

# SUPPORT TO THE LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN GREECE

## Assessing Skills and Work Readiness: Best Practices and Recommendations



**WORLD BANK GROUP**  
Social Protection & Jobs



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# Support to the Labor Market Integration of Refugees In Greece

Assessing Skills and Work Readiness: Best Practices and  
Recommendations

*World Bank Group's  
Social Protection & Jobs Global Practice*

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## Abbreviations

ALMP – Active Labor Market Program

ATP - Applied Training Program

ESTIA - Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Program

EU – European Union

GCR – Greek Council for Refugees

HR – Human Resources

IAP – Individual Action Plan

ICT - Information and Communications Technology

IRC – International Rescue Committee

IT – Information Technology

I.REF.SOS - Innovative Response for the Facilitation of Young Refugees' Social Support Program

KPA2 – OAED's local public employment offices

MIS - Management Information System

MoLSA - Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

OAED - Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization

PES – Public Employment Service

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## Table of Contents

Abbreviations .....	1
Table of Contents .....	2
List of Figures .....	4
List of Boxes .....	4
List of Tables .....	4
Acknowledgments .....	5
Executive Summary.....	6
1. Background.....	10
1.1 Context.....	11
1.2 Success Factors and Trade-offs in Designing Effective Recognition and Validation of Skills and Prior Informal experiences .....	16
2. International and Greek experiences for the Recognition and Validation of Skills and Competencies.....	18
2.1 International experiences and tools.....	18
2.2 The Greek Experience on tools for the Recognition and Validation of Skills and Competencies.....	24
2.3 OAED's Previous Experience .....	26
3. Recommendations.....	28
3.1 Designing the Skills Recognition Tool for OAED.....	29
3.2 Considerations on Digital platform / IT support.....	39
3.3 Going forward .....	40
Bibliography.....	42

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Graph - Asylum and first time asylum applicants - Greece .....	12
Figure 2: Trade-offs in the design of skills recognition tools.....	16
Figure 3: the proposed process of refugee profiling – the position of the recognition of skills and prior learning experience .....	31
Figure 4: Assessment and recognition of skills in 3 areas .....	32
Figure 5: Overview of the proposed counseling process.....	33
Figure 6: the proposed process of refugee profiling – referrals.....	36
Figure 7: Business process for referrals.....	37
Figure 8: Work Plan Scenario 1.....	38
Figure 9: Work Plan Scenario 2.....	39

## List of Boxes

Box 1: Concepts and Definitions .....	15
Box 2: The E-Portfolio .....	27
Box 3: What kind of skills do employers value?.....	30

## List of Tables

Table 1 - Pros and Cons for each Information Management System Option.....	40
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## Executive Summary

**The Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) is planning to launch a pilot in early 2021 with the objective to enhance refugee integration into the Greek labor market.** One of the innovations of the pilot is the introduction of a tool for the recognition of skills and prior experience of refugees. The World Bank is assisting the OAED in the development of such tool, as well as in its implementation.

**The main purpose of this note is to present a proposed *Skills Recognition Tool* and a framework for its roll-out in the context of the aforementioned Pilot.** The deliverable submitted by the World Bank consists of four main documents:

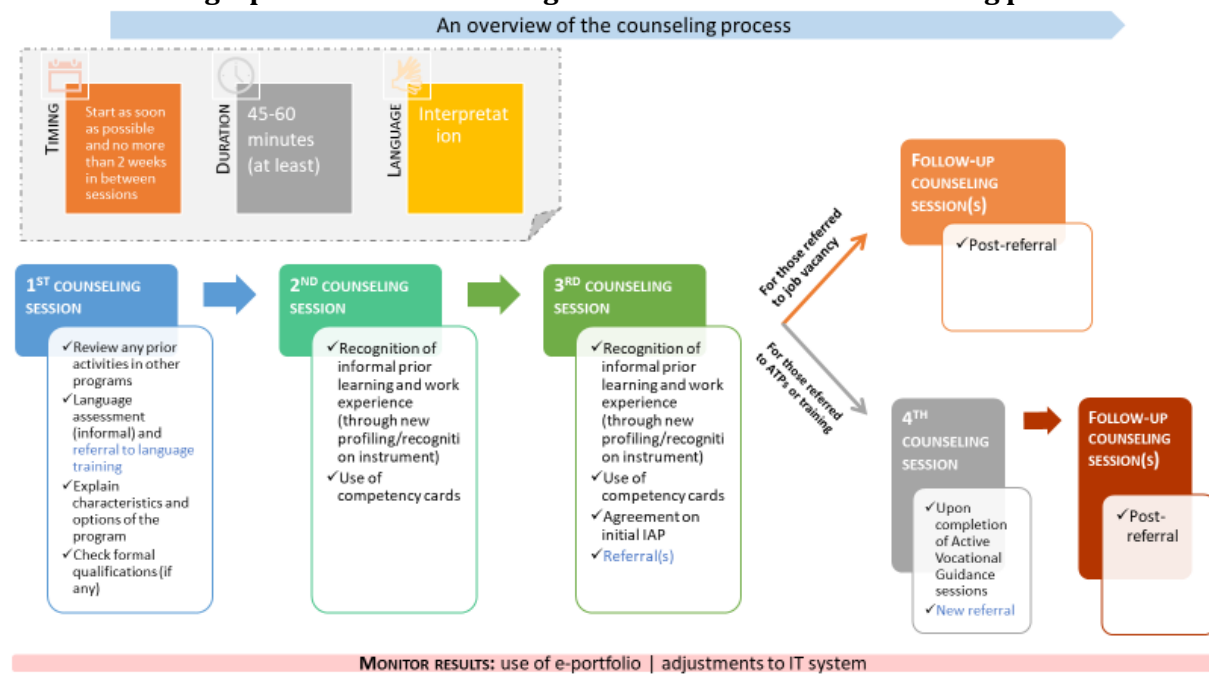
- a) A tool for recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning and experiences. This tool is presented in an Excel format;
- b) An appendix with 6 sections: I) Outline of the Individual Counseling Sessions; II) Information System User Requirements and High-Level Functional Specifications for the Pilot; III) Outline of the Methodological Guide; IV) Main Challenges Faced by Refugees and Public Employment Services in Labor Market Integration; V) Recognition of Formal Qualifications: International Experience and Greek Approach; VI) International Tools Review;
- c) An expanded Individual Action Plan (IAP) to be used by counselors, also presented in Excel format; and
- d) This note, which includes the context and evidence on which the development of the tool was based, technical guidance and methodology on how to apply this tool during the pilot, and technical considerations regarding the development of an IT system for the pilot.

**The proposed tool is in a digital questionnaire format. It was designed to be covered in 3 individual counselling sessions of 45 to 60 minutes and contains the following sections:** 1) Results of previous counselling sessions; 2) Language; 3) Obstacles and Barriers, 4) Education and training, 5) Professional experience, 6) Soft (horizontal) skills, 7) Digital skills, and 8) Driving licenses and other skills.

### **General features of the tool's usage include the following:**

- The *Skills Recognition Tool* should always be completed with the assistance of a counselor.
- A set of 3 appointments plus a subsequent check-in with the job counselor is proposed for those referred to a job vacancy without the need to participate in vocational training or internships.
  - For participants referred to vocational training or internships, 4 appointments would be required: the 3 appointments outlined below, plus a follow-up appointment after the Active Vocational Guidance sessions have finished, in order to make the next referral.
- Counseling should start as soon as possible after the general information session, while allowing OAED's local public employment offices (KPA2s) to maintain a reasonable workload;
- No more than 2 weeks should elapse between counseling appointments;
- Referral to language training should happen during the first session;
- Counselors should mention information on available vacancies in each session with job seekers and should be pro-active in referring a participant to a job vacancy if there is one that fits his/her profile at any point during the counseling process.

The flowchart graphic below shows the general features of the counseling process.



**The first session will focus on:** understanding the participant’s starting point; ensuring that the participant understands the characteristics of the program, and options available; conducting a language assessment and identify first barriers. The corresponding sections in the *Skills Recognition Tool*, to be used in this session, are “Results of previous counselling sessions”, “language skill” and “obstacles and barriers”.

**The primary purpose of the 2nd and 3rd sessions is to apply the other sections of the *Skills Recognition Tool* and document its results.** This will lead to the identification of any qualification or skills in a specific occupation, past learning experiences, digital skills and other interpersonal and soft skills.

**Based on the results, counselors will discuss program activities, agree on an initial IAP and proceed to referrals.** For the development of the IAP, the World Bank has provided a template, annexed to this document, that may be used by the OAED counselors.

**A digital version of the *Skills Recognition tool* is considered crucial to support the whole process and enable the counselor to save time by organizing the information received from the refugee in a structured and user-friendly platform.** The information management system (MIS) options considered in this note to enable the OAED systems to effectively run the proposed tool are:

- An extended/updated version of the E-portfolio platform, developed by the OAED as part of a previous program in support of refugees, complemented by the OAED MIS.
- An extension of the OAED MIS functionality
- The development of an entirely new platform



**For the development of the above recommendations and processes, the World Bank team has taken into account the inputs shared by OAED and DG REFORM, the specificity of the Greek context, as well as relevant international and Greek examples.** Three main lessons emerged from this work:

- 1. There are trade-offs to be considered:** comprehensive, in-depth assessments tend to take longer to be completed, and normally require more resources to be invested. On the other hand, quicker and cheaper options do not provide the full, or in-depth, picture of refugees' skills, and face the risk of being less valued by prospective employers.
- 2. Time is key:** the earlier skills, qualifications and prior experience are assessed, the better. Early integration processes tend to have better results as longer times of inactivity may impose financial, motivational and social burdens on newly arrived refugees.
- 3. Effective recognition relies on coordination:** closely coordinating with employers ensures that recognized prior experiences are relevant to the needs of the labor market and employers; it helps building on the expertise of the private sector in identifying relevant skills and abilities; and lends credibility to the broader recognition process and thus win buy-in from other employers. The cooperation between different public institutions and non-profit organizations is also important, to avoid doubled work and to ensure the effectiveness of the process.

**The experiences reviewed in this note include:**

International experiences (Tools reviewed)	Experiences in Greece (International and nongovernmental organizations)	Greek experiences (by public institutions)
MySkills	United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR)	I.Ref.SoS
My Professional Experience	International Rescue Committee (IRC)	OAED's profiling system
Competence Cards	The Greek Council For Refugees (GCR)	
EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals		
Competence Check		
Language and Qualification Portfolio for Migrants and Refugee		
Skilllab		
Nadine Project		

**Following the submission of this deliverable, it is suggested that the OAED:**

- 1. Reviews and finalizes the proposed questionnaire for the Skills Recognition Tool.** As part of this process, the OAED should consider consulting with staff of agencies/NGOs currently working with refugees to get their inputs on the proposed parameters for this process;
- 2. Sets the requirements for the information system to support the proposed process and instruments.** This will be used as a base to reach a decision between the options considered in the IT systems section;

3. **Develops a methodological guide covering both the counseling process and the tools that will be used by the counselors.** With this guide, counselors will have the necessary information to follow a standardized process for every participant. Along with the methodological guide, a weekly timetable for the counseling sessions could be useful.

## 1. Background

**The Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) is planning to launch a pilot in early 2021 with the objective to enhance refugee<sup>1</sup> employment.** This pilot aims to provide support for the integration of refugees into the Greek society, mainly through labor market integration, thus providing them with the necessary tools in their path towards self-sufficiency. The OAED's initiative seeks to place approximately 1,000 recognized refugees in jobs in the Attica and Central Macedonia regions. The planned program is expected to lay the basis for mainstreaming interventions for refugees into the ongoing active labor market program (ALMP) reform that is currently underway by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and the OAED.

**The OAED and employment counselors have an important role to play in making the skills and work experience of refugees “visible” to future employers.** This is critically important to improve their chances to access quality jobs for which they are suited. In that sense, the core principles of this pilot<sup>2</sup> include two points that will be covered in this note: 1) the implementation of skill assessments, building on available tools and taking into account lessons learned from similar programs; and 2) the provision of culturally sensitive counselling and development of an Individual Action Plan that takes into account the beneficiaries' individual characteristics and needs. The pilot aims to leverage mechanisms and tools, both from Greek and from other countries, that have been previously tested and worked well to identify the professional background as well as the skills of the beneficiaries.

**The international and Greek examples presented in this note illustrate a wide range of tools and approaches to recognize and validate refugee skills and prior work experience.** Based on these examples and taking into account the Greek context, this note suggests a pragmatic approach for the recognition of refugee skills that OAED can consider for the soon-to-be-launched refugee pilot. The recommendations build on the procedures currently in place to profile jobseekers registered as unemployed with OAED and are adjusted to better meet the needs of refugees, taking into account the tools developed and the lessons learned from the program Innovative Response for the Facilitation of Young Refugees' Social Support Program (I.Ref.SOS).<sup>3</sup> Specific features of the proposal also incorporate lessons from other international and Greek experiences.

**The document is structured as follows:** Section 1 gives the relevant background for context, focusing on the obstacles faced in the process of recognition of prior experiences by public employment services (PES) and by refugees. This section also summarizes the main lessons from

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<sup>1</sup> According to the EU Commission, a refugee is a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail herself or himself of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it. The recognition by a Member State of a third-country national or a stateless person as a refugee is defined as refugee status. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/glossary\\_search/refugee\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/refugee_en)

<sup>2</sup> The core principles are: a) strong focus on outcomes; b) early engagement with the private sector; c) development of training programs together with companies and based on skills needs; d) development of a concrete outreach plan; e) implementation of skill assessments building on available tools and taking into account lessons learned from similar programs; f) provision of culturally sensitive counselling and development of an Individual Action Plan that takes into account the beneficiaries' individual characteristics and needs; and g) provision of complementary training (Greek language, cultural orientation, soft skills) and of post-program support/counselling.

<sup>3</sup> A former pilot program led by OAED in partnership with other national and international stakeholders targeted young refugees and asylum seekers aged 16-24.

the literature regarding success factors in the design of skills and prior experiences recognition tools. Section 2 presents and analyzes selected tools used in European countries and in Greece to surpass these obstacles and effectively recognize refugee's prior experiences. Section 3 builds on these lessons learned and presents recommendations for an integrated approach to counselling and skills recognition within the pilot envisioned by the OAED. The appendix, presented on a separate document, contains 6 sections: I) an outline of the individual counseling sessions, as proposed in section 3; II) system user requirements and high-level functional specifications for the IT system development, as proposed in section 3; III) the proposed outline for the methodological guide to be developed; IV) an extended commentary on the main challenges faced by refugees and public employment services in the labor market integration process; V) an additional section on the recognition of formal qualifications; and VI) an extended review on the international tools presented on section 2.

**Together with the material presented in this document, the World Bank has developed a draft for the tool of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning that the OAED could consider for the upcoming refugee pilot.**<sup>4</sup> The tool is presented in a separate excel file, as annex, and is accompanied by an outline of a methodological manual (Appendix III) that counselors could use as a guide for the counselling sessions. An expanded individual action plan (IAP) is also presented in annex to this document, in excel format.

## 1.1 Context

**As one of the primary points of arrival and entry into the EU, Greece has recently experienced a significant increase of migration inflows, especially of asylum seekers and refugees.** More than 1 million migrants and asylum seekers entered the EU through Greece in 2015 and 2016. After the EU-Turkey Statement<sup>5</sup> entered into force at the end of March 2016, it was estimated that more than 60,000 migrants and asylum seekers remained in Greece. During the period 2017-2019, Greece received over 200,000 asylum applications with applicants mainly coming from Syria (25%), Afghanistan (19%) and Pakistan (11%).<sup>6</sup> During the same period, Greece granted international protection status (refugee and subsidiary protection status) to approximately 43,000 applicants.

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<sup>4</sup> See Table 1 for the definitions of 'recognition', 'informal' and 'non-formal learning'.

<sup>5</sup> Cooperation agreement between the European Union and Turkey regarding the crossing of refugees and migrants from Turkey to EU member countries.

<sup>6</sup> Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Asylum Service, January 2020

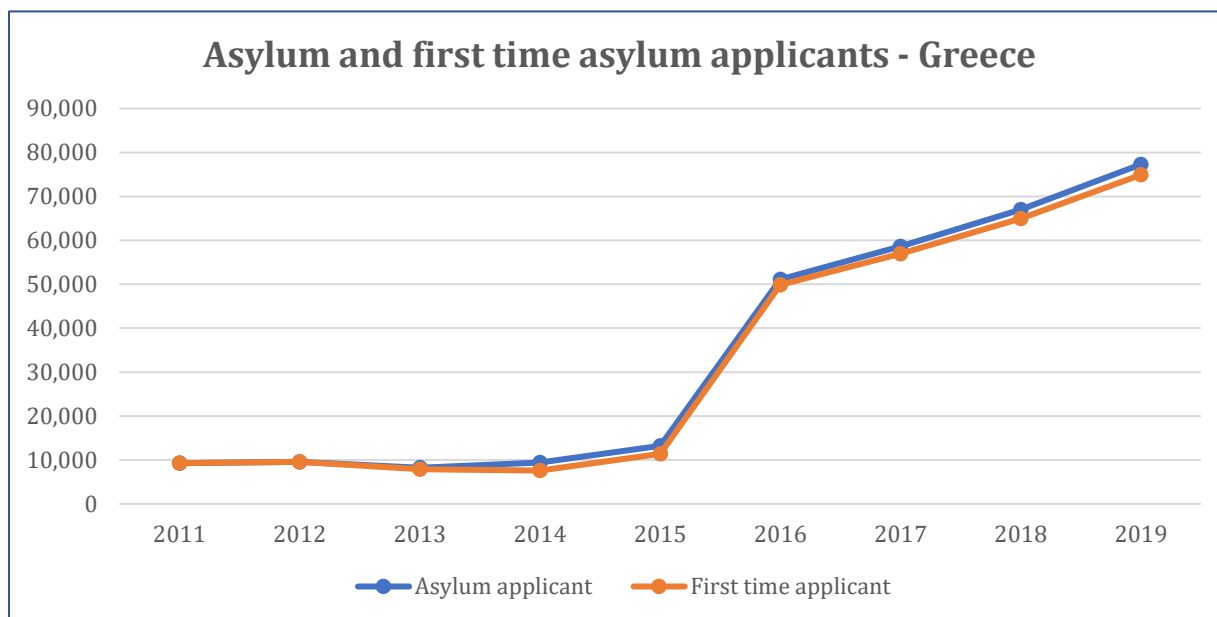


Figure 1: Graph - Asylum and first time asylum applicants - Greece  
Source: Eurostat, 2020.

**Refugees and asylum seekers in Greece have low educational attainment levels.** According to the World Bank's Asylum Seekers' Survey (EASS 2017),<sup>7</sup> approximately 70% of the participants had either no formal education or primary education only. Males have higher participation rates in all education levels and have a lower no education percentage than females. According to data from the OAED's registry, 78% of those registered have either no formal education or the level of education is not specified. 11% have primary education level. Primary and secondary education levels appear to be slightly higher among individuals who belong to the 30-44 age group. Furthermore, several ad hoc surveys conducted among beneficiaries of the two main programs currently running in Greece, namely ESTIA (UNHCR)<sup>8</sup> and HELIOS (IOM)<sup>9</sup>, indicate that about 60% of the respondents have lower education levels (primary, incomplete primary, incomplete secondary or none). In contrast, approximately 20% of them have completed secondary education.

**Considerable evidence<sup>10</sup> have shown that integration of refugees into the labor market is an important step in their integration process. However, the limited evidence available to prospective employers to determine refugees' skills and abilities is an important challenge that refugees face on their way to the labor market.** While job seekers may know their own abilities, hiring firms typically do not. This is particularly true for harder-to-observe skills and abilities including socio-emotional and interpersonal skills. To overcome this challenge, job

<sup>7</sup> A quantitative asylum-seeker survey conducted between January and May 2017 in Italy and Greece. It collected information from a random sample of adults in asylum centers on (1) basic demographic and socioeconomic characteristics; (2) the migration experience; and (3) respondents' plans and aspirations.

<sup>8</sup> Since 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in cooperation with the Government of Greece (GoG) and municipalities has been running the 'Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation' (ESTIA) program, which is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the EU. The ESTIA program helps vulnerable asylum seekers and their families live in urban accommodations.

<sup>9</sup> The program HELIOS operating under the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, focuses on the stage following reception, i.e. integration at local level. HELIOS is implemented by the IOM and several partners and is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the EU

<sup>10</sup> Bertelsmann Foundation, 2016.

seekers need to credibly demonstrate – or “signal” – their skills and abilities to prospective employers. Refugees may find it more difficult than Greek job seekers to provide such signals to prospective employers, even if they have desirable education, qualifications, skills, and abilities. Refugees may not have relevant certificates or degrees from their home countries with them and prospective employers might not know how to interpret certificates or degrees from other countries. Furthermore, it may be impossible for prospective employers to contact previous employers for references, and skills and abilities might have been obtained in informal or non-formal ways that are not common in Greece. The most common challenges for refugees are then the lack of usual evidence and potentially a language barrier that inhibits the articulation of skills (Appendix IV presents more details on the main challenges faced by refugees; Appendix V discusses formal credentials in the Greek context).

**As a result of their challenges in accessing the host labor market, evidence from around the world suggests that migrants frequently take jobs that are a poor fit for their qualifications, skills, and abilities.** Migrants frequently “downgrade” their occupations and end up in jobs that earn much less than the jobs that they would be qualified to do.<sup>11</sup> This “occupational downgrading” can lead to frustration and discouragement, including adverse mental health impacts.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, if faced with the impossibility of joining the labor market formally, refugees may recur to the informal sector, where they are often subject to precarious work conditions, further exposing their vulnerabilities.<sup>13</sup> Refugees may thus need special support to find jobs that are appropriate for their qualifications, skills, and abilities.

**Evidence from Germany and other European countries suggests that recognizing qualifications and validating informal and non-formal skills and abilities is critically important.**<sup>14</sup> Data for immigrants to Germany shows large gains in formal employment and earnings as a result of occupational recognition. After three years, fully recognizing foreign qualifications raises employment rates by almost a quarter and hourly wages by almost a fifth relative to immigrants who did not have their qualifications recognized.<sup>15</sup>

**Reflecting the importance of qualification recognition and skills validation, the European Commission (EC) has worked with Member States to put in place appropriate procedures and processes.** The “Professional Qualifications Directive” (2005/36/EC) governs the recognition of formal qualifications and applies to all EU citizens and third-country nationals including refugees. In December 2012, the Council of the EU also adopted a “Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning” (2012/C 398/01), defining validation as “a process of confirmation by an authorized body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard”. It calls for the Member States to place appropriate arrangements enabling validation of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired via non-formal and informal learning.

**In this context, public employment services and other actors across the EU have developed a range of tools and approaches to support recognition and validation process for refugees.** Two broad kinds of recognition and validation exercises can be distinguished:

- **The recognition of *formal* foreign qualifications such as vocational training, tertiary degrees, and other *formal* education;**

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<sup>11</sup> Dustmann, Frattini, and Preston 2013; King and Lulle 2016; Mattoo, Neagu, and Özden 2008; Migrations between Africa and Europe 2013; Friedberg 2001

<sup>12</sup> Crollard, de Castro, and Tsai 2012

<sup>13</sup> Bertelsmann Foundation, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Martin et al. 2016

<sup>15</sup> Brücker et al. 2020

- **The recognition of other prior learnings and experiences by validating *informal and non-formal* skills and competencies including socio-emotional and interpersonal skills.**<sup>16</sup>

Given the low-education background of refugees at the time arriving in Greece and since the OAED does not envision at present to provide training leading to jobs that require professional certifications, this note will focus on the **recognition and validation of prior *informal experiences*** (see Box 1 on definitions). Although formal recognition is not the main subject of this note, subsection V of the appendix briefly presents international best practices and the Greek experience in the recognition of formal qualifications.

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<sup>16</sup> Konle-Seidl, 2017

## Box 2: Defining the main terms

This document uses the definitions of “recognition”, “validation”, “informal” and “non-formal” experiences, in accordance with the European Union Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01). According to the document, the terms are defined as it follows:

- **Formal learning** means learning which takes place in an organized and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education;
- **Non-formal learning** means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programs to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organized by civil society organizations for their members, their target group or the general public;
- **Informal learning** means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child);
- **Recognition of prior learning** means the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.
- **Validation** means a process of confirmation by an authorized body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:
  1. **Identification** - Validation starts with the identification of knowledge, skills and competence acquired, through dialogue with the candidate. In the identification phase, it becomes clear what the reference standard is of the validation process.
  2. **Documentation** - In the documentation phase, the candidate makes the identified knowledge, skills and competences visible. The candidate provides evidence of the acquired learning outcomes based on the reference standard.
  3. **Assessment** - An authorized body assesses the evidence that the candidate has provided in the documentation phase and compares it with the reference standard. Assessment can take many different forms.
  4. **Certification** - An authorized body certifies the results of the assessment. The



## 1.2 Success Factors and Trade-offs in Designing Effective Recognition and Validation of Skills and Prior Informal experiences

Countries, organizations and institutions have creatively designed new tools and processes to address the growing need for recognition and validation of prior informal experiences. In the design and operationalization of an effective recognition and validation process, the experience from PES across the EU suggests three clear success factors:

1. There are trade-offs to be considered in the design or recognition procedures
2. Time is key
3. Effective recognition relies on coordination

**1. The first lesson drawn from the international experiences observed is that there are clear tradeoffs that must be considered in the design of recognition procedures.** Comprehensive, in-depth assessments usually require long and repeated meetings with counselors, the development of adequate material, potential investment in IT equipment and physical space, and partnerships and coordination with several stakeholders. The main benefits they offer are to provide a good picture of refugees' skills and to be typically more valued by prospective employers. In addition, they are potentially more useful to employment counselors to inform referrals. The practical assessment of occupational skills tends to be more time-consuming than for other skills, as it requires specialized evaluation for each different profession. On the other hand, less comprehensive assessments require fewer resources, are faster, do not require extensive and intensive coordination among stakeholders, and can easily be implemented. The drawbacks are that they do not provide the full, or in-depth, picture of refugees' skills, and are typically less valued by prospective employers.

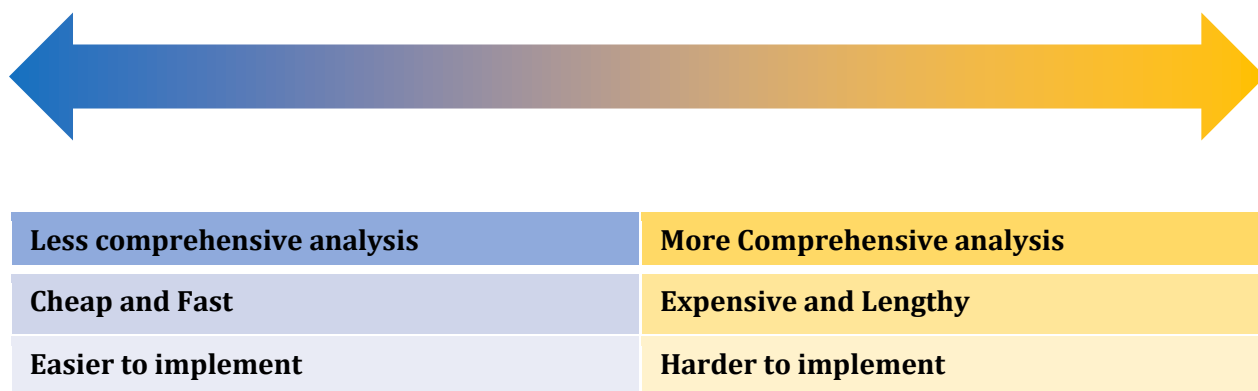


Figure 2: Trade-offs in the design of skills recognition tools

**Technology can help to bridge this gap.** For the assessment and validation of informal and non-formal skills and competencies, the trade-off between time and complexity, and the value of the assessment, is alleviated by a new set of technological, easy-to-implement tools. Such tools may assist PES counselors in effectively assessing prior skills in a relatively short amount of time. These include:

- IT-based and gamified testing of vocational skills, video and image-based skills identification and self-assessment techniques;
- Learning programs based on practical cases and examples;
- Self-assessment tests with the help of online guides, chatbots, or individualized approaches by practical testing.

These tools tend to prioritize pragmatic approaches, often with the help of technology, over comprehensiveness. They also tend to use multilingual materials, including visual aids that do not rely on complex language.

**2. Identifying, mapping, and assessing skills early is critical.** Doing this process early on enables PES counselors to refer refugees to integration programs that are appropriate for their particular situation (e.g. apprenticeship, language courses, occupation- or vocation-specific technical trainings etc.). An early assessment of skills not only helps PES counselors to better tailor their services but can also inform refugees about their own skills and abilities and their fit within the Greek labor market. For the integration of refugees, conducting early skill assessments may imply that they should be available also to asylum seekers, i.e. before a decision on recognizing refugee status is taken. This would ensure that individuals can be referred as soon as they are eligible for programs or work, thus reducing their time in inactivity. However, currently only refugees may register at the OAED. In this specific case, acting early would mean registering and treating refugees as soon as possible after their refugee legal status has been accepted.

**The examples of Finland, Germany, and Sweden offer various illustrations of early skill assessments:**<sup>17</sup>

**In Finland**, a quick skill and background survey is implemented in reception centers so that triage for further programs can take place very early. The results from these surveys and local labor market needs are also considered in the assignment of a settlement area. After permanent residency status is granted, refugees can then complete a more thorough skill assessment with the Finnish PES.

**In Germany**, asylum seekers that are categorized upon arrival as having better prospects of staying in the country are given access to the PES services, including skill identification and mapping.

**In Sweden**, comprehensive skill assessments through the PES are only available for refugees, not asylum seekers. Asylum seekers can, however, use the PES-managed internet platform "Jobskills.se" from the moment they arrive in Sweden. Ultimately, asylum seekers may use the tool to find employment even before being granted refugee status.

**In Greece**, several NGOs support refugees, through their employment services, in the recognition of their skills and validation of their qualifications. At the NGOs Greek Council for Refugees, International Rescue Committee, and SolidarityNOW, recognition of prior experience takes place very early during the counseling process. In **GCR**, starting in the first session, the counselor fills out a form with information on educational level, work experience (country of origin, intermediate stations, host country), professional training and skills. At the **IRC**, also at the very beginning (first counseling session), the counselor works with the refugee on describing his prior experience concerning work, language and digital skills. At **SolidarityNOW**, the counselors work with refugees from the beginning of the process to assess the language level, based on how efficiently they interact.

**3. Effective Recognition Procedures Rely on Coordination and Cooperation between public and private sectors.** Another key factor for effective recognition procedures that emerges from the experience of other EU Member States is to ensure a close collaboration and coordination with employers, employer organizations, and other stakeholders including various government agencies. Closely coordinating with employers is important for at least three reasons:

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<sup>17</sup> European Commission 2017

- To ensure that recognized prior experiences are relevant to the needs of the labor market and employers;
- To build on the expertise of the private sector in identifying relevant skills and abilities; and
- To lend credibility to the broader recognition process and thus win buy-in from other employers.

**Besides the close coordination with the private sector, the cooperation between different public institutions and non-profit organizations is also important.** Sometimes refugees go through three or more rounds of prior experience recognition (e.g. one with UN agencies, one with local NGOs and then one with the PES). To avoid this double, or even triple, work, it is important that these processes, such as language education, informal skills recognition, validation and any other interventions are well documented and transmitted among the different actors.

**Internally, it is equally important to have public bodies coordinating national policies, with local interventions and streamlining integration measures.** Scattered and uncoordinated government recognition procedures can undermine cooperation with the private sector. The international experience suggests several approaches that may improve coordination and engagement in the recognition of prior experiences. For example, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have recently made efforts to streamline their integration policies.<sup>18</sup>

**In that sense, evidence suggests that effective coordination on recognition and validation of prior skills and experiences will rely on:**

- **Organized communication between relevant actors;**
- **A clear division of roles, shared objectives and expected outcomes; and**
- **Agreements on data sharing and/or one-point reception centers to close coordination gaps.**<sup>19</sup>

## 2. International and Greek experiences for the Recognition and Validation of Skills and Competencies

**This section presents tools and case studies from countries across Europe as well as the experience of various organizations in Greece.** A brief overview of these tools and the main takeaways from each is presented. It also introduces OAEDs previous experience with refugees from previous pilot programs.

### 2.1 International experiences and tools

**Organizations, both private and public, from various EU Member States have developed innovative tools to facilitate the recognition and validation of skills and competencies.** As explained above, the processes of recognition and validation of informal and non-formal prior learning and experiences are relatively new. Private and public institutions have started developing in the past 15 years creative approaches and mechanisms to try to deal with these new challenges related to the integration of refugees into the labor market. Some approaches focus on the recognition and documentation of existing skills, i.e. making skills visible;<sup>20</sup> some others focus on the validation of professional skills;<sup>21</sup> while some other focus on assisting on the counselling

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<sup>18</sup> EU Commission, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> EU Commission, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> For example the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals, Skilllab and My Professional Experience

<sup>21</sup> For example the Competence Check

sessions for refugees.<sup>22</sup> The main objective of this sub-section is to review some of these different approaches and what are their strengths and limitations.

**The tools presented below have been rolled out in European countries, often successfully, and present at least one of the features mentioned below.** Such positive features may guide the design of the new tool, namely: easy implementation, cost-effectiveness, easily scalable models. The tools presented in this section are:

- 1) MySkills
- 2) My Professional Experience
- 3) Competence Cards
- 4) EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals
- 5) Competence Check
- 6) Language and Qualification Portfolio for Migrants and Refugee
- 7) Skilllab
- 8) Nadine Project

### 1) MySkills

Name	MySkills
Country/Institution	Germany - Bertelsmann institute
Objective	Verify previous professional experience
Involvement of counselors	Counselors are mainly involved in the process before and after the assessment through the tool takes place
Approximate length	3-4 hours
Pros	Not too long, easy to understand, significantly comprehensive
Cons	Requires high initial investment on technology and depends on some degree of counselor assistance

**In Germany, the Bertelsmann Stiftung – a large private foundation – has developed three pragmatic tools to support the recognition of informally acquired competencies: MySkills, My Professional Experience, and Competency Cards.** The first one, MySkills, is computer-based and aims to provide reliable evidence on professional experience in 30 occupations. The tool requires refugees to complete a test of around 120 job-related questions based on videos and images that illustrate typical practical situations. Test takers are given tasks similar to those on the job and it takes from three to four hours to complete the exam. The test results are then automatically generated, and readily available for PES counselors to discuss with refugees. The tools are currently available in six languages: German, English, Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Turkish.

**MySkills is a very good example of a middle-ground between a tool that might be too simple, therefore lack reliability, and a tool that might be too complex, hard to implement.** It is computer-based but counts on the assistance of a counselor; it takes a few hours to complete. The 120 job-related questions are designed to give a comprehensive view of the refugee's capacities regarding a profession; and the outcome is clear enough to be directly annexed to a CV and understood by employers. The initial capital expenditure to develop such a tool is higher than in other models, but since it would be a replicable computer-based tool, the average costs would reduce over time.

### 2) My Professional Experience

Name	My Professional Experience
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<sup>22</sup> For example Competence Cards and the Language and Qualification Portfolio for Migrants and Refugees

<b>Country/Institution</b>	Germany - Bertelsmann institute
<b>Objective</b>	Self-assessment of professional experience
<b>Involvement of counselors</b>	Low or no involvement - on-line tool
<b>Approximate length</b>	5-20 minutes
<b>Pros</b>	Pragmatic, quick, free and self-assessment possible
<b>Cons</b>	Relatively superficial assessment

**My Professional Experience, in contrast with MySkills, is a quicker and simpler tool.** The tool is based on a freely accessible website through which tests can be completed in a self-guided manner. It consists of an on-line test comprising 20 to 40 images depicting day-to-day activities in the chosen profession, followed by the question “How often have you done this?”. There are four possible answers: Never (zero times), Not often (1 to 9 times), Often (10 to 49 times) or Very often (50+ times). The assessment usually takes only a few minutes to be completed and is currently available for 30 occupations. The output of this questionnaire is a summary graph of experiences. These results are then immediately available and can be downloaded, printed, or sent by email. The website is available in six languages: German, English, Russian, Farsi, Arabic and Turkish.

**My professional experience is a very pragmatic tool that does not assess in depth the existing skills but has very low operational costs and can be very quickly applied.** Its purpose in the integration process would be different than the Myskills, for example. My Professional Experience is intended to be a complementary tool, that will give the counselor some quick insights on the refugee’s familiarity with a job before resuming (or even starting) the counseling process. As an example of usage, the self-assessment could be requested to refugees before the start of the counselling sessions, in order to generate an overview that could be used by caseworkers during the counselling.

### 3) Competence Cards

Name	Competence Cards
<b>Country/Institution</b>	Germany - Bertelsmann institute
<b>Objective</b>	Facilitate counselling sessions and communication
<b>Involvement of counselors</b>	The tool is supposed to be used during counselling sessions and is dependent on high involvement of counselors
<b>Approximate length</b>	Varies according to usage
<b>Pros</b>	Flexible, cheap and easy to implement
<b>Cons</b>	Highly dependent on caseworkers

**The third Bertelsmann tool is the Competence Cards, which were developed to provide employment counselors with a flexible and modular tool to identify, explore, and discuss social, personal, and methodological skills of refugee job seekers.** The tool is based on 46 cards, depicting social, personal, and technical/methodological skills. The cards contain descriptions in very simple language, a visualization and translations. Additionally to those 3 categories, there are also 11 cards on “interests”, which may be used beyond skills identification, for example, for applications, writing a CV, motivating or orienting the client. There are also 3 cards with the symbols “+”, “++” and “+++”, that can be used to assess the levels of familiarity, skills and interest. Competence Cards are available for free download in the website of Bertelsmann in eight languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish and Tigrinya.

**Competence cards are very flexible, cheap and easy to implement, but are highly dependent on caseworkers.** Implementing a system solely based on competence cards could be challenging due to a lack of standardization and material to assess specific job-related capabilities. However,

the tool can undoubtedly be used as a complementary tool to facilitate counselling sessions flow and communication. Cards may be shown, for example, to assist caseworkers in reviewing soft skills or personal and professional interests.

#### 4) EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals

Name	EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals
Country/Institution	European Union overall
Objective	To create a comprehensive CV-like profile mapping out the skills profile, qualifications, and work experience of refugees
Involvement of counselors	Counselors may use the tool to record the outcomes of sessions or it may be used by the client alone, depending on the usage made by the PES.
Approximate length	2-5 hours, directly or in several sessions, depending on customization
Pros	Highly adaptable and free of charge
Cons	Complicated to use and not meant to be a tool for recognition, but rather documentation

**Recognizing the need for a flexible, refugee-focused skills profiling tool across EU Member States, the European Commission has developed the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals.** It is a computer-based tool that can be completed online or offline, for use by PES and other labor market intermediaries. The tool is composed of several questions that refugees will respond to, creating a resume-like form that maps skills, qualifications, formal education, informal training and work experiences. It intends to create a comprehensive profile mapping out the skills profile, qualifications, and work experience of refugees in a way that is understood across the European Union countries. It can be accessed from most devices such as desktop or laptop computers, mobiles or tablets and is available in all EU official languages (apart from Gaelic) and in Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Somali, Sorani, Tigrinya and Turkish.

**The tool is not meant to be a tool for recognition of skills, per se. However, it can be a powerful ally in the process.** The tool is highly adaptable to different contexts and systems. Therefore, some features of it, such as the design or some questions can be used for inspiration or be integrated in the tool to be developed.

#### 5) Competence Check

Name	Competence Check
Country/Institution	Austrian PES
Objective	Assess and recognize existing professional skills, languages and qualifications of refugees
Involvement of counselors	The tool is highly dependent on intense counselling sessions
Approximate length	5-7 weeks
Pros	It is very comprehensive and has good acceptance in the labor market
Cons	Time consuming and requires high human capital and financial investments

**In Austria, the PES developed Competence Check to recognize and assess existing skills, languages and qualifications of refugees and help deciding on further intervention measures.** The Competence Check takes about 5 to 7 weeks to be completed, during which, each participant has one hour of one-on-one biographical interviewing/conversations and ten hours of workshops each week. During the one-on-one sessions, the refugee will be inquired about its qualification, while in the workshops, they will receive useful information on the Austria labor

market, education system, and social protection system. If the participant demonstrates to have significant prior experience in any area, he/she might be sent to other specialized institutions that are able to check their practical and work skills. It is offered in the mother tongue of the refugees involved (Farsi/Dari, Arabic, Russian, and French) and in German for those with sufficient German language skills.

**Competence check Austria is the most complex method discussed in this note.** It is harder to replicate due to the high dependence on human resources. The tool depends on very intense counselling and on the specialized assessment of professionals and institutions from a particular profession, leading to formal recognition. However, it is also the most complete tool reviewed on terms of recognition and validation. The results from available surveys show that this method had a very good acceptance by the labor market in Austria. Although it may not be possible to replicate it in the short term, it is possible to learn from it and improve existing procedures using this model as a guide for the long-term.

## 6) Language and Qualification Portfolio for Migrants and Refugees

Name	Language and Qualification Portfolio for Migrants and Refugees
Country/Institution	Austrian NGO
Objective	Assist the caseworker in conducting relevant and impactful counselling sessions
Involvement of counselors	The tool is highly dependent on intense counselling sessions
Approximate length	Varies according to usage
Pros	Available for free, it is comprehensive and very easy to implement
Cons	Time consuming and highly dependent on caseworkers

**The Language and Qualification Portfolio for Migrants and Refugees was developed in 2005 by the Austrian Integrationhaus project.** The tool is aimed at assisting the caseworker to conduct the sessions by means of reflection and self-assessment. The tool is a workbook of approximately 60 pages, providing a myriad questions and exercises that might assist in the process of drawing a comprehensive picture of the client's professional and personal profile. The workbook also provides food for thought strategies to achieving professional and academic goals. It is currently available in Arabic, BCMS (Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian), English, French, German, Persian, Russian and Turkish.

**The Language and Qualification Portfolio is available for free, it is comprehensive and very easy to implement.** The workbook can be used in its entirety to guide and give a more standardized format to counselling sessions. Inversely, its parts can be used to organize specific segments of the counselling only, or as an inspiration in content or format to develop a tool that is more sensible to the local needs.

## 7) Skilllab

Name	Skilllab
Country/Institution	Netherlands startup
Objective	To use technological features to ease and accelerate the process of skills recognition and job placement
Involvement of counselors	Counselors may follow the process but do not need to be heavily involved. Counselors will mainly use the tool outcomes
Approximate length	A few hours
Pros	User friendly, easily deployable and scalable
Cons	Less customizable than comparable tools and more costly

**SkillLab is a mobile app, developed in 2019 by a company of the same name, aiming to use technology to ease the skills recognition process.** The app provides three main features: a profile to be filled with personal information, education and past experience; a skills assessment tool; and a skills-profile match with existing occupations in the European labor market. The skills assessment tool identifies a list of possible skills that were acquired during the reported previous experiences. The assessment is based on a questionnaire that will ask about if, and how often the user has used that skill during that experience. This will be repeated for each skill mapped, and based on the answers, the app will find and rank the most suitable occupations existing in the European labor market that match the user's existing skills. The user may then browse these occupations and see how many of the necessary skills he/she already has and which ones they don't, offering space for learning opportunities. The caseworker may also see the progression and results of the user. The app also allows for results to be exported in a resume template. Skilllab is currently available in 27 languages including the main languages from European countries and from the main destinations of refugees.

**The tool is very user friendly and allows for completion in about an hour.** Because counselors do not spend time on interviewing and CV building, they can spend more time with personalized advice. Caseworkers may directly suggest and offer applications to appropriate jobs and vacancies based on the tool outcomes. It is quick to deploy, with proven scalable software. **On the other hand**, the app is significantly less customized than comparable computer-based tools, such as MySkills, so the resulting assessment is more superficial. In addition, the tool is relatively costly, as it is developed by a private company and must be bought for usage.

## 8) Nadine Project

Name	Nadine Project
Country/Institution	Project funded under the EU Horizon 2020 program <sup>23</sup>
Objective	To use data and digital features to monitor, evaluate and improve the process of integration of migrants into the labor market
Involvement of counselors	Varies according to the use of the platform. Generally speaking, it may reduce the involvement of counselors in some parts of the process
Approximate length	Varies according to use
Pros	The platform, as it is intended, has a great potential of increasing labor market integration of migrants through better access to information.
Cons	Since the project is still in its initial phases, many of the features remain unclear on how specifically they would work.

**The Nadine project consists of a digital platform with multiple functionalities aiming at facilitating the integration services offered by PES to migrants.** The system uses open data from companies, local market and job postings and collects data on migrants and local services to assess: migrant labor supply and demand, available services to migrants, training needs and skills matching (migrants' skills identified through the app's assessments vs. required skills for job postings). The platform also offers standardized psychometric tests, skills assessment games, chat-bots, among other tools for migrants, policy makers and local host institutions. The skills assessed include languages and literacy skills, numeracy skills, ICT skills, technical-manual skills,

<sup>23</sup> The project development is coordinated by Script & Go, a French private company, but involves a consortium of 12 other participants among which technology companies and universities from across Europe. The full project funding details are available at: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/822601>



entrepreneurial skills, organizational skills, cognitive/analytical skills and personal skills. The project is still in its pilot phase.

**The Nadine Project uses multiple digital features to improve PES and migrants' experiences.** The project is one of the few experiences reviewed that is building a database from information gathered both from clients and service providers to improve the labor market integration processes. The project is also innovative in the sense that it assembles digital tools for every step of this process, namely: career guidance, profile builder, skills assessment, social services, peer-to-peer support, education and training, and communication with local authorities.

## 2.2 The Greek Experience on tools for the Recognition and Validation of Skills and Competencies

**Organizations, non-governmental or multilateral, that hold a stake in labor market integration of refugees, are also developing their own processes for recognition and validation of skills and competencies.** The review that follows shows examples of NGOs and international organizations currently active in Greece and what is their method of choice to face the very diverse challenges posed in this context.

### Experiences presented in this section:

- 1) United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR)
- 2) International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- 3) The Greek Council For Refugees (GCR)

#### 1) United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR)

Organization	UNHCR
Program	Employment consulting and work integration in Crete
Objective	To assess communication skills, overall skills and competencies and previous work experiences
Involvement of counselors	Counselors are deeply involved in the process
Approximate length	4-5 weeks
Pros	Combines caseworker-based tool with a computer-based tool; acting early; and having interpreters present for the session
Cons	Largely depends on caseworkers' availability

**The UNHCR in Greece has developed a pilot for assessment of prior experiences that includes at least five counselling sessions.** During these sessions, the counselor assesses the individual's skills, professional background and experiences by using the following tools: 1) A Complete Assessment Tool, consisting of a questionnaire with rating from 1 [feeling at risk] to 5 [feeling very secure] at the first two sessions and covering the following areas: Language Skills Assessment; Ability for Employability; other general socio-economic and health related questions. 2) EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals during 2nd session. The counselors conduct these sessions with the support of an interpreter. Furthermore, the UNHCR's employment integration in Crete targets asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection who are also beneficiaries of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation program (ESTIA).

**UNHCR mainly targets asylum seekers in line with the international best practice of acting early in the labor market integration process.** Another positive feature of this program is the combination of a caseworker-based assessment tool for skills recognition with the computer-

based EU Skills Profile Tool to record the outcomes. As a result of this, the program benefits from the strengths of two different, but complementary, tools.

## 2) International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Name	IRC Hellas
Program/action	Career Counseling Services and main partner of “Curing the Limbo” program of Municipality of Athens.
Objective	Counseling and training services for the labor market integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and vulnerable population in Athens.
Involvement of counselors	High involvement of counselors in individual sessions, Job Readiness workshops and Business training
Approximate length	5-8 weeks
Pros	Quality-assurance and evidenced-based programming through an effective monitoring system; presence of interpreter during activities; and job interview preparation.
Cons	High level of engagement of Job Counselors in the assessment processes;

**The IRC is tackling the issue of recognition by using an internally developed tool for skill mapping, based on the EU Skills profile tool and expanded accordingly, in the format of an excel file.** The tool includes categories of selected questions on demographics, professional background and educational experience. For the process, each participant benefits from 3-5 appointments. The counselling sessions last for 45 minutes, where counselors can count on the support of interpreters, mainly for Arabic, Farsi and French. Under IRC’s program, counselors offer 3 to 6 sessions per day for 4 days a week, being able to serve an average of 15 new unique beneficiaries per month.

**A key aspect of the IRC in Greece is that they are heavily focused on monitoring and evaluation.** Based on project indicators, data collection tools are developed to systematically gather the needed information, then implemented through trained local program staff. Examples of indicators include: the percentage of participants finding work after attending the program; information on the type of work (full time, part time) as well as industry; the percentage of participants that have shown improved knowledge after the program; etc. This evidence is then used to adjust the program design, the program curricula, and the materials used.

## 3) The Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)

Name	GCR
Program	Employment Hub/Step Greece
Objective	Assess qualifications, skills, Greek language skills, experience, ambitions, and barriers
Involvement of counselors	Counselors are deeply involved in the process – acting also as focal points for employers
Approximate length	10 weeks for the individual counseling sessions; plus workshops on soft skills and information on specific professions

<b>Pros</b>	Intense individual counselling focused on preparing beneficiaries for the labor market; Intense one-week workshops with the involvement of employers; support participants in job matching; interview preparation; and involvement of interpreters in the workshops
<b>Cons</b>	Limited number of Job Counselors, which hindered the program's capacity

**The GCR is registering the profile of refugees and conducting a personality and skills assessment test during the first two counselling sessions.** The skills assessment takes the form of a checklist, through which counselors assess qualifications and skills, level of Greek and English language, IT/Digital skills, professional experience, ambitions, interests and barriers of refugees. Each refugee attends 10 counseling sessions, one session per week, with an additional two or three follow-up sessions that take place after job placement. Each session lasts 45 to 50 minutes and GCR's job counselors serve on average 15 individuals per week.

**The GCR made use of an online questionnaire to support counselors in conducting the assessment.** The practice optimized counselling time and eased the process of recording data. They also conducted early assessments of Greek language proficiency, which helped understanding at the beginning of the process if the refugee would need language classes to facilitate integration. GCR has also provided refugees with a higher number of counselling sessions than other procedures reviewed, including follow-up session, which shows a highly tailored process to each individual's needs. In addition to that, GCR has offered beneficiaries seminars focused on soft and presentation skills, as well as vocational training in sectors of high demand. Their approach is highly targeted at strengthening employment prospects.

## 2.3 OAED's Previous Experience

**OAED's previous experiences presented in this section include:**

- 1) The I.Ref.SoS project
- 2) OAED's Profiling system

### *1) The I.Ref.SoS project*

**The I.ReF.SoS is a former pilot program led by the OAED in partnership with other national and international stakeholders targeting young refugees and asylum seekers aged 16-24.** The program has offered services such as Greek language classes, basic skills training, and individual counselling. It was aimed at developing an effective system for social support and rapid employment integration for the beneficiaries. During the pilot, refugees participated in a combination of one-to-one and group career counseling sessions, with a duration of 45-50 minutes per session. Three sessions were offered per participant. These sessions focused on their prior experience and an assessment of skills.

**In the first session**, the counselor collected information on social, cultural, and professional background, education levels, certifications, diplomas, languages, digital skills, professional experience, and support network in Greece. **During the second and third sessions**, the counselor discussed and collected information on skills, personal and educational/training goals.

**After the third session**, the findings were recorded in a digital platform called "e-portfolio". The counselor filled-in the sections in the platform based on the results of the counseling sessions.

## Box 2: The E-Portfolio

The [E-portfolio](#) is an on-line self-assessment tool, created as part of the [I.Ref.SoS project](#). It has been built on the WordPress platform and aims at facilitating the integration of refugees into the education system and the labor market by recording information provided by refugees which lacks evidence or documentation supporting recognition.

The tool includes 74 questions, divided in sections focusing on refugees' personal profile, formal qualifications, skills and professional experience. The tool is currently accessible only through an on-line website, and is in English, with translation available to Greek, German, Turkish and Urdu.

As a first step, refugees were granted access to the platform to record their personal information (Country of origin, Marital status, address, residency status and expectations). The remaining sections, constituting the core of the tool, focus on language, literacy, educational background, professional experience, overall skills and professional expectations.

The main purpose of the e-portfolio was to create an enriched "Digital CV" able to be recognized by stakeholders such as employers, training providers, other career counselors etc. The output for the refugees was printable and available to be saved in a pdf format.

The tool was used mainly by career counselors after the individual counseling phase of the project (third session) and before the group sessions but could also be accessed by refugees and other counselors, based on authorization/access criteria. With authorization, employers could also see some sections.

*Box 2: The E-Portfolio*

### **2) OAED's Profiling system**

**In 2018, the OAED started the implementation of a profiling system for the unemployed who registered with the agency.** The process is based on an on-line questionnaire, with the option of completing the questionnaire at a local KPA2 office (OAED's local public employment offices). The use of the system began in phases, starting with individuals registering as unemployed for the first time, or whose registration had expired. Next, it included anyone in the target group, which consisted of individuals over 45 years old and registered as unemployed for at least 6 months, and who wished to participate in the pilot program being implemented in Elefsina.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Under the framework of modernizing the Greek ALMP system, since August 2018, MoLSA with OAED are piloting a new model of delivering ALMPs in three municipalities in Elefsina. The objective is to move from an ad hoc to a more systematic approach to managing services and programs available to registered jobseekers. The new model is underpinned by (i) strengthened provision of counselling services at OAED, (ii) better utilization of labour market information to inform both design and implementation of programs, (iii) enhanced information systems, and (iv) improved planning, supervision and monitoring of programs.

**The purpose of profiling is to enable the OAED to segment jobseekers into groups with a similar risk of not resuming work.** The system uses an objective and standardized method, thereby freeing up time for the counselor and guiding referrals to active labor market programs. The questionnaire developed for the Greek profiling tool includes about twenty items, starting with the identification by the respondent of the desired employment specialty, followed by three blocks:

- a) related qualifications and work experience;
- b) the adequacy of horizontal skills; and
- c) experience in job search (including the identification of obstacles to finding a job).

**Based on a statistical model taking into account the answers to the questions, there are currently 5 possible profiling categories.** Those categories classify individuals according to their distance from the labor market, and risk of remaining unemployed, ranging from 1 (immediately ready for work) to Group 5 (major obstacles requiring services from other agencies in addition to the OAED).

**The evidence presented in this note suggests that the OAED's experience with profiling can be used as a starting point to the task of recognition of skills and work experience of refugees.** In general, the experience with profiling has been positive in Greece and several of the items covered in the questionnaire are equally pertinent for refugees. However, other aspects of profiling do not seem suitable for them. For example, the statistical model to categorize individuals on distance from the labor market and the risk of remaining unemployed is not designed for refugees since foreigners who do not speak Greek are classified as Group 5, mentioned above. Additionally, the experience of completing an on-line self-assessment in Greek could prove to be both discouraging and complex for a refugee. The results could then be misleading for both the refugee and the counselor.

**One of the options to address these shortcomings would be to incorporate other significant items in the profiling questionnaire.** By expanding the questionnaire in its length and depth, it could then be possible to assess prior learning and experiences from refugees that would not otherwise have been taken into account. The questionnaire would be conducted in a one-to-one interview between the counselor and the refugee. The outcome, however, would not classify him/her using the typical existing categories. The counselor would instead refer the refugee to the appropriate pilot intervention(s) based on the profiling results. This option has been further developed and discussed in section 3.

### 3. Recommendations

**The international and the Greek experiences described above cover a range of methods for the recognition of skills and prior work experience.** The recommendations developed in this section draw from the knowledge that was already built and tested, while balancing effectiveness and feasibility. Concretely, the proposal below stands on three priorities:

- **First**, to ensure that the process to recognize skills and prior experiences is timely;
- **Second**, to incorporate innovative, technology-supported features in order to maximize what can be achieved given the number of counseling sessions deemed possible by OAED; and
- **Third**, to find a feasible process with results that are widely accepted by employers.

### 3.1 Designing the Skills Recognition Tool for OAED<sup>25</sup>

#### What was taken into account?

**The tool proposed as part of this deliverable was developed balancing effectiveness and feasibility.** The tool was shaped taking into consideration the trade-offs from the International and Greek experiences on recognition procedures on one hand (see Section 1.2), and the limitations from KPA2s capacities (including the number of counselors available for the pilot) and the needs of the target group on the other hand.

**The proposal builds on the model of a series of individual sessions, similar to the I.Ref.SOS program.** The model includes two features intended to enable the I.ReF.SoS approach to be applied more widely in the pilot by the OAED employment counselors:

1. **A streamlined version of the EU Skills Profiling Instrument for Third Country Nationals, or use parts of it, to guide the process of recognition of informal qualifications.** Both Greek and international experiences suggest the usefulness of a standard, simple tool to recognize and validate specific skills and previous experience. Although, in practice, many agencies working with refugees have proven that the EU Skills Profiling Tool is often overly complicated to be implemented, the tool can still be used as inspiration, given its format and comprehensiveness.
2. **The “Competence Cards” to add a visual element to facilitate counselling sessions.** International experience suggests the potential and value to include, within the tool, visuals or similar features to increase their user-friendliness and ease of application for the refugee population. As mentioned during the review of the “Competence Card”, a visual component would facilitate a less time-consuming process of recognition, and doable within the planned number of counseling sessions (C.f. “The Skills Recognition Tool and the Proposed approach for counselling” below). The EU Skills Profiling Instrument for Third Country Nationals has also recently included such features. Given that the tool would be used as inspiration, this should make it relatively easier to incorporate visuals into the streamlined instrument proposed.

**The tool, and its application through counselling, was developed to present the following advantages:**

- The counselling sessions offer time and “space” for interaction between counselor and refugee;
- The tool addresses different subjects and sheds light in areas that that should make sense to the refugee and need to be explicitly discussed;
- It is dynamic as the counselor can use the tool by going back-and-forth depending on the characteristics of the refugee;
- It provides a structured way, easy to follow by counselors with limited experience with this target group;
- It is less complicated and easier to implement than the EU Profile Tool;
- It is well combined with visuals (Competence Cards) that very easily can be used in a session with a refugee and in this way compensate for language barriers thereby improving their communication with better results; and

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<sup>25</sup> The tool hereafter proposed as “Skills Recognition Tool” can be found in annex to this document, in Excel format.

- It offers useful and comprehensive insights on refugee's background and thus can be a bridge for the next steps of pilot program concerning referrals (Language training course, Active Vocational Guidance, ATPs, Job vacancies).

**A structured approach will help to reduce the burden on counselors.** Otherwise, they would need to develop their own interview guide, and standardize the support to refugees, building on OAED's experience with profiling. The tool proposed, as well as the counselling process for implementation, should be adjusted as necessary based on experience.

**A proper assessment of the types of skills valued by employers is key. It would provide the counselors with the information they need to approach employers and promote target groups.** In that sense, it is important for OAED to meet employers' expectations and become a "trustworthy broker" thereby strengthening the efficiency of the matching process.<sup>26</sup> According to research, employers tend to consider language proficiency, type of horizontal skills, and prior work experience as important elements when it comes to hiring refugees (see Box 3 "what kind of skills employers value").<sup>27</sup>

### Box 3: What kind of skills do employers value?

Despite employers' positive attitude towards hiring refugees, refugee employment remains challenging across many countries. According to several international reports [OECD and UNHCR (2018), *Breaking Barriers* (2018); Desiderio (2016)], employers seem to cite several reasons hindering them from hiring refugees including lack of knowledge about refugee and asylum regulations, uncertainty about their skills and professional abilities, lack of documentation to prove educational attainment, lack of references or concern about lower productivity due to language and cultural barriers. As a result, employers may underestimate refugees' skillsets and refugees turn out to find jobs that do not match their skills and qualifications.

Language proficiency is perceived from Greek employers as the main barrier to employing a refugee, with employers noting that many jobs require staff not only to communicate sufficiently in Greek but also to read technical and safety information. Vocation-specific language training is also considered an asset. In Greece, employers also recommend that refugees should be equipped with a set of basic soft skills including communication skills, teamwork, familiarity with the local business culture, positive attitude and skills for job-readiness. Furthermore, nowadays new ways of working and greater use of technology is likely to lead employers to require from refugees to possess computer literacy and other digital skills.

*Box 3: What kind of skills do employers value?*

<sup>26</sup> In addition to good screening, employers highly value the supportive and remedial role that the agency can play in developing and offering training programs to upskill and reskill the target group of the pilot according to their business needs!

<sup>27</sup> Going forward, OAED should conduct a follow-up with a few human resource managers of employers who have already been contacted on the pilot to explain the instrument and get their feedback on any gaps on potential improvements.

## The Proposed process of profiling for the Refugee Pilot

The Skills Recognition Tool builds upon the existing profiling system of OAED. Figure 3 below shows the overall proposed process of refugee profiling for OAED. The red box indicates where the process of recognition of prior experiences and skills would fit in the general profiling framework.

1. The first step is for refugee jobseekers to register with OAED;
2. Refugees would go then through a filtering process checking if they meet the established participation criteria (e.g., Age and minimum knowledge of Greek language – A1 level);
3. If the participant does meet these criteria, s/he will go through a selection process of who would be allowed to participate in the pilot. For evaluation purposes, it is recommended that this selection is random. For example, a lottery process<sup>28</sup>;
4. Selected participants will be notified of their participation;
5. An information session is held to inform beneficiaries about the counselling process;
6. The individual counselling sessions take place, during which the recognition of skills and prior experiences happens;
7. Based on the counselling results, refugees are then referred by counselors to job placement, or group counselling, or language classes, or training.

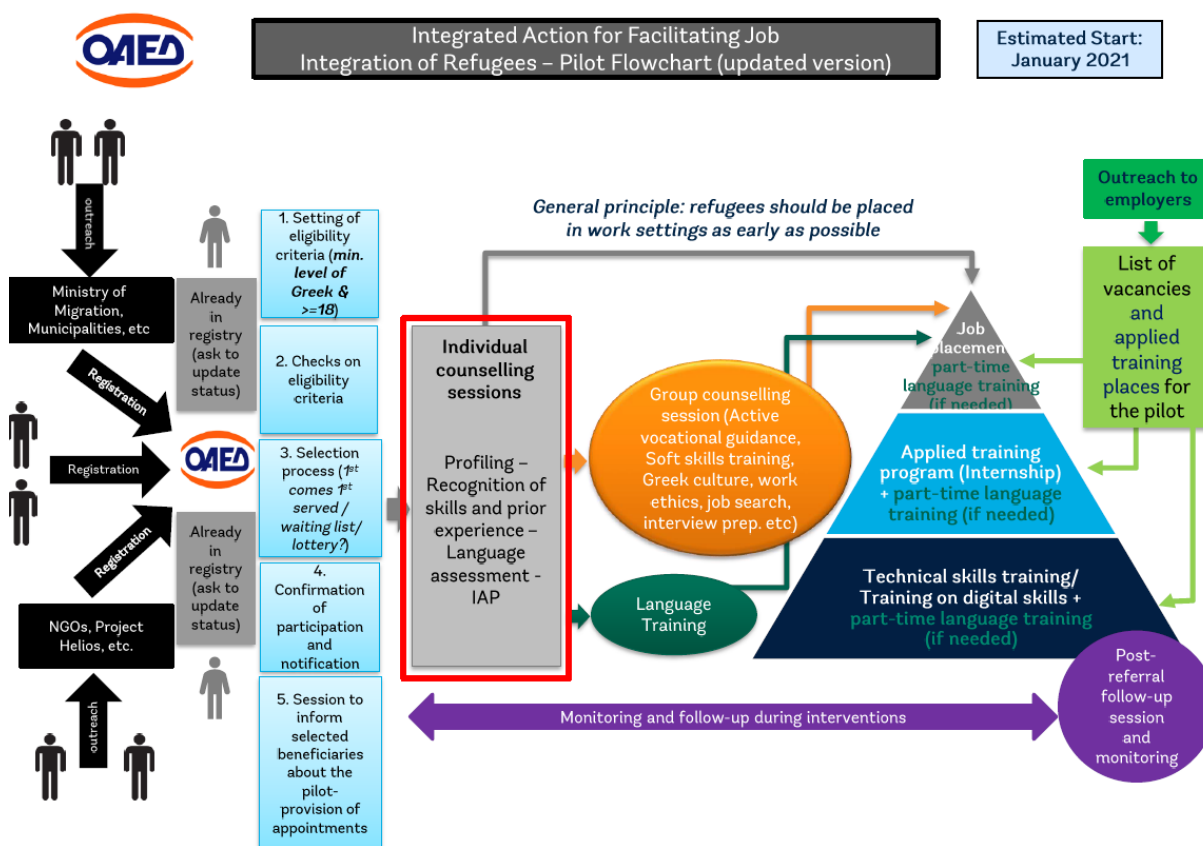


Figure 3: the proposed process of refugee profiling – the position of the recognition of skills and prior learning experience

<sup>28</sup> Assuming oversubscription to the pilot, OAED should then randomly assign interested refugees who meet eligibility criteria either to pilot participants (those who will receive pilot services - program group) or to non-participants (those who won't receive pilot services control group). A lottery process randomly selects participants from a pool of candidates. Such process can be beneficial for building on the data generated by the pilot, since random selections diminish any form of bias that may occur during a selection process.



## The Proposed Skills Recognition Tool and the approach for counselling

**The recognition of skills and prior learning should be one of the main objectives of the initial stages of the counseling process.**<sup>29</sup> The focus would be to assess and recognize skills in three areas:

- 1) Language,
- 2) Horizontal (soft) skills, and
- 3) Prior work experience<sup>30</sup>.

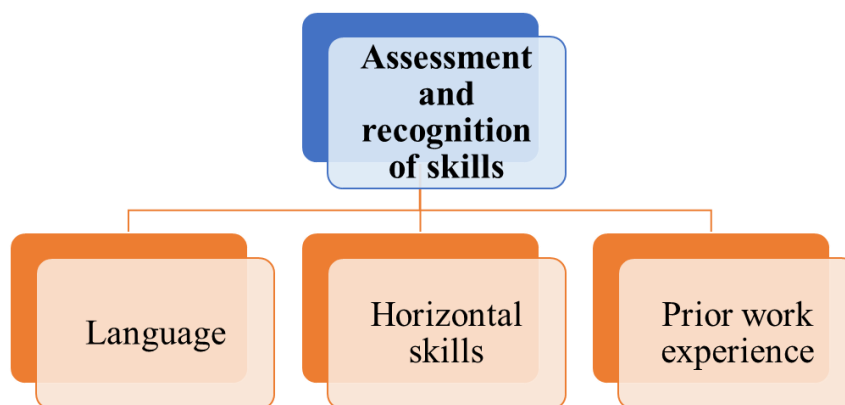


Figure 4: Assessment and recognition of skills in 3 areas

**The tool would be covered in 3 individual counselling sessions of 45 to 60 minutes, and would contain 8 sections:**

- 1) Results of previous counselling sessions
- 2) Language,
- 3) Obstacles and Barriers,
- 4) Education and training,
- 5) Professional experience,
- 6) Soft (horizontal) skills,
- 7) Digital skills, and
- 8) Driving licenses and other skills.

**The full proposed tool draft can be found annexed to this document, in excel format.**

<sup>29</sup>Subsequent counseling sessions would focus more on referrals and follow-up after participation in pilot activities and would be covered in other outputs of the technical assistance.

<sup>30</sup> In the early stages of the pilot, OAED's preference is not to focus on the recognition of formal skills, nor skills related to a particular occupation, given the complexity, length of time and coordination efforts that these processes would require. Nevertheless, it will be important to monitor during the pilot the possible need for these features among the refugee population, with a view to their inclusion in a possible scale-up or mainstreaming of these activities. International and Greek experience in both areas is included in Appendix II – Recognition of Formal Qualifications.

The proposed *Skills Recognition Tool* incorporates specific questions from OAED’s standard profiling instrument, the e-portfolio of the I.Ref.SOS project and the EU Skills profile tool. Each section contains a series of questions, and multiple-choice responses, thought to be essential for the prior recognition of skills in each area. At the end of each section, there is a forward looking question to assess the participants’ interest in and preferences for OAED’s available activities. This last feature is designed to provide initial inputs for referrals. The *Skills Recognition Tool* will also include visuals based on the “Competences Cards” in the section of soft skills, digital and other skills.

The *Skills Recognition Tool* should always be completed with the assistance of a counselor. Although unemployed registered with OAED have the option of filling out the profiling questionnaire online, the recommendation for the refugee target population is to complete the *Skills Recognition Tool* during the counseling sessions with the support of the job counselor. That would ensure that possible language or literacy barriers will not interfere in the completion of the questionnaire.

The flowchart graphic below (figure 5) shows the general features of the counseling process. A set of 3 appointments plus a subsequent check-in with the job counselor is proposed for those referred to a job vacancy without the need to participate in vocational training or internships. For participants referred to vocational training or internships, 4 appointments would be required: the 3 appointments outlined below, plus a follow-up appointment after the Active Vocational Guidance sessions have finished, in order to make the next referral.

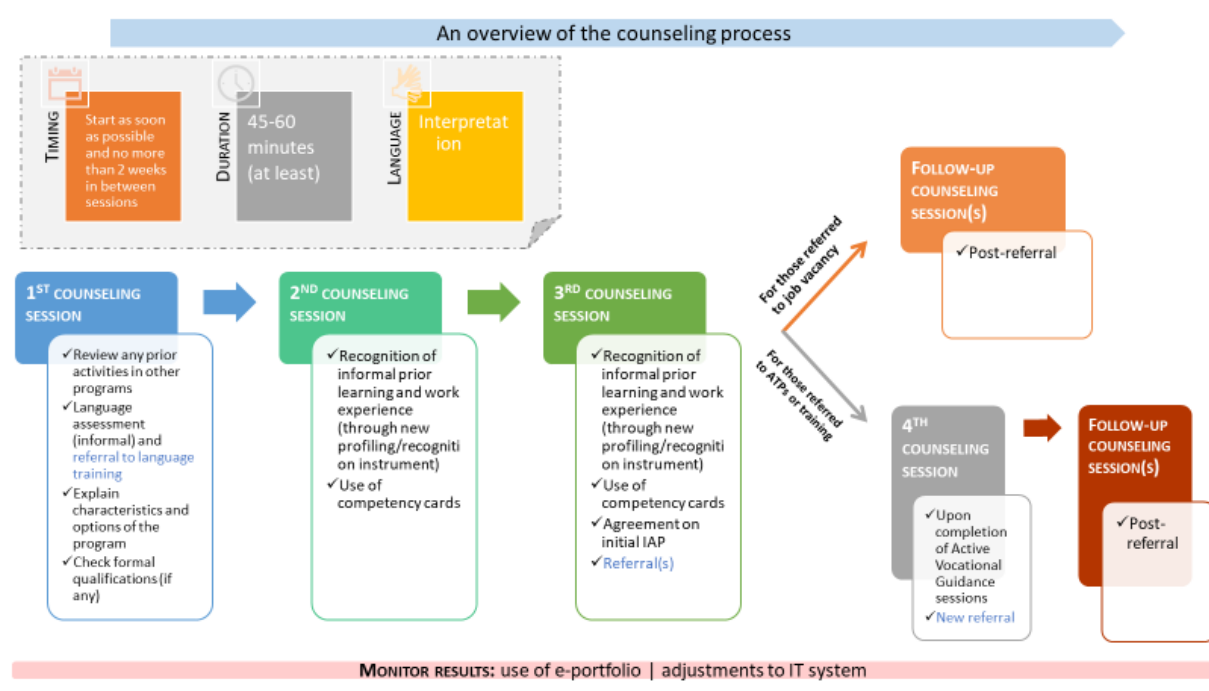


Figure 5: Overview of the proposed counseling process

### Key recommendations regarding the counselling process:

1. Counseling should start as soon as possible after the general information session, while allowing the KPA2s to maintain a reasonable workload.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> In the initial information session, the participants selected would learn about the services to be provided in the pilot and schedule an appointment with an employment counselor. This is shown in box #5 in the pilot flowchart.

2. **No more than 2 weeks should elapse between counseling appointments.** This recommendation is based upon the previous experience of I.Ref.SOS and in order to reduce the risk that the participant becomes impatient with the process and/or loses interest.
3. **Counseling sessions should be programmed to last longer than the typical appointment with a job seeker, at least 45-60 minutes, and include an interpreter.** Once OAED decides on how many KPA2, and how many counselors within each KPA2 will be assigned to work at least part-time with refugee clients, workflows should be planned and estimated.
4. **It is envisaged that the referral to language training would happen during the first session.** For counselors to be able to document language skills, it is important that they receive information from the language instructors for each refugee handled (level of classes, attendance, performance, etc.).
5. **To reinforce the focus on employment, in each session counselors may inform the participant about current vacancies and in which areas recent placements have been made.** Moreover, the counselor may be pro-active in referring a participant at any point during the counseling process to a job vacancy if there is one that fits his/her profile.

The suggested outline of topics to be covered and focus for each counseling session is presented below with references to the instruments to be used.

### ***Counseling session 1.***

**The first session will focus on:** understanding the participant's starting point; ensuring that the participant understands the characteristics of the program, and options available; conducting an initial language assessment and identify first barriers.

**Counselors should understand the participants' starting point.** Participants may already have gone through other programs, rounds of counselling, or learning activities that would facilitate the counselor's work. To understand where participants are in their journey, counselors should review if any prior of these prior activities took place, and, if possible, check their results. During this first session, counselors should leverage the results of previous discussions related to employment, and the participant should feel that this new process builds on these activities, to avoid a sentiment of "wasted time".

**Counselors should informally evaluate the language skills of the participants.** This could be done by evaluating the efficiency of their interaction and communication in Greek, based on their experience in the counselling session. If the participant has documents attesting to level and/or class attendance, the counselors would review this information.

**At last, counselors should have a first attempt to identify any constraints/obstacles that would influence the characteristics of a suitable job.** This will help the counselor shaping the next steps and preparing for the following sessions.

**The corresponding sections in the *Skills Recognition Tool*, to be used in this session, are "Results of previous counselling sessions", "language skill" and "obstacles and barriers".**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> session outline:**

- Register background info (Social, professional profile). It is important to register contact information, migration status, including checking and is necessary updating OAED database;
- Summarize content of pilot, reiterate focus on employment in order to help participants understand referrals and other options that they have;
- Answer questions, clarify any misunderstandings about the program objectives and content;

- Discuss the most important results they would like to achieve from their participation;
- Review results of any previous counseling related to employment;
- Review prior and ongoing language training;
- Discuss goals of language training as related to employment;
- Assess/determine whether any language training is necessary and refer to the appropriate language assessment followed by training. Explain details of language training and expected outcomes;
- Inquire about any Obstacles and Barriers that affect employment;
- Register session results, including in relevant sections of the Individual Action Plan (IAP).

### *Counselling sessions 2 and 3*

**The primary purpose of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sessions is to apply the other sections of the streamlined instrument for recognition of informal prior learning and document its results.** In the case that counselors detect gaps on horizontal skills or participants themselves identify a need in that area, referrals should be made to workshops, with a view to building and validating those abilities. Counselors would use a checklist containing the topics below, together with the specific questions from the draft instrument to guide the interview. Counseling sessions would continue in parallel to participation in language classes.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> session outline:**

- Apply the Skills Recognition Tool
- Identify any formal qualification and skills in a specific occupation
- Check-in on experience with language training (any problems, issues, etc.).
- Register session results

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> session**

- Apply the Skills Recognition Tool
- Prepare E-Portfolio
- Check-in on experience with language training
- Discuss Program Activities
- Agreement on initial Individual Action Plan
- Referral to: (1) Job Vacancy; (2) Technical Training; (3) Applied training Program (ATP)
- Register session results

A more developed outline of the individual counseling sessions, including tools to be used, skills areas to be recognized, and possible referrals can be found on the **Appendix XI: Outline of the individual counseling sessions.**

### *Referrals*

**The general principle to be followed for the referrals is that refugees should be placed in work settings as soon as possible.** The model we propose also assumes that no participant would receive more than 2 referrals (not including language training, workshops, or active vocational guidance).

**The complete flowchart below (Figure 6) represents the overall process flow of profiling proposed for this pilot.** The red boxes highlight the referrals available, according to this proposal, and where they would fit into the overall process. The referrals available would be:

- Language training;
- Group counselling sessions (Active vocational guidance, soft skills training, Greek culture, work ethics, job search, interview preparation, etc.);
- Job placement - with part-time language training if needed;

- Applied training program (e.g., internships) – also with part-time language training if needed; and
- Technical skills training / Training on digital skills – also with part-time language training if needed.

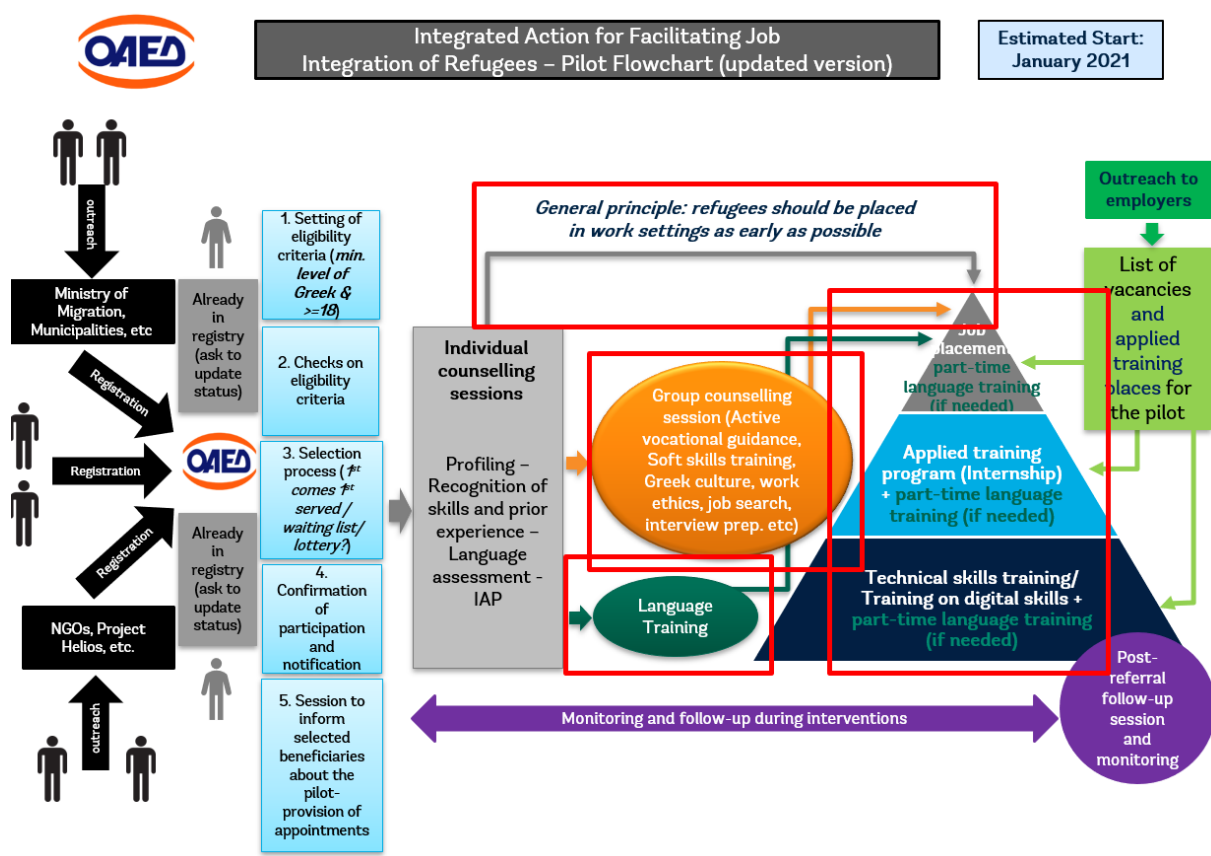


Figure 6: the proposed process of refugee profiling – referrals

Job counselors make and record referrals according to identified gaps, the hierarchy and availability of options and the readiness of individuals.

Figure 7 aims to provide a more detailed look into the business processes of referral and where these should take place throughout the whole counselling journey:

- The process starts with the 3 counselling sessions aforementioned;
- The green box “Complementary referrals”, aim to show that early enough the counselor should refer the refugee to a language course and group sessions, if needed;
- After having attended the first 3 sessions, the individual should be referred by the counselor to the appropriate intervention:
  - Job placement,
  - Applied Training Program, or
  - Technical skills training/ Training on digital skills combined with an active vocational guidance session to decide on the training speciality.
- For those who haven’t been referred to a job after the 3<sup>rd</sup> counselling session, they can have an additional counseling session upon completion of an intervention (see grey box

“counselling session 4”). After this fourth session, the counselor would then make the referral either to a job placement, or to an applied training program as needed;

- The list of vacancies (in purple) provided by employers should inform the counselors about the jobs and ATPs available for the pilot;
- Post referral counselling sessions (last phase) are also necessary upon completion of intervention to monitor achievements and results.

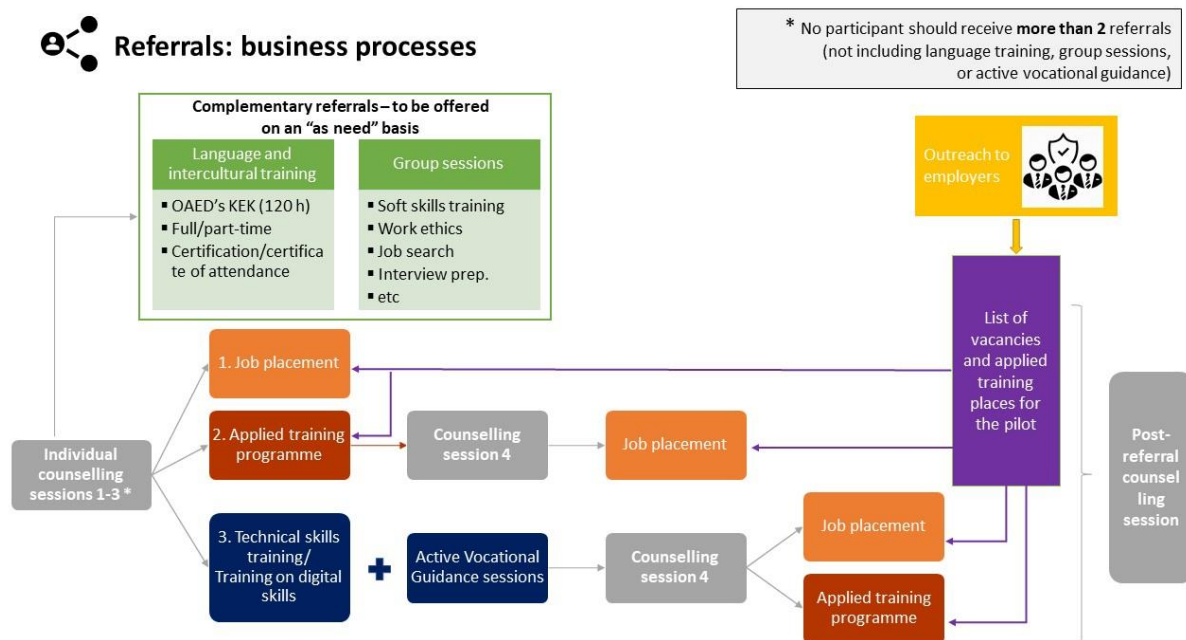


Figure 7: Business process for referrals

## The Work Plan Scenarios

**The business processes proposed below take into account OAED’s human resource capacity constraints.** There is currently a small number of counselors in Greece, relative to the number of unemployed, even after the recent increases in staff. On the other hand, refugee job seekers will likely have previously received counseling if they have participated in other programs before, which could facilitate the work of the OAED counselor, including the recognition of prior learning.

**Two indicative scenarios were developed assuming that the parameters set above (length of interview and time between appointments) are feasible (see Figures 8 and 9 below).** The key assumptions for the proposed schemes are the following:

1. The pilot will be implemented in 3 KPAs. Scenario 1 assumes 1 job counselor focused on the pilot per KPA, Scenario 2 assumes 2 job counselors per KPA;
2. The duration of the appointment will be of 60 minutes maximum;
3. The workload for each job counselor will be of 3 hours a day and 4 days a week;
4. Each beneficiary should receive 3 appointments within a period of one month.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Counselors should be given flexibility to schedule additional sessions with participants, if needed, to document extensive skills or because of communication difficulties. It is also possible that some participants may need fewer sessions, if it is possible for them to be referred to a job vacancy early on.

Scenario 1 assumes a quantity of 201 beneficiaries to be served in 16 weeks, while scenario 2 assumes the same quantity of participants to be served in 9 weeks. It is also assumed that counselors will be serving regular clients.

**Scenario 1:** Given these assumptions, 12 participants would be served in the first week. That would be their 1<sup>st</sup> appointment (orange box). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, 6 new participants would be served, while 6 “old” participants would have their 2<sup>nd</sup> appointment (green box). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, a group of 6 participants would have their 3<sup>rd</sup> appointment (blue box), while the other 6 would have their 2<sup>nd</sup> appointment. By the 4<sup>th</sup> week, the 12 initial participants would have concluded their 3 counselling sessions. Following that model, by the 16<sup>th</sup> week, all 201 participants would have completed their cycle of 3 counselling sessions.

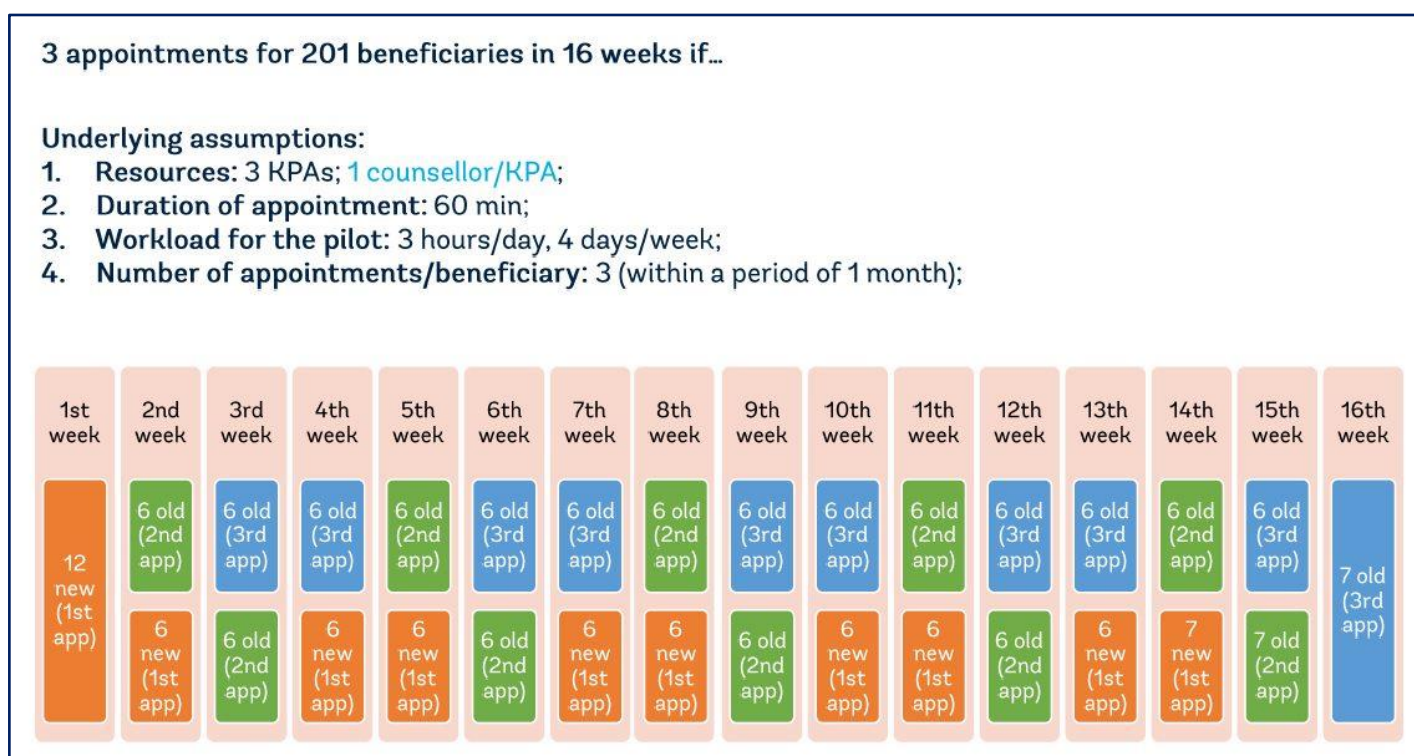


Figure 8: Work Plan Scenario 1

**Scenario 2:** Provided that scenario 2 projects 2 counselors instead of one, it also projects that the time needed for the completion of counselling for the 201 participants will be shorter. In this case, 9 weeks. Given these assumptions, 24 participants would be served in the first week. That would be their 1<sup>st</sup> appointment (orange box). The rationale is the same of the scenario 1, but with twice the number of participants being served per day (green box stands for 2<sup>nd</sup> appointment and blue box for 3<sup>rd</sup> appointment)

3 appointments for 201 beneficiaries in 8-9 weeks if...

Underlying assumptions:

1. Resources: 3 KPAs; 2 counsellors/KPA;
2. Duration of appointment: 60 min;
3. Workload for the pilot: 3 hours/day, 4 days/week (each counsellor);
4. Number of appointments/beneficiary: 3 (within a period of 1 month);

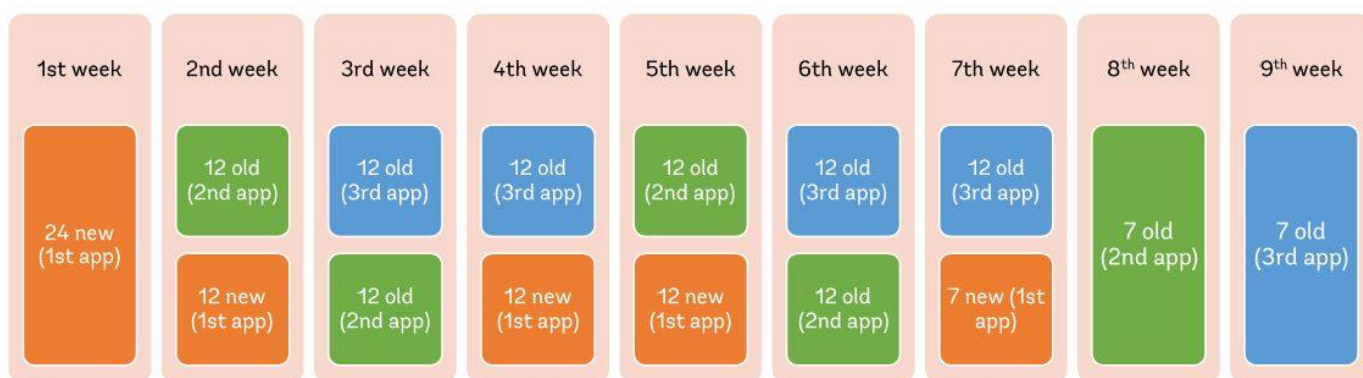


Figure 9: Work Plan Scenario 2

## 3.2 Considerations on Digital platform / IT support

**A digital version of this tool is considered crucial to support the whole process and enable the counselor to save time by organizing the information received from the refugee in a structured and user-friendly platform.** The scheduling of appointments as well as the results of the interviews, including the pathways/actions agreed with the counselor, need to be supported by the Information System and recorded digitally. This includes the *Skills Recognition Tool* as well as the e-portfolio and the IAP.<sup>33</sup>

**The first step is to agree on the user requirements and high-level functional requirements to underpin the process of recognition of skills and prior learning. This should be done as soon as possible.** The requirements must cover the needs of both internal and external users. Internal users are individuals or groups of users who will interact with the management information system (MIS) and work within OAED. Internal users include, within OAED, the job counselors, language trainers, workshop trainers, KPA2 heads, and management. External users are all of those who will interact with the MIS and are not OAED staff. That includes refugee participants and employers.

**The appendix II describes in detail the requirements for each user as understood by the World Bank team and the information management implementation options based on that description.** The options considered include:

- Extended/updated version of the E-portfolio platform complemented by the OAED MIS;
- Extension of the OAED MIS functionality; and
- Development of an entirely new platform.

<sup>33</sup> Both proposed documents are presented as annexes to this note.



Options	Advantages	Drawbacks
Extended/updated version of the E-portfolio platform, developed by the OAED as part of a previous program in support of refugees, complemented by the OAED MIS	Easy solution with swift development time	An extra configuration of the plugin will be needed to accommodate the Skills Recognition Tool questionnaire
		No guarantee that two or more plugins can be seamlessly integrated to facilitate the same purpose
		If no interconnection between the two systems, the counselors should have to use both in parallel
Extension of the OAED MIS functionality	Registration of refugees with OAED MIS thus availability of baseline data	Development of new module as an extension of OAED MID to cover the additional user requirements (a variation of the existing profiling module) and facilitate the pilot's Skills Recognition Tool questionnaire and the expanded IAP
	Most features already in OAED MIS (e.g. case management, IAP management)	
	No interoperability features needed	
Development of an entirely new platform	Effective and can lead to the complete coverage of the Pilot needs, provided that all the MIS's functional and non-functional requirements are precise and finalized	Time-consuming and costly
	New platform with features that could be reused in other labor market programs under OAED	

Table 1 - Pros and Cons for each Information Management System Option

**It is important to note that these requirements only address the aspect of the present pilot related to the recognition of prior learning.** That means that these requirements will need to be integrated with other parts of the pilot to constitute the system's final technical specifications (e.g., outreach and communication, referrals, identification of internship placements and job vacancies). Likewise, the final approach to be followed for information management implementation should be decided once the full set of user requirements is in place.

**The ability of OAED and its staff to effectively implement the pilot requires robust Information System support of all business processes, as well as monitoring.** The full set of user requirements for all business processes of the pilot need to be completed in a timely manner, so that a decision can be taken on the information management implementation option and any development completed well before activities start.

### 3.3 Going forward

**The next step is for the relevant OAED departments to review and finalize the proposed questionnaire for the Skills Recognition Tool.** As part of this process, OAED should consult

with staff of agencies/NGOs currently working with refugees to get their inputs on the proposed parameters for this process. Once finalized, the requirements for the information system to support the process and the instruments will need to be defined, starting from the considerations aforementioned in this note.

**The development of a methodological guide covering both the counseling process and the tools that will be used by the counselors is also considered important.** Appendix III of this document provides the basis for building this methodological guide. With such a guide, counselors will have the necessary information to follow a standardized process for every participant. Along with it, a weekly timetable for the counseling sessions should be created. This document also provides the basis for that, on subsection I of the Appendix. This table would be available for the caseworker to overview the counseling sessions per KPA / Counselor. In that sense, OAED could reach out to counselors to present and discuss the use of the supporting material, and gather their views, main concerns and inputs on the overall process before launching the pilot.

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