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Policy Brief WP 4
Stakeholder Map and TCNs' SKC Recognition
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Introduction

This policy brief gathers the main reflections shared in workgroup WP4 following the results of the testing phase, which has highlighted the strengths and problems to be overcome for the development of a shared audit scheme for the recognition of TCN's SKC.

The aspects that will be discussed in this document were also shared during the second international meeting (22 and 23 January 2015) with the other European partners involved. The comparison among the experiences investigated (cross analysis) resulted to be quite complex, given the variety of contexts taken into account, very different in terms of historical, social and economic features and, more specifically, norms and procedures characterizing recognition systems. However, the constant activity of process sharing helped underlining some issues that influence the validation process beyond local features and constraints.

Recommendation

These issues became the final recommendations to Stakeholder and Policy makers in order to get benefits from experiences coming from Diverse project on the topic of recognition and valorization of a common audit scheme around Europe. It works as a guidelines in order to frame policy and practices devoted to the question addressed.

The role of labor market stakeholder

The crucial role of the group of stakeholders is confirmed by all the experiences. Within this network a **particularly important role is plaid by actors representing the labor market**.

The business world is the privileged field in which people can enhance the skills learned in their life path, in a formal or non/informal way. With specific reference to TCNs, the activities of competence validation can therefore become a meeting ground between the enterprises' need for human capital and TCNs' need to integrate into the receiving country's labor market. In particular, companies may be especially interested in having an independent evaluation tool for the recruitment (a phase whose costs and times are becoming an increasing problem for enterprises) and development of human resources. With regard to TCNs, this would help improving the matching between labor supply and demand, valorizing the human capital possessed by migrants beyond the stereotyped representations on their role in the labor market (cfr. cap. 3). Nevertheless. some experiences showed the difficulty of engaging employers within the network of stakeholders. Often they are not aware of the benefits they could derive from the implementation of validation practices or believe that the latter are interesting but too challenging due to their cost and time. The promotion of information among employers and their representative associations might not be sufficient to overcome this problem. A better coordination should be promoted between public policies and the strategies of human resource development implemented by companies'. This could facilitate the synergies between already existing programs and projects, hence improving the canalization of resources and favoring strategies of cost sharing. Moreover, trade unions may be interested in supporting the practices of skills validation as a means for promoting citizens' and foreign workers' rights. In this concern it is meaningful to highlight that not all trade unions, beyond rehetoric, have yet fully included lifelong learning as a crucial element of their policies and strategies, and that often they are not sufficiently aware of the pivotal role of non/informal learning recognition within this new perspective.

The role of formal and non/informal learning

As suggested by the experiences observed, a fruitful route for enhancing the skills acquired non/informally by migrants is their recognition through the assignment of credits valid in the formal learning system. **The contamination between formal (training and updating) and non/informal (expertise gained through work and life experience) learning** is one of the most interesting opportunities for TCNs integration. On the one hand, the formal recognition of competence acquired in non/informal settings can improve people's employability and integration into the labor market. On the other hand, the validation and certification process also becomes an opportunity to enter / re-enter in contact with formal contexts of learning, in order to improve one's skills. This integration between formal and non/informal recognition systems may help limiting the risk of

marginalization for TCNs, by promoting their active participation in the economic and social life of receiving communities.

Sustainability

The issue of **sustainability** is underlined in all the experiences observed. Some existing practices are holistic and adopt a wide and pertinent perspective but they imply long times and high costs. Each stakeholder is in charge for a single part, but no actor can sustain the entire process; and only a small portion of costs can be charged on candidates. Times become longer when, as often happens as an attempt to fulfill comprehensible needs of formalization and standardization, the process is burdened by a complex bureaucracy. The possibility to design an audit scheme combining non /informal recognition practices and formal recognition procedures appears to be a promising way to overcome these problems. As a matter of fact, it creates important synergies able to improve economic sustainability, since it contributes to support the networking among social and economic actors who provide their expertise in the recognition process.

The role of counseling and guidance actions

All the experiences analyzed show that, when dealing with TCNs and more in general with disadvantaged target groups, the major challenge for the entire system: private and public bodies operating in this field is shifting perspective from audit, intended as evaluation of conformity to standards, to counseling, conceived as a form of guidance during the validation process (cfr. par. 4.2). Indeed, any device envisaged for this target group must be focused on the person and should aim to help him/her to transform his/her aspirations and expectations into an achievable plan and in realizable objectives. We are not dealing with an ideological position but with a work method. It is the person who actively participates in the recognition process: the candidate do not receive a service passively. Moreover, it is the person who intentionally envisages a plan and, based on his/her priorities, chooses what to valorize of his/her personal and professional experience, also (but not only) according to the competence which can better fulfill the labor market's requests. Therefore, if, as has already been mentioned, the involvement of the labor market stakeholders can meaningfully contribute to the effectiveness of the device, nevertheless it is necessary to avoid slipping into a demand-side approach, even when the person has an urgent need to find a job. As a matter of fact this kind of approach would not only distort the meaning and aims of the validation process, but would also end up by orienting activities only towards the labor market's needs. The examples analyzed show that when the process is driven only by the demand of employers, and in general of the labor market, the migratory background risks not being taken into account, if it is not pertinent to the needs of the job at issue. In addition, if we consider the usefulness of the migratory background only for inclusion in the labor market, we disregard that some of the skills learned by TCNs can be useful in other fields of social and civic life, such as the voluntary and non-profit sector, cultural mediation, and communication).

For all these reasons our proposal insists on **the importance to implement the counseling action during the whole validation process**, in order to support the increase of self-awareness on the part of candidates.

Professional skills and standard

The comparison among the different European experiences analyzed shows the current absence of a full sharing of **professional standards** of those who should manage the validation process and a common need to develop specific competence necessary to utilize the validation device: the complexity of this audit scheme implies the need to enlarge professional teams, and to improve the latter's skills in team working. A very important role should be assigned to the skills linked to counseling, tutoring and assistance to disadvantaged target groups, who should be helped in identifying and valorizing their competence acquired in non/informal contexts. These role is usually plaid by a counselor, who, nevertheless, should be able on the one side to analyze professions and the functioning of the labor market, and on the other side to help the candidate in collecting and documenting his/her competence, and in preparing assessment examinations. Moreover, with specific reference to the enhancement of the migratory background, counselors should update their skills on new methodologies and tools for the validation of TCNs' non / informal learning. In this direction, in the perspective of lifelong learning, it would be advisable to include the issue of non / informal recognition especially in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Within this framework, ad hoc deepenings on migrants specificities could be envisaged, to promote and improve the methods and instruments able to bring to light and capitalize the potentials, in terms of human capital, contained into the migratory background.

The role of validation process linked to other active labor policy

European guidelines and national legislations on validation of learning converge on the principle of voluntariness of people. Everyone should be able to follow the path of non / informal recognition as one of the possibilities to improve their employability. Nevertheless, the observation of all the national contexts involved sheds light on the fact that the effectiveness of this instrument remains very weak if private bodies (in particular companies) and mostly public institutions do not play an active role in the diffusion and promotion of the validation process. In the absence of this commitment, if validation is considered as a service to be offered to individuals who autonomously make request of it, two main problems will occur: 1) the service will be very expensive, either for public funds or for self-financing; 2) validation practices will not be socially and publicly disseminated, within a context where the knowledge and the perception of the usefulness of validation are still very limited both among people and organizations. Besides, people who could benefit most from these activities are likely to remain excluded in favor of those who are already integrated into the labor market and in society. To avoid these risks, **public services should envisage validation practices as instruments to be included in an integrated strategy towards social and economic inclusion.** As a matter of fact, the comparison among the experiences analyzed highlights that validation instruments can have a meaningful impact on the social and economic inclusion of TCNs only if connected to other services of active labor policy (trainings, guidance, internships) aimed at promoting migrants integration into the regular labor market.

The most effective way for ensuring the link between validation and services of active labor policy strongly depends on each country's legal framework and on the role that in every context is plaid by the main public and private actors. For example, in some countries [ex. Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands] the role of public employment services is very strong and can significantly contribute to the coordination between validation practices and other activities. In other countries (ex., Italy) only a small percentage of job seekers (even smaller among migrants) address to the public employment service and the third sector plays a more active role for the inclusion of TCNs in the

labor market. These diversities must be taken into account in the designing of a validation device and in the planning of its integration within the system of active labor policies.

At a glance: One process and different paths

The field testing highlights the importance of building a flexible validation device, able to adjust to the needs and features of each TCN target group: The validation process should always be customized and start from the identification of skills and the reconstruction of the migratory background. The experiences observed show that a standardize, non flexible validation device tends to penalize migrants with a low level of education and with weak social networks.

Also the overall strategy of competence valorization where to include the device implementation should be planned based on the specific target needs. For TCNs who have just arrived in the receiving country, the recognition of skills learned in a non / informal context should be just one step in a longer process of integration into the formal education system and in the labor market; for TCNs who had a longer experience in the receiving country and are unemployed validation should represent an important instrument for self-promotion and for enhancing their employability. In this case, the validation should be linked to specific programs of training and retraining towards reintegration into the regular labor market; for employed TCNs validation can represent an opportunity for maintaining their level of employment (avoiding the risk of expulsion from the labor market), or for improving their position by participating in professional development programs offered by public institution or, more frequently, by companies, in the perspective of lifelong learning.