To motivate refugees to participate, validation procedures should establish some kind of “value chain” for the refugees: If I go through this validation process, then I can continue to an internship assessing my skill level, and then I can…etc.”

The tools identification and validation of refugee skills and qualifications should not only focus on the current labour market needs, but also be open to the refugees’ talents, long-term goals and life situation as a whole. In other words, the needs of the labour market and refugees needs and plans should be balanced.
3.0 Overall Conclusions

Although this PLA focused on skills and competences of refugees, it acknowledged that these are part of a wider set of challenges concerning the integration of refugees into European society. These include cultural assimilation, the care and education of children and families, language skills, and health issues. The PLA noted in particular the value of a staged approach to skills and competences, both in terms of the range of skills and competences (high-level skills and qualifications are better documented and more readily assessed), but also in the timelines along which they are assessed and recognised (some assessment processes start at the time when refugees apply to a country, others only when they are granted residency). It was noted that the assessment and recognition process should aim for the shortest possible time from arrival in Europe to securing a job, since this helps reduce dependencies on the social support systems. Furthermore, this also helps to avoid poverty traps, and to minimise the potential for radicalisation and marginalisation.

Part of the process in reducing the time-line is to build as much information as possible at the earliest possible opportunity. Rather than wait until administrative systems can engage with refugees and start the documentation process, there is potential value in refugees documenting as much as possible about their experiences, skills, and competences. This also helps to reduce the considerable administrative resources needed in refugee process. Refugees are not just a uniform community of employees who need to be found jobs, but they include entrepreneurs, people who have run their own businesses, and employed others. It can generally be expected that they are motivated to find work, and therefore they should be provided with the earliest opportunity to contribute to the assessment and recognition processes. The PLA strongly emphasised that guidelines for validation must have the refugee as the prime focus, not the administration(s).

That said, the PLA was very aware of the layers of the processes. It is easier to assess the qualifications and skills of a trained doctor or a lawyer, than it is a self-taught IT specialist. The doctor and the lawyer require an assessment between two formal systems of recognition (originating country, and European country). The self-taught IT specialist may come to Europe with no formal documentation at all, and where they come from a war zone that arrive often without the ability to provide references from former employers. Therefore and initial ‘layer’ could be self-assessment and self-reporting by a refugee. The next ‘layer’ could involve testing and assessment of skills and competences. The final ‘layer’ could be formal documentation, such as a portfolio for refugees and administrations to record the outcomes.

Consequently, trust and authority pervade the processes of assessment and recognition. The case-studies and the discussions in the PLA highlighted that across Europe there are ‘bubbles of trust’ where there are successful initiatives. Small bubbles exist at local and urban levels (Eindhoven for example), while country-level bubbles exist in Germany where a national-level authoritative process has been developed. Trust and authority needs to follow the recognition process, since refugees may not just be on a journey to one Member State, but may undertake cross-border mobility within the EU in the future.

In bringing the discussions to a close the PLA re-emphasised the urgency of the situation with refugees. The recognition and validation processes are being challenged by the scale and immediacy of the problems. In that context Cedefop has an important role in sharing information and analysis and identifying methods to refine the approaches to assessment and recognition. The PLA recommended that an expert group is established to support MS and that the topic should be followed up by the EQF AG. The Commission indicated that a report on the outcomes of the PLA will be given at the meeting of the EQF Advisory Group on 14-16 June.
## 4.0 Final Agenda

Peer Learning Activity the Hague  
28 - 29 April 2016  

*Social Economic Council, Bezuidenhoutseweg 60, 2594 AW Den Haag.*

### AGENDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Speaker/Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08:30 - 09:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:00 - 09:15</td>
<td>Welcome address</td>
<td>European Commission, DG Employment, Susanne Lonscher-Räcke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Co-ordination Point ECVET, The Netherlands</td>
<td>Marijke Dashorst, advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.15 - 9.45</td>
<td>Setting the scene – conceptual and practical challenges</td>
<td>Cedefop, Jens Bjornavold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.45 - 10.15</td>
<td>National approaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Sweden</td>
<td>The Swedish programmes for refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joel Hellstrand, unit for integration and introduction, Swedish Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employment Service, Stockholm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.15 -10.30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30 – 11.15</td>
<td>Group discussions</td>
<td>How to identify skills and competences of refugees?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.15-12.00</td>
<td>Plenary: Report from group discussions (Rapporteurs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00 – 13.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.00 - 14.00</td>
<td><strong>National approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.00 - 14.00</td>
<td><strong>2. Germany</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Validation of skills of refugees at school level, in transition to VET and the labour market, towards Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Erik Hess, German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, VET policy</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification and documentation professional skills acquired through experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Michael van der Cammen, area manager of migration and refugees, German Federal Public Employment Service</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00 - 14.30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.30 – 15.30</td>
<td><strong>3. The Netherlands</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Credential evaluation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stan Plijnaar, S-BB Cooperation organisation for VET and labour market</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Example of cooperation in the south of the Netherlands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sala Besic, strategic advisor, municipality of Eindhoven</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.30 – 16.30</td>
<td><strong>Group discussions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to validate the skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to certify?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What should be the requirement to the responsible bodies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.30-17.15</td>
<td><strong>Plenary: Report from group discussions</strong> (Rapporteurs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Friday 29 April 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 09.00 – 10.00 | **Academic Recognition of Qualifications of Refugees**<br>
*Mette Moerk Andersen, European Commission, DG EAC*<br>
**Identifying and documenting refugees' skills with a European tool – a Skills Profiler for asylum seekers**<br>
*William O’Keeffe, European Commission, DG EMPL* |
| 10.00 – 11.00 | **Group discussions**<br>
Practical ways to help with identifying and documenting and recognising refugees' skills and qualifications |
| 11.00 – 11.30 | **Coffee break**                                                          |
| 11.30 – 12.30 | **Plenary: Reporting from group discussions and Q&A**                    |
| 12.30 – 13.00 | **Conclusions and Closing remarks**<br>
Commission and Cedefop |
| 13.00 -14.00  | **Lunch**                                                                |