How to make visible and value refugees' skills and competences

Exchanging European experiences and approaches

It is estimated that more than a million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe (EU/EEA) in 2015 ([1]). Similar numbers are possible for 2016. For these refugees to become integrated, and eventually contribute actively to society, they must be able to build on their existing knowledge, skills and competences, acquired through education and training and/or work experience. There is thus a need for high capacity/high quality solutions allowing recently arrived refugees and migrants to have their skills and competences identified, documented, assessed, and if required, certified in the quickest and best possible way.

Material gathered by Cedefop shows that most of existing validation arrangements in Europe are not targeted to migrants. Only 10 countries (out of 36 surveyed in the 2015 inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning) reported to have initiatives on validation specifically targeted to migrants, and very few reported having as main users of the validation processes migrants[2]. With the current migration crisis, more and more initiatives are appearing, but integration with the existing processes is still undefined

It is important to note that while it is important to make visible and value skills and competences of refugees, this needs to be done within a wider context of guidance, counselling as well as education and training.

The April 2016 peer learning activity (PLA) in The Hague provides an opportunity for national stakeholders and experts to exchange experiences on approaches developed at local, national and European level to make visible and value refugees' skills and competences.   The PLA is organised in cooperation between the Dutch National Coordination Point ECVET, the Dutch National Coordination Point NLQF and the European Commission and Cedefop.

([1]) http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html
([2]) http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory

1.   GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE PLA

The following three challenges inform the work of the PLA:

- Existing national recognition, validation and/or guidance/counselling systems have not been designed to deal with the current situation, neither in terms of number of individuals to be 'processed' nor in term of the particular problems caused by language, cultural background and (in some cases) lack of written, formal documentation.

- While some stakeholders at local, national and European level have recognised the need for initiatives to be taken in this area, developments seems generally to be slow and unevenly distributed between and within countries.

- So far there has been no systematic sharing of experiences and solutions in this area. This means that developments take place in isolation from each other, potentially causing loss of time and money and preventing synergies to develop.

2.   WHO IS THE TARGET GROUP?

It is important to discuss at what stage any arrangement for identifying and documenting skills and competences should be activated. Is the focus exclusively on those having received permission to stay or should a broader approach be applied, covering everybody arriving in a country? The identification of the key target-group is important and influences the scale and scope of the exercise. The four phases identified below may point towards a stepwise approach where an initial identification phase is followed by more extensive and detailed phases tailored to the needs of the individual. The PLA could clarify the following question:

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

3.   HOW TO CAPTURE THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCES OF REFUGEES – THE DIFFERENT PHASES

The individual refugee must be at the focus of any arrangements. This is first of all about making visible the diverse and often unique learning of individuals, in education and training but also at work, at home or through leisure time activities. It is secondly about attributing value to the learning experiences of the individual, irrespective of the context where this took place. The purpose is to make it possible for the individual refugee to 'exchange' the outcomes of prior learning into future employment and/or education opportunities. The European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2015) distinguishes four distinct phases characterising validation arrangements. These phases are highly relevant also when addressing the skills and

competences of refugees. For each of these phases, different actors will play a role and different tools will need to be used.

3.1. Identification of refugees' knowledge, skills and competence

Any initiative in this area must start with the identification of knowledge, skills and competence acquired (including formal qualifications) and is where the individual becomes increasingly aware of prior achievements. This stage is crucial as learning outcomes differ from person to person and will have been acquired in various contexts: in formal education and training, at home, during work or through voluntary activities. For many, discovery and increased awareness of own capabilities are a valuable outcome of the process. Identifying this non-standardised learning is a considerable methodological challenge. Methods and approaches must be 'open to the unexpected' and not be designed in ways which narrow down the range of knowledge, skills and competences that may be considered. While the identification phase can be efficiently supported by the use of standardised ICT tools (for example allowing self-assessment), this stage will frequently require active involvement of advisers and counsellors able to enter into a dialogue and provide direction. The PLA could clarify the following questions:

- Which tools for the initial identification of skills and competences exist and can be adapted to the group of refugees?
- Which new tools for the initial identification of refugees' skills and competences are currently being developed; and what characterises these?
- How are ICT based tools being balanced with guidance and counselling?
- How can overall capacity and quality of identification tools be improved?
- What kind of language/translation support is required

3.2. Documentation of refugees' knowledge, skills and competence

For the identified learning to be exchanged into employment and/or education, it needs to be documented and supported by evidence. This can be carried out in various ways, for example through a CV, a portfolio or via other formats. This documentation will normally provide an overview of the work/learning career of the individual. If available, this documentation can be accompanied by various proofs (formal documents, works samples or assessment results) that attest to their learning achievements. When available, this evidence should go beyond a simple listing of job-titles or positions and provide an insight into the skills and competences acquired. The portability of evidence is of particular importance. A situation where local, regional, sectoral, national and European level stakeholders operate with different (and competing) documentation formats will inevitably make it difficult for the individual refugee to present and get

acceptance for his or her acquired skills and competences. Common formats for the presentation of learning experiences, as demonstrated by Europass ([3]), can aid this transfer and promote better understanding of these outcomes. The PLA could clarify the following questions:

- Which documentation formats are currently used for documenting refugees' skills and competences?
- What kind of evidence should be required when documenting refugees' skills and competences?
- To what extent are available formats used for documenting refugees' skills and competences supporting the transfer and portability of acquired knowledge, skills and competence?
- What kind of language/translation support is required?

3.3. Assessment of refugees' knowledge, skills and competence

Assessment differs from the identification phase (see above) in the sense that the individual should perform according to requirements set by an agreed standard ([4]). Assessments will always underpin formal qualifications awarded by the education and training system but will in many cases also be used in more limited areas, for example to test language and ICT skills and competences. The design of assessment tools for refugees, for formal qualifications as well as for more limited skills/competence, will frequently require a combination of written tests and practical challenges. Experiences from the field of validation indicate that tools frequently will need to apply practical demonstrations, simulations or gathering of evidence from past practices. The result of the assessment phase can be used to design compensatory training measures if needed. With this in mind, it should be possible to direct refugees to the adequate training to obtain a specific certificate (qualification or part of a qualification) that can provide them with access to labour market and/or educational opportunities.

- Which assessment tools (including self-assessment) are addressing the needs of refugees?
- Which assessment tools are needed; and in which areas?
- How can the credibility of refugee oriented assessments be strengthened?
- What kind of language/translation support is required?

([3])   Cedefop: *Europass*: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home
([4])   The assessment phase can both comprise self-assessments and assessments by external parties.

3.4. Certification and formal recognition of refugees' knowledge, skills and competences

Certification can take many forms, ranging from the formal qualifications received from an education and training institution to the work related certificates and licenses allowing individuals to carry out a particular job or task. Many refugees arriving in Europe will already be in possession of formal qualifications from their homeland. In these cases existing arrangements for recognition (for example ENIC/NARICs) can be used to compare the document in question to the relevant national qualification. In cases where documents are missing alternative procedures may be set up, allowing the refugee in question to sit for the relevant tests. It is crucial that this process is managed by a credible authority or organisation. The value – or the currency – of a certificate or qualification acquired in this way depends on the legitimacy of the awarding body or authority. The PLA could clarify the following questions:

- To what extent are formal procedures for recognition of refugees' formal qualifications in place?
- When a formal qualification documents is missing; which procedures have been put in place?

4. COORDINATION

Identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying skills and competences is not exclusively linked to the education and training sector but requires the involvement of public employment services, labour market authorities, employers, guidance and counselling as well as social services (etc.). Coordination between stakeholders at local, regional, national and European level is also required to succeed. For this, it is necessary to have clear roles and responsibilities. Improving coordination will also contribute to make the validation process more user-friendly avoiding inefficiencies. In addition, it is important to understand how the process of validation can be integrated and interacts with the asylum or refugee application. The PLA could help to clarify the following questions:

- What kind of coordination is currently in existence at national level?
- What kind of coordination would ideally be required at national level?
- How can European solutions support work in this area?