



Education and Culture DG  
Lifelong Learning Programme

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# **USER GUIDE**

**Validation of Competencies  
as Part of Career Counselling**



This instrument for counseling was developed in the framework of the project *Counseling Returning Migrants and Unemployed – Back to Work*, Project Number: LLP-LDV/TOI/10/RO/023

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## Introduction

This Instrument has been developed by a group of partner organisations from across Europe:

- Romanian Institute for Adult Education (IREA) (Romania) (Lead Partner)
- Merseyside Expanding Horizons (MEH) (United Kingdom)
- European Centre for Education and Training (ECET) (Bulgaria)
- National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR) (Denmark)
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) (Greece)
- German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) (Germany)
- Romanian Forum for Refugees and Migrants (ARCA) (Ro)

The project aims to build on existing European Life Long Learning Projects – ACCED, VINEPAC and FAMCOMPASS, to transfer the innovation contained within these projects and draw upon the competency based models of these projects to develop a training and validation tool that will support counsellors in working with unemployed people, including low skilled, those without few or no qualifications, and returning migrants.

The Instrument will assist counsellors to draw out and formalise the skills, knowledge and experience that individuals have acquired throughout their lives. The projects key objective has been to address the issue of how an individuals competences can be validated, recorded and accredited, when they have been acquired in a non formal setting (e.g. outside of formal education and training). It is essential that all the competences that are valuable and useful can be



recognised and formalised. This Instrument will assist counsellors to match the competences of their clients to opportunities in the labour market.

The Back to Work instrument is aimed at professionals delivering careers advice and counselling, in adult education institutions (public or private), or in government and voluntary based agencies Counsellors should have a minimum level of knowledge and competence in the field. The Instrument can be used with unemployed people, but specifically with low skilled clients, those with none or few formal qualifications, and returning migrants.

Professional Practice in guidance counseling varies widely across Europe, with a range of methods, systems and validation processes in place to provide services to unemployed people. The Instrument is intended to be of practical use to the counsellor, and to enhance good practice across partner countries, and be compatible across Europe. It has been written with the intention that Guidance Counsellors use their professional skills and judgment to select which parts of the instrument would be most appropriate for use with particular clients, to enhance and add value to the counseling process.

This user guide contains the following:

- Background: setting the Instrument in context
- Preparation: Recommendations on preparation for using the instrument with clients
- Guidelines for use: Description of each section of the Instrument, and methods of practical delivery with clients



## Background

Today's European labour market is in a constant state of change. Individuals now often change jobs, even professions several times over their working lives. The evolution of technology, the dynamic nature of a changing labour market, changes to the workforce and to organisations, all require us to acquire new competences that we can transfer and use in a new workplace. People who become unemployed have to be able to transfer their experience, knowledge and competences to new fields of work, activity sector or even to new countries.

This project addresses the importance of being able to fully validate the knowledge, competences and skills adult learners have developed in non-formal and informal contexts and/or work settings. This project aims to develop some of competences that career counsellors will require in order to prepare, support and facilitate individuals who wish to access an accreditation and validation process. This Instrument is aimed at counsellors working with people with low levels of formal education, and specifically returning migrants. Many clients in these groups will have a wide range of experience and competences, but may not have the formal qualifications to validate these competences.

Many professions still require formal qualifications such as diplomas and certificates, even though many European countries are encouraging the use of the process of recruiting on the basis of APL. In order to lower the barriers to formal learning and to improve the attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities of LLL, this project aims to facilitate access to validation and accreditation.



As a consequence of the current European Economic crisis, 2 groups of people require additional support in accessing validation and accreditation:

Individuals returning to their country of origin, after a period of time working abroad (reverse migration). A significant number of people who are unemployed, in particular need are people with low levels of education and qualifications.

Many returning migrants have acquired useful experience and developed some competences while working abroad and it is these competences that we intend to address. Statistics show that low qualified people, and especially those from a migrant background, are much more vulnerable to becoming unemployed when the jobs market is under pressure. This is true even in countries like Denmark, which have low rates of migration and relatively low unemployment rates. Among the outreach strategies for these people, validation of non-formal and informal learning is often named.

Often, as you can see in the National reports and Final report about counselling and validation ([www.backwork.eu](http://www.backwork.eu)), local, regional or national agencies offering counselling services are not responding to the real needs of individuals and it can be difficult to make the link between personal competences and those required by the labour market.

Our National Reports show that the validation process is either not well known or that there is some distrust in the validity of its use. Learning does not just take place in school and universities, but in family, at work, hobbies, voluntary activities, involvement in different associations and organizations, through interactions with different people or individual studying.



We need to valorise all types of learning in all contexts and to accredit and validate non-formal and informal learning. The benefits of Valorisation are:

- A method of matching an individuals skills, knowledge and experience to those required by a dynamic workforce in a knowledge based society
- It will empowered disadvantaged groups in society e.g. those with little or no qualifications
- Facilitate more effective career education
- A useful method for self-evaluation and raising the individuals' self-esteem.

The Back to Work project intends to develop the validation and recognition of knowledge and competencies unemployed people have previously acquired, in different contexts, as part of the employment services, in order to facilitate better matching between needs and competencies on the labour market. The unemployed people, including returning migrants facing unemployment, are offered counselling and support services within the local employment offices, but these services are not enough adapted to go into deep supporting the reflection and validation of the real competences that workers have.

Identification of non-formal and informal learning is seen as a process which '... records and makes visible the individual's learning outcomes. This does not result in a formal certificate or diploma, but it may provide the basis for such formal recognition.'

Validation of non-formal and informal learning '... is based on the assessment of the individual's learning outcomes and may result in a certificate or diploma.' The term validation of learning outcomes is understood as: 'The confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.'





The self-evaluation (self-assessment) method offers the opportunity to reflect upon the competences that have been achieved outside of formal settings. The purpose is to encourage a person to build up a clear picture of the extent and the range of competences related to his/her role performance. This picture will help him/her and other people also, for example to apply for a new job.

Frequently, counselling is associated with the idea of crises, dysfunction or unsatisfactory situation. When people who are returning migrants or with low levels of education, are asked about their competences or abilities, often they respond they do not have much competences because they make a connection between knowledge, competences, abilities and so on with the idea of school, certificates, diplomas etc. Generally, adults have a very rich life experience, they may be a member of a family, take care of children or elderly relatives, they may contribute to their community, they may have a good track record in employment and have acquired vast learning 'on the job'...but often...having no "framework of competences" or formal certification for these skills. That is why through BACK TO WORK counselling instrument we intend to help the counsellor to facilitate validation. The counsellor can help the client to discover and reflect upon the competences acquired, to reflect upon them and to organise them, in order to prepare the client for the assessment process. Helping adults to be aware of their competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts is a good opportunity to raise their self-esteem, and to help them to develop a plan of action regarding their personal and professional life in the future.

We hope you will find the Back to Work Instrument useful in providing a service to your clients, and will assist you in your aim of supporting clients into employment.



## Preparing to Use the Instrument

The **Back To Work** instrument is designed to be used by professionals who are providing career counselling and advice on work, education and training to individuals, especially those clients who are unemployed and seeking to return to work. The Recognition and Validation Tool itself is designed to be used during one to one counselling sessions between the client and an appropriately experienced Counsellor.

The process of recognition and validation can be a complex and difficult one, and will require some level of skill from the counsellor if they are to be able to confidently extract the relevant information from the client. In order to be able to use the Instrument and provide appropriate advice and support to the client, we recommend a minimum level of competence on the part of the counsellor. The levels of training and qualification for careers counselors across Europe varies dramatically (as evidenced in the Countries Report) and at present in many countries there is no single recognised minimum professional standard for delivery of counselling and advice. With this disparity in mind, the instrument is aimed at counsellors with sufficient experience to be able to deliver a good quality service.

When you agree to begin the Recognition and Validation process with your client, there are a number of issues and considerations for you to think about that will help you get the best out of the process. Many of these things will be things you may do as a professional as a matter of course, but they are worth noting again here:

- Ensure that your counselling sessions with your client take place in a secure and safe setting. You will need private space so that your client feels comfortable speaking about often very personal matters.
- Establish whether your client has any additional needs. Does the client require any adjustments due to a physical disability? Is your meeting room accessible? Assess whether your client has any communication needs, or



learning needs, and ensure that you are communicating and providing information for your client that is appropriate to their needs. For example, a client with dyslexia may appreciate any written information being produced according to how they can best use it (coloured paper etc).

- Agree a plan of action with your client. You will need to fully explain to them what is involved in the Recognition and Validation process. They will need to know exactly what will be expected of them, how long the process is likely to take, and if there will be any writing for them to do. Most importantly they will need to know why the process is useful for them. At your first meeting, clarify what their requirements are, and agree what their goals are, e.g. to return to employment within a period of time. It is important that the client recognises how the process is going to benefit them – this will make them feel at ease, and will help ensure they are committed and enthusiastic.
- Assure your client that any information they share with you is private, and will remain confidential. You will obviously have to detail much of the information they give you in the portfolio, but you should always check this with the client. During the course of your sessions they may disclose very personal details about themselves, and a counsellor must always have the agreement of their client before sharing any personal information with a third party.
- It can be useful, before embarking on the process, to have an initial meeting with your client to establish a rapport and a good working relationship. Trust is an important factor in the process, and an informal introductory session can be a good way for you to get to know your client, and for them to become used to speaking to you.



## **USING THE BACK TO WORK INSTRUMENT**

### **SECTION 3**

#### **Basic competencies for Career Counsellors**

The First Step in using the Instrument is to assess the professional skills and knowledge of the Counsellor who will facilitate the Recognition and Validation Process with the Client. This section should be used by the Counsellor to assess whether they have the basic competencies required to adequately guide their client through the recognition and validation process. This process is in two stages. Firstly the Instrument presents a matrix of Basic Competencies which are considered to be essential and necessary requirements for all adult career guidance Counsellors. There is then a further matrix which looks at competencies which are directly related to Recognition of Prior Learning.

Before beginning to use the tool with clients, counselors should firstly complete both stages of the Counsellor self -assessment, and thoroughly evaluate whether they are able to competently carry out the process.

#### **BASIC COUNSELLOR COMPETENCIES**

This Section of the Instrument contains a set of Basic Counsellor Competences. Before embarking on a process of Recognition and Validation with a client, the Counsellor should use the Self Evaluation Checklist to determine if they possess the required skills and knowledge to be able to support the client through the process in a competent manner. Counsellors should assess and reflect on their own knowledge, skills and practice and consider whether they are suitably experienced in order to guide their client through the process.

If the counsellor is unable to confidently state that they possess all of the basic competences it is recommended that they undertake further training and professional development before carrying out work with clients that incorporates The Recognition and Validation Tool.



## SECTION 4

### **Self Evaluation of Competences related to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), EQF Level 6.**

In this Section you will find a further set of counsellor competencies which are directly related to the delivery of Recognition of Prior Learning. The matrix is intended for the counsellor to use to assess their level of skill, knowledge and competence. Even if the counselor doesn't have direct experience of RPL they may have experience in other areas that are directly relevant. For example a counselor will have experience of assisting clients to write job applications, or of helping clients to describe their work history.

There are 3 Parts to the Self Assessment Matrix. Each part asks you to consider your practice in terms of your level of knowledge, skills and competence in each of these areas. The 3 parts are: your knowledge; your skills and your level of competence.

Each Self Assessment Matrix consists of 3 Steps:

#### **Self Evaluation**

Look at each Competence and assess whether in the course of your work with clients you have knowledge and skills in this area of work. For example, when you meet a client for a first counselling session, do you explain how your service operates, and what the client can expect from your sessions?

#### **Specify**

The next step is to draw on some examples of how you this – for example, when agreeing what your service can provide for your client; do you give them a written statement of service?

### **Assess**

Finally, assess whether your knowledge and ability in this area of your work is sufficient or if you need to undertake further training or professional development in this area. You will need to consider if your level of ability is suitable for using this instrument.

Repeat these 3 steps for each part of the Matrix: It is often useful to complete this exercise with a colleague who you work closely with and may be able to offer constructive advice and support in assessment.

Use the attached case studies to help you with this assessment process if you feel that these would be helpful, to consider if you have carried out similar tasks with previous clients.

We have included a series of case studies in this user guide which are intended to give you some guidance as to how you may assess your own competencies as a counsellor. Each case study describes the work of a career counsellor and which competencies they have demonstrated when working with a particular client.

### **N.B**

Following this self –evaluation process as a counselor allows experience and insight into the RPL process which is similar to that which your clients will follow while using the Back To Work Instrument. The counsellor will be identifying and evidencing the skills, knowledge and experiences which have been developed over the course of the counsellor’s career, and will allow reflection on areas of strength and areas requiring development. This is very similar to the experience which your client will have.

## **Case Study 1 - Germany**

### **Counsellor:**

Achim Müller is a 34 years old guidance counsellor who works in a public education and training centre. He works mainly with unemployed migrants who have problems finding a suitable job. The qualification levels of his clients are very different. For this reason he has a broad variety of methods at his disposal and is able to adapt them to very different situations.

Achim has a diploma in adult and continuing education. Since he is working as a guidance counsellor he is regularly attending further education in career and guidance counselling.

### **Client:**

Burim is 29 years old. He was born in Albania and moved to Germany eight years ago. He has no vocational qualification that is recognized in Germany. His wife Alev was born in Germany. Her parents are from Turkey. They came to Germany in the 1970's when German industry was recruiting the so called "guest-workers". Alev went to school in Germany and finished a vocational training programme. Burim and Alev have two children aged three months and two years. For this reason Alev stays at home with the children. Burim worked in the hotel and restaurant sector. He stopped working in this sector because it did not allow regular family life because of changing work schedules and long and intensive working days. Afterwards he learned to drive a fork-lifting truck and got temporary work in a warehouse. Now he is unemployed and feels like he stays with his back to the wall and has no perspective at all.

### **Aims:**

Burim needs an education which provides him with the possibility of finding a good and stable job in the German labour market. Since he is not too old to take part in a German vocational education programme Achim's main aim is to motivate him to take this step and to identify his real interests, competences and abilities. In order to reach this aim, Achim has to encourage Burim to deal



intensively with the activities and skills used and support him in creating awareness of his personal strengths and weaknesses.

The aim of the counselling process is to validate informally and non-formally acquired skills. Achim's task is to assist Burim in determining and documenting his own competences and abilities and how and where they were acquired.

### **Appointments:**

Four meetings – Each meeting lasts one and a half hour.

### **Counselling process:**

During the first meeting Achim realized that Burim lost a lot of his self-confidence because of his life situation. It seemed to be important to strengthen his personality and self-confidence. Burim should see what he has learned in life. Achim asked him to take a look at his life and to describe his activities in different learning fields, like hobbies, private life and family life, school, working life, volunteering and social involvement. Burim and Achim tried to develop a profile of his strength and weaknesses. However, at the end of the individual consultation Burim had still no idea what he wanted to do in future. Achim had the impression that Burim has much more potential than they could identify in one hour. He came to the conclusion that Burim needs more help to be aware of his full potential and to be aware of his real interests. For this reason Achim asked him to bring his wife Alev to the next meeting.

In the second meeting Burim, Alev and the Achim discussed the results from the first meeting. Achim asked Alev to look back in time to when Burim was more successful and asked her to tell them what was different when Burim was employed. Alev began to focus more on Burim's personal life and hobbies. She realized that Burim forgot to tell that he used to play handball in a team for some years and that he stopped being a member of the team because he did not feel comfortable in this handball club. A second reason for leaving the team was his work schedule in the hotel. Moreover he forgot to mention that he was a very successful handball player in Albania and that he worked on a voluntary basis as a





trainer for the youth-team. After Alev had talked about the 'good old times' Burim's mood was getting better. Both, Alev and Burim were able to improve the descriptions of his strengths and weaknesses.

The objective of the third meeting was to figure out and value the competences and abilities of Burim. Together they used a scale with four levels. On level one, one is only able to use a skill when he/she gets help from others and on level four one is able to use a skill autonomously in very different contexts. After the valuing they were able to figure in which areas of life Burim is competent. Before Alev and Burim left, Achim asked them to think about possible conclusions.

In the fourth meeting they came to the conclusion that Burim could apply for a vocational education programme for retailers in sport stores. He left with the idea to find a sport store where he can do this education programme (German dual system!). A second idea was to look for a handball club where he feels comfortable and where he can work as trainer on a voluntary basis.

After eight weeks Burim told Achim that he had joined a handball club. One member of this club owns his own sport store. Burim started to do a paid traineeship in this shop. This will be the store where he is going to do his vocational education programme for retailers, which starts next autumn.

### **Competences of the counsellor :**

This case study demonstrates the following counsellor competencies:

- Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided and agree on a course of action (1)
- Explain to the client what self evaluation is (2)
- Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences and assist to extract what is relevant (3)
- Demonstrate intercultural awareness (6)

## **Case Study 2 - Bulgaria**

### **General information/Registration**

The lack of professional experience and insufficient motivation are some of the reasons for the high unemployment rate among young people. Accepting unskilled jobs, usually abroad, despite their good education, is often the reason for falling behind in their career and poor competitiveness on the labour market. As an employment consultant I often work with this group of unemployed people.

Emiliya came to the Labour Office in Sofia. She was 26, coming back from Greece where she had worked as a waitress on a cruise ship for 9 months. I explained to her that this whole process starts with a registration at the Labour Office and ends with finding the most suitable job for her. I found out that Emiliya had a law degree from the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia and no professional practice. She was fluent in English and wished to find a suitable job here in Bulgaria.

### **Diagnostics and analysis of problematic areas**

After the registration I had to collect the necessary information and analyse it to offer Emiliya the best possible action plan. The deeper understanding of Emiliya's needs and potential, as well as her living environment, allowed me to offer a package of services that would satisfy those identified needs.

I am interested not only in bringing back those who have dropped out of the labour force, but their lasting inclusion in the labour market. This is why I monitor the adaption of the unemployed person for a certain period after starting a job.

During the registration and our conversation I made eye contact encouraging her to speak.



After the registration I informed Emiliya that she could use the following **services** at the Labour Office:

- Information and consultation on the services provided by the Labour Office;
- Information on vacancies and their requirements;
- Reference to a suitable workplace or meeting with a specific employer;
- Assistance in independent job seeking;
- Reference and inclusion in a national employment and/or training programme;
- Reference to employment and training programmes (financed under the Operational program Human Resources Development);
- Consultations on regional employment and training programmes;
- Reference to vacancies announced through EURES;
- Consultations on employment under intergovernmental agreements;
- Consultations on starting a business;
- Consultations on professional development;
- Consultations on enrolling on a training course, including motivational training, etc.

Developing and implementing an action plan is a two-sided process that assumes activity from both parties and that is why I used the following **techniques and approaches**: asking probing questions, blockbusting questions, 'about' questions, reflective questions, hypothetical questions, challenge questions, framing questions.

In reference with the above, I made **Personal Situation Analysis** with an emphasis on the areas with negative influence on the opportunities and capabilities for employment: personal, environmental, communicative factors, etc. followed by **Personal Opportunity Analysis** with an emphasis on the areas which will be supportive in short-term and medium-term employment. I pointed out to Emiliya that successful and lasting inclusion on the labour market increasingly required the following skills:



- Ability for a true self-assessment of one's professional qualities and skills;
- Her adaptability as unemployed to the changes on the labour market;
- Her skills in independent job seeking;
- Her communication skills (literacy level, oral and written communication);
- Ability to work in a team with other people (e.g. people from another nationality, more/less qualified; disabled people);
- Accuracy, trustworthiness, etc.

After the registration I informed Emiliya what followed, what her **rights** and **obligations** were. Since she had worked under an employment contract with the foreign ship-owner she was entitled to monetary unemployment benefits here in Bulgaria until she started a job that corresponded to her education and qualification.

### **Action Plan/Employability**

After our conversation and my analysis, I referred Emiliya to training and employment programme financed under the Operational programme Human Resources Development. The main objective of the Project is assisting in the career start of young people under 29 through training and subsequent employment. She was in the target group where 4 employers had submitted applications looking for a legal practitioner.

Emiliya took a 3-month course in digital competency, I gave her a reference and after that a referral letter for the same employer. After that a 12-month contract for apprenticeship was signed between the Labour Office Directorate, the Employer and Emiliya.

For the last 7 months Emiliya has been working as a jurist in the firm where she was recommended by the Labour Office. She feels great at her new position, her colleagues are friendly and she is motivated to prove herself as a true specialist in her field.

**Competences of the counsellor :**

This case study demonstrates the following counsellor competencies:

- Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided and agree on a course of action (1)
- Explain to the client what self evaluation is (2)
- Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences and assist to extract what is relevant (3)
- Ensure the client has understood and gained ownership of the process (10)



### **CASE STUDY 3 – United Kingdom**

#### **Background Information**

I met Nabil at his interview with Employment Support Service. He was 45 years old, and had had over 25 years experience of working in the catering industry. He had lived in the United Kingdom for 5 years after leaving his home country of Tunisia. Although he can speak English quite well, his written English was extremely poor, and this was something that he was very concerned about as he wanted to embark on a university course in Catering Management, and felt that his lack of English written skills would have held him back. He decided to embark on the course as he was unemployed, and no longer wanted to work in lower grade positions in the catering industry, when he wanted a Management position and did not have the relevant qualification to apply for any positions.

At our interview I asked Nabil if he would prefer to have his interview in the office or in our interview room. I ensured that my desk was not cluttered with information and that the windows in the office were open as it was quite a warm day. I ensured that I faced him in a relaxed manner before we began the interview. I also informed him that the office can get very busy with visitors or the telephone ringing and I apologised in advance of this. He reassured me that this did not concern him and he was happy to stay where he was.

We then settled into the interview process and I explained to Nabil about The Jobs Education and Training Service, action planning procedures, and I offered him the Statement of Service, a document which outlined what he could expect from us and what we expected from him. We also completed a registration form which I did on his behalf once he explained about his English writing skills. After I had completed the formal part of the interview, I then asked Nabil to tell me a little about himself, his past experience including his employment history, as I would be able to assess the skills he has gained on his employment journey, and we could discuss what he may need to gain in the future. This was also a good



way to remind him of the valuable transferable skills he had gained along the way and how his cultural experiences will be an asset to him in the United Kingdom.

He informed me that he would like to go into Catering Management as he had worked in the catering industry in many positions and now wanted something more professional as a career in catering. He informed me that he was very concerned about his lack of English writing skills and his desire to embark on a course to rectify this. I informed him about the Drop-in Study Centre and that I would be happy for him to arrange to speak to Daniel the Centre Manager. Nabil was pleased about this and I phoned Daniel to make the necessary arrangements for September. I also gave him information about the locations which provide the University courses he required and gave him the relevant information.

When speaking to Nabil, I adapted my language in order for him to understand more easily the information. I used language which was simple and direct, and went over points he did not understand. I wrote details down for him, e.g. contact names and telephone numbers. I rang the college and arranged for him to come in for support prior to the course.

Nabil was a very easy person to speak to, and was very eager to gather all the information he needed. This made the interview sustainable, relaxed and friendly, and we made a lot of progress in the time we had in the interview. When we had covered all the requirements Nabil had I went over the points with him one more time to ensure no details were overlooked. I completed an action plan and Nabil signed it.

I advised him to keep in touch and keep me informed as to his progress. He embarked on his HND and he also attended the Drop in Study Centre one day per week for his Basic skills in English.





### **Competences of the counsellor :**

This case study demonstrates the following counsellor competencies:

- Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided and agree on a course of action (1)
- Explain to the client what self evaluation is (2)
- Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences and assist to extract what is relevant (3)
- Demonstrate intercultural awareness (6)



### *Case study – Romania*

#### General information/ Registration:

Mohammed is a migrant from Syria who came to Romania in 2010 and married a Romanian citizen. He studied 2 years of engineering at a University in Syria but without graduating. Since his arrival in Romania he has held a variety of minor jobs in the construction field. In Syria, he had also worked for 6 months as a receptionist in the hospitality industry. When he first came to the National Employment Agency, he was unemployed for a few months and looking for a long-term job that would enable him to build a career.

#### Aims:

Mohammed needs to complete his education and at the same time to have his skills recognized in order to be able to access better jobs in the Romanian labour market. After his registration I collected the necessary information about his life, his background and his expectancies regarding his future job. After analyzing this information and as a consequence better understanding Mohammed, his needs and desires, I will be able to guide him adequately so as to achieve his long lasting incorporation in the labour market which will also meet his needs. I informed him on the services he can make use of within the National Agency: information and career counseling, mediation for job search/ for finding work/ labour mediation, vocational courses, consultancy in establishing a business, completion of income, promoting workforce mobility.

#### Counselling:

The counseling process consisted of 4 meetings. I tried to understand the client's context, by asking Mohammed to describe his life, his hobbies, former jobs and volunteering activities. I drafted a situation analysis, focusing on his strengths and weaknesses in terms of job seeking. I presented to Mohammed the skills he needs in order to access a good job in the ever changing Romanian labour market: adaptability to the changes and to the employers' needs, team player abilities, self-assessment, and communication skills. I also informed Mohammed on the



rights and obligations he has in Romania and discussed with him the short and long-term plan for his inclusion in the labour market.

Action plan:

After careful consideration and discussions with Mohammed, he decided that the best long-term plan is to have his studies in Syria validated and recognized so that he can later finish his degree in Romania. This would ensure that he can build a career in Romania in the field for which he has prepared. However, due to pressing financial problems, he needed to find a job soon.

The short-term plan discussed and accepted by Mohammed was to apply for a vocational course in the hospitality industry which would ensure an easy access to a job.

### **Competences of the counsellor:**

This case study demonstrates the following counsellor competencies:

- Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided and agree on a course of action. (1)
- Explain to the client what self evaluation is (2)
- Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences and assist to extract what is relevant (3)
- Demonstrate intercultural awareness (6)



### **Case study 5 - Denmark**

Peter is 42 years old and works as a guidance counselor at a Centre for Adult Education and Continuing Training. His job is counseling, guidance and training for different target groups, mainly employed and unemployed low skilled workers – Danish and ethnic minorities.

A main part of his job is work with individuals and groups, who need training or further education, and who might benefit from a validation process to shorten a formal education or gain admission to higher education. He also works with recognition of competences and strategic competence development with groups of workers in companies or in job centre projects with unemployed workers.

Peter is concerned with developing his own knowledge, skills and competences in working with VPL. He is familiar with the concept of Lifelong Learning and he is eager to contribute to the dissemination of the concept. He has a formal education in teaching and training of adults and he is presently attending further education in career counseling (at diploma level 6).

Peter wishes to work with the Back to Work Instrument and has filled in the Self-Evaluation form of counselor competences related to Validation of Prior Learning.



## 3 steps Self-Evaluation of counselor competences related to Validation of Prior Learning, EQF level 6

Step 1: Reflect		Step 2: Specify	Step 3: Assess	
<p><b>EQF level 6</b></p> <p><b>Knowledge</b></p>		<p>Do I have advanced knowledge in the field of recognition and validation of prior learning, and a critical understanding of theories and principles?</p>	<p>Check and/or specify knowledge you may have acquired from e.g.: (the examples below may work as inspiration for you to discover/realize your knowledge)</p>	<p>Do I need further training to develop this?</p> <p>Yes No I do not know</p>
<p><b>1</b> Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided, and agree on course of action (creating the contract).</p>	<p>Do I have advanced knowledge in the field of recognition and validation of prior learning, and a critical understanding of theories and principles?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have knowledge of theories and methods of formal, non formal and informal learning.</li> <li>I have knowledge of theories of and methods for recognition, documentation and validation of competences.</li> <li>I have knowledge and understanding of national and international lifelong learning strategies and laws.</li> <li>I have knowledge and understanding of the Danish educational system and labor market.</li> </ul>	<p>I have a degree in Adult Teaching and training, level 5.</p> <p>I have completed two modules (20 ECTS) of the diploma study in Career Guidance, level 6.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>2</b> Explain to the client what self-evaluation is and outline its benefits.</p>		<p>I have completed a special training course for counselors working with VPL processes, 50 hours.</p> <p>I work with a variety of methods for recognition and documentation of prior learning in companies.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>3</b> Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences (autobiography) and assist him/her to extract what is relevant in order to reflect upon his/her competences.</p>		<p>I have participated in a study visit program in Poland (CEDEFOP).</p> <p>I have attended national and international conferences and study days on lifelong learning strategies.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>4</b> Understand and explain the evaluation scheme that the client can use to grade his/her competences.</p>		<p>It is a main part of my work to have a deep understanding of the educational system and the labor market. I keep up with laws and regulations concerning education and labor market, I read newsletters and articles published by governmental offices, knowledge centres and relevant academic</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>5</b> Comprehend the significance of assessment and valorization of learning.</p>				
<p><b>6</b> Demonstrate intercultural awareness.</p>				
<p><b>7</b> Develop, maintain and update a portfolio for assessment that reflects the total life situation of the client and present it the best possible way.</p>				

Specific competences required for conducting a RPL process





	<p><b>8</b> Have a good grasp of specific methods of documentation that is required for recognition of prior learning.</p> <p><b>9</b> Understand of the requirements of an external assessor and ability to explain the recognition process to the client.</p> <p><b>10</b> Ensure that the client has understood and gained ownership of the process.</p>		institutions.							
	<p><b>Step 1: Reflect</b></p> <p><b>EQF level 6</b></p> <p><b>Skills</b></p>	<p>Can I demonstrate advanced skills, mastery and innovation in the field of RPL and solve complex and unpredictable problems?</p>	<p><b>Step 2: Specify</b></p> <p>Check and/or specify <u>skills</u> that you may have from experience with e.g.: (the examples below may work as inspiration for you to discover/realize your skills)</p>	<p><b>Step 3: Assess</b></p> <p>Do I need further training to develop this?</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>No</td> <td>I do not know</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	Yes	No	I do not know	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No	I do not know								
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>								
<p><b>Specific competences required for conducting a RPL process</b></p>	<p><b>1</b> Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided, and agree on course of action (creating the contract).</p> <p><b>2</b> Explain to the client what self-evaluation is and outline its benefits.</p>	<p>Can I demonstrate advanced skills, mastery and innovation in the field of RPL and solve complex and unpredictable problems?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have skills in using methods and tools for recognition, documentation and validation of prior learning</li> <li>I have skills in communication, facilitation and collaboration with diversified target groups</li> </ul>	<p>In my daily work with employees from private and public companies and with unemployed seeking guidance and counseling I work with different methods and tools for recognition and documentation of prior learning, e.g. portfolios, self-evaluation tools, tests and interviews. I work with validation tools when assessing for shortening formal education.</p> <p>I work with different target groups, people with no or limited education and training, people with some education and people with further education. Mostly adults but also some younger people. I work with ethnic minorities in special training courses for bus drivers and with unemployed low skilled workers in special training courses for entering the wind mill industries.</p> <p>I cooperate with jobcentres, trade unions and unemployment offices.</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>								
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>								



<p>3 Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences (autobiography) and assist him/her to extract what is relevant in order to reflect upon his/her competences.</p> <p>4 Understand and explain the evaluation scheme that the client can use to grade his/her competences.</p> <p>5 Comprehend the significance of assessment and valorization of learning.</p> <p>6 Demonstrate intercultural awareness.</p> <p>7 Develop, maintain and update a portfolio for assessment that reflects the total life situation of the client and present it the best possible way.</p> <p>8 Have a good grasp of specific methods of documentation that is required for recognition of prior learning.</p> <p>9 Understand of the requirements of an external assessor and ability to explain the recognition process to the client.</p> <p>10 Ensure that the client has understood and gained ownership of the process.</p>							





Step 1: Reflect		Step 2: Specify	Step 3: Assess			
<b>EQF level 6</b> <b>Competences</b>		Check and/or specify situations and examples of professional use of knowledge and skills you came across: <i>(the examples below may work as inspiration for you to discover/realize your competences)</i>	Do I need further training to develop this competence?	Yes	No	I do not know
Can I manage and take responsibility for complex and unpredictable professional activities and take responsibility for managing professional development of RPL strategies?		<p>At my workplace we have a monthly supervision session in a group of colleagues. We deal with challenges and problems in our daily work. We supervise each other and we have expert input on theoretical issues relating to our job challenges.</p> <p>I am presently attending a third module (10 ECTS) of the diploma education for counselors.</p> <p>I am involved in a development project at my workplace concerning ethical standards in counseling.</p> <p>In my spare time I work in a boxing club with re-socializing young people with a ethnic background who have been involved in criminal activities.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have the ability to develop own practice concerning RPL in an interplay between theoretical reflection and practice.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have the ability to support and interface a client in an open-minded manner.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have the ability to act based on professional ethical standards.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
1 Present clear and accurate information on the service to be provided, and agree on course of action (creating the contract).			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2 Explain to the client what self-evaluation is and outline its benefits.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3 Encourage the client to express his/her own personal experiences (autobiography) and assist him/her to extract what is relevant in order to reflect upon his/her competences.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4 Understand and explain the evaluation scheme that the client can use to grade his/her competences.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5 Comprehend the significance of assessment and valorization of learning.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6 Demonstrate intercultural awareness.			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7 Develop, maintain and update a portfolio for assessment that reflects the total life situation of the client and present it the best possible way.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8 Have a good grasp of specific methods of documentation that is required for recognition of prior learning.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
9 Understand of the requirements of an external assessor and ability to explain the recognition process to the client.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
10 Ensure that the client has understood and gained ownership of the process.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		



<b>SECTION 5 EXERCISES</b>
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**This part of the Instrument is intended for counselors and clients to prepare for embarking on the ‘Back To Work’ Instrument.**

**This section contains a series of 19 different learning activities. Each activity looks at an aspect of the RPL process, and will enable the counselor and client to work on developing skills and knowledge that will be useful during the process.**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>purpose</b>
<b>Activity 1 We’ve got so much in Common</b>	Getting to know each other
<b>Activity 2 Listen to each other</b>	Learning to listen
<b>Activity 3 You and me in the forest at night</b>	Trust and communication
<b>Activity 4 Me and My Life</b>	Talking about life events
<b>Activity 5 Valuing different forms of knowledge</b>	Identifying different types of skills and knowledge which are non-academic
<b>Activity 6 4 sides of a message</b>	Explains how verbal communication works
<b>Activity 7 telephone</b>	Demonstrates importance of clear communication
<b>Activity 8 Clock of Questions and answers</b>	Active listening and open/closed questioning
<b>Activity 9 Feedback Letters</b>	Giving and receiving constructive feedback and promoting tolerance



<b>Activity 10 Methods of Evaluation</b>	Advantages and disadvantages of different types of assessment
<b>Activity 11 Portfolio</b>	Questions that will help to build up a portfolio
<b>Activity 12 Learning is important!</b>	Describing formal and non-formal learning experiences
<b>Activity 13 Its time to assess my competencies</b>	Practicing self-assessment
<b>Activity 14 Local Labour Market Study</b>	Thinking about steps needed to access labour market
<b>Activity 15 Finding your path through the obstacles</b>	Understanding the counseling process
<b>Activity 16 Interview</b>	Preparing to be interviewed
<b>Activity 17 Reflection on Biography</b>	Learning contexts and learning outcomes
<b>Activity 18 Establish an action plan</b>	Identifying and assessing goals, aims and objectives
<b>Activity 19 Learning Opportunities</b>	What is available that will help to progress learning

The aim of this section is to enable counsellors to build a working relationship with their client and to explore some of the issues and areas to be addressed in a way which is interactive and illustrative. These exercises can be used in group work sessions, or may be adapted to suit one to one work between the counselor and the client.

Counsellors do not need to use all of these exercises. We recommend that counselors conduct an initial assessment of individual clients and decide which of the above exercises would be most relevant and useful to your client.

Counsellors should consider the suitability of some of the exercises in relation to individual clients. For example, there are some exercises that involve writing which may not be suitable for clients with low levels of literacy. Several exercises involve interaction with other members of a group which may be unsuitable for clients lacking in self- confidence and who may not be ready for this type of activity.

Counsellors need to be assured of the clients commitment to the RPL process at the outset, and ensure that the client remains engaged with the process. If the process is too lengthy, or is too challenging for the clients level of ability, this may cause the client to become disengaged from the process.

Counsellors will also need to take into account the availability of the client and the amount of counseling time available when planning these activities.



## SECTION 6

### **The Counselling Instrument**

This section is the part of the instrument you will use during counselling sessions with your client, the Reflection of Prior Learning Process.

The RPL process is in 5 parts –

- **General Information,**
- **Assessment of Competences linked to working life,**
- **Reflection File.**
- **Portfolio of Evidence**
- **Self Evaluation Report/Case Studies**

### **General Information**

Use this short questionnaire to allow your client to begin to reflect on their past experiences and current situation and to build a picture of their working life to date. What were the important phases of their working life, where did they learn new skills, take responsibilities and take on new challenges? Take plenty of time with your client to explore and put together an overview.

### **Assessment of Competences related to working life**

In this section you and your client will complete a series of tables listing competences that are acquired through employment, education, training and voluntary and life experience.

The Assessment Tables cover the following areas:

1. Communications at workplace
2. Working in a team
3. Planning the activity of a team
4. Diversity of orientation
5. Building relationships
6. Learning and development
7. Creativity
8. Innovation
9. Work commitment
10. Time management
11. Management skills
12. Job knowledge
13. Planning and activity
14. Organising an activity
15. Decision making
16. Health and security
17. Quality assurance
18. Self- development

Consider each of the competences and sub competences carefully and ask your client to select which level of competence they consider best describes their level





of ability. There are 5 levels of competence. Before starting this exercise ensure that you are familiar with these levels:

***Level 0 – the competence is not relevant to the clients experience, they are not at all familiar with it***

***Level 1 – the client is familiar with the competence but does not have any practical experience***

***Level 2 – they have some limited experience in this area, but have very seldom used it practically***

***Level 3 – your client has often used this competence and can reflect on how to use this***

***Level 4 - your client is very familiar with this competence and uses it often and can readily reflect on how to use it.***

In each section of the competence tables, you may add other sub competences not already covered in the list. There may be competences that your client has acquired that are important or useful, and it's vital that these are included in the table. They can be assessed against the 5 levels in the same way as the listed competences.





## Reflection File

In the reflection file, you and your client use the questionnaires provided to describe in detail the skills, knowledge, strengths and weaknesses that have been identified as part of the assessment process. In this part of the process, you will encourage your client to consider and note in their own words how they feel they perform in this area related to all areas of their life.

These questionnaires look at the following life areas:

- Social Activities
- Family Life
- Activities done outside of work work/hobbies
- Voluntary activities
- work

The client should think about each area of their life, and referring to the list of competences ask them to choose 2 or 3 competences from the list, ask them to describe how they can demonstrate these through using concrete situations. The client should complete a reflection for each of the areas described.

The questions are intended to act as a guide to allow the client to reflect on how they have developed in the course of their lives, however they may need additional explanation and examples to draw out the necessary information to fully complete each questionnaire. They need to give firm real life examples from the various areas of life to demonstrate their level of competence. Completion of these questionnaires will form a solid basis for a portfolio which clearly illustrates what they have to offer an employer.



## Portfolio of Evidence

This section is to be completed by the client, reflecting specifically on learning experiences which have been acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

In the **First Table** the client should record the different pieces of evidence that describe their learning experiences.

The instrument contains a series of questions that can be used by the counsellor to help the client to remember and describe their experiences. The table is intended to assist the clients to bring together different pieces of evidence that can be used in the validation process when it is being assessed by an independent evaluator.

The **Second Table** helps the client to record their specific competences and evaluate their own level of competence. Please refer to the notes contained in the instrument for guidance on assessing occupational standards.

## Self Evaluation Report/Case Studies

In this section the client will summarise all their competences and experiences into a narrative self-evaluation report. They will also produce a written case study in a format which tells their story and clearly demonstrates the experiences and competences they have acquired over time.

This section may be a significant challenge for clients with low levels of literacy or with limited experience of producing written pieces of work. Many clients will be daunted by the prospect of this task. Counsellors will need to be prepared to offer intensive support and assistance to clients to accomplish completion of these particular tasks.



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