

Mapping Institutional Experiences of Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education

Focus on Non-Formal and Informal Learning
Survey results

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Background

Flexibility of higher education has become over the past years one of the key requirements for further development. This has been brought by a growing diversity of people interested in higher education, by a variety of their age, social background, previous educational path, ambitions and expectations. The increased diversity of learners coupled with a more dynamic and changing workplace and a focus on innovative and flexible learning provision has resulted in an enhanced focus on recognition of prior learning – hereafter RPL – within higher education. Recognition of prior learning has been perceived as one of the key instruments in enhancing flexibility, especially as regards making the studies more efficient and accessible for those with some previous learning or work experience.

Development of European Higher Education Area (EHEA), known also as a “Bologna process” has reflected these requirements and addressed life-long learning concept already in the ministerial communique in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve¹. While there was a substantial attention paid to recognition of prior learning following this communique, there was a Network on Recognition of Prior Learning within the work programme in years 2009 – 2012, it didn’t have much impact on further work and the discussion on the theme at European level was left to other networks and initiatives. The developments in various countries, need to introduce tools for enhanced access to higher education and smooth recognition of various achievements enhanced an interest in learning from other countries’ experience and a discussion on possible solutions.

The “Recognition of Prior Learning in Practice”² project aims to learn about the situation, challenges and good practices within recognition of prior learning in higher education in several European countries. It is run by the Swedish Council for Higher Education together with governmental and institutional partners from Austria, Croatia, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden and EURASHE as a representative of professional higher education under the specific Erasmus+ call for governments and stakeholders to address EHEA commitments and peer learning.

The project ran a survey mapping the experience and views of higher education institutions from various European countries in order to have a more solid basis for further discussions, learning, but also formulation of adequate policy messages. Despite the efforts the survey attracted mostly the institutions from the project partners’ countries, still it brought some interesting results and input for further work.

Methodology

In the framework of the project, a survey was conducted by EURASHE between 24 September 2019 and 31 January 2020. The survey focused on recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning for both access to higher education and provision of credits for academic purposes³ and was aimed towards practitioners in the field of higher education and professional higher education, who both have or do not have experience with RPL. The survey was promoted repeatedly through project partners, including the request to other European representations (e.g. European University association), considering the project

¹ Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, see http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2009_Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve/06/1/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique_April_2009_595061.pdf.

² See <https://www.uhr.se/en/rplinpractice>

³ For some definitions and the survey see the Annex 1 of this report.



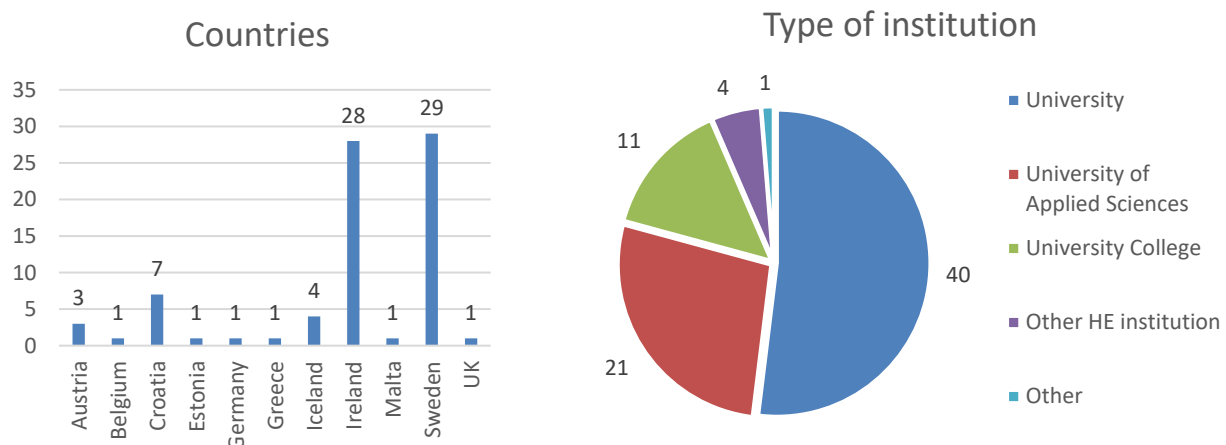
capacity and rather informative character of the survey there was no specific selection of potential respondents.

While the diversity of various higher education institutions is reasonably reflected (taking into account that universities of applied sciences exist only in some binary higher education systems, e.g Austria, Croatia or Ireland), the geographical distribution of the respondents may strongly affect the final results. The sample includes responses from only some countries with advanced experience with RPL, therefore further learning on others' experience would be helpful. Therefore, the results should be taken only as an input for further discussions, can't serve as any kind of representative views, neither for most of the countries nor at the European level. Still, the results may point to some general challenges and issues to be considered in further policy work.

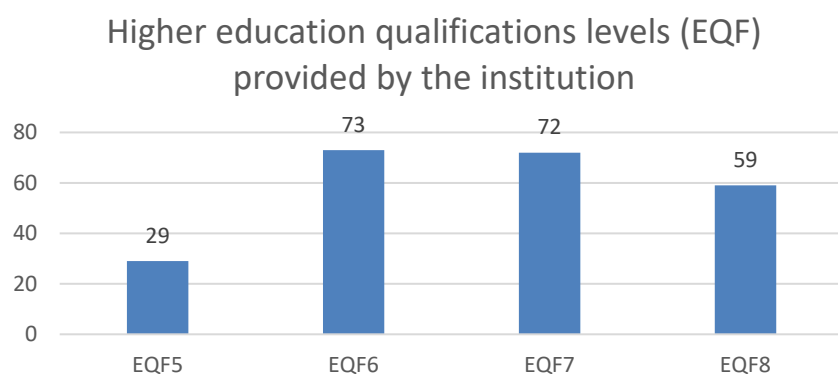
Overview of results

Profile of the respondents

There were 113 total responses to the survey. Out of this total, the completed responses were 79. This report will only present the results of the completed responses.



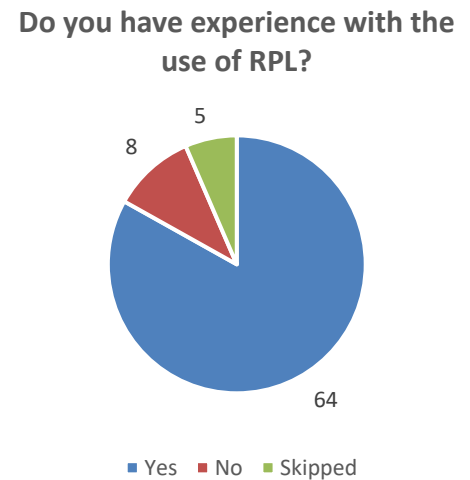
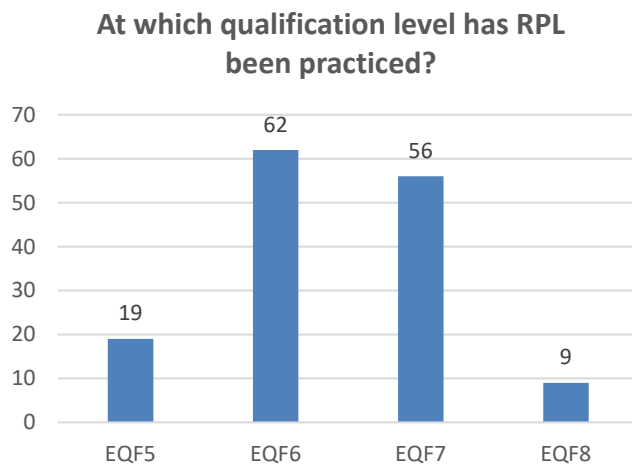
Respondents of the survey came from 11 different European countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, the highest proportion of them came from Sweden (37.5% of responses), Ireland (36% of responses) and Croatia (9% of responses). The survey was able to address practitioners from various strands within higher education and reflect the diversity of institutions and their missions. In particular, out of 77 respondents, 40 (52%) represent university, 21 (27%) a university of applied sciences or similar institution of professional higher education and 11 (14%) a college of higher or tertiary education.



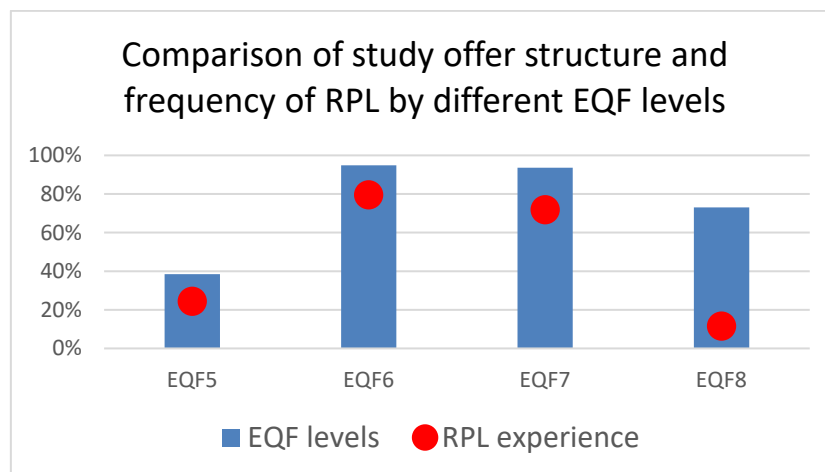
The institutions represented offer all four education qualification levels (EQF), with a predominance of EQF6 (95%) and EQF7 (94%).

Experience with Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The majority of respondents (83%) had experience with Recognition of Prior Learning – hereafter RPL – at their institution. In particular, they practiced RPL in EQF6 (81%) and EQF7 (73%).



While the distribution of RPL experience somewhat copies the distribution of the qualification levels at short-cycle, undergraduate and graduate levels (EQF5-7) throughout the sample, the frequency of its use at the doctorate studies level is proportionally much lower. The sample indicated most often implementation of RPL at Bachelor level (EQF6, 84% of responding institutions offering studies at this level) and Master (EQF7, 77 % of respondents with such level of programmes). At short-cycle (EQF5) the RPL seems to be used more at universities and universities of applied sciences than other tertiary or higher education institutions, but such level of programmes is not included in various European higher education systems and goes still through quite dynamic developments. It is also important to keep in mind that the sample of respondents is not representative, the survey attracted rather those with the RPL experience and doesn't necessarily reflect full picture.

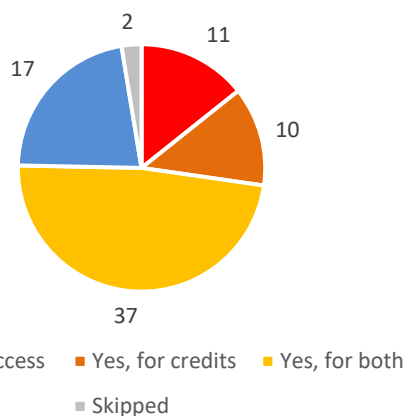


Formal regulations on RPL at national and institutional levels

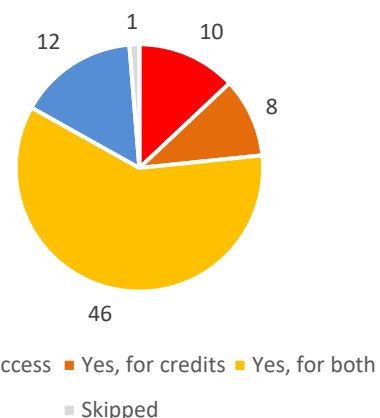
National regulations

According to the majority of respondents, some formal regulations on RPL exist in most of the countries represented in the sample. Sometimes the regulations address only RPL for access to higher education (14 % of respondents) or for awarding corresponding credits (13% of responses). Complex regulations for both access and credits seem to exist in only several countries represented (Austria, Germany, Ireland and Sweden). Respondents from Croatia and Iceland indicated absence of some relevant regulations at the national level, also the sole respondent from the United Kingdom reported no regulations. However, the survey may serve rather as an indication of awareness of institutional respondents of available regulations and their interpretation of the state as even within the countries with sufficient responses the interpretations varied and included all possible options and the experts' comments during editing the report point to some regulations or national guidelines. It is also necessary to keep in mind that the survey focus only on recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning, not recognition within formal academic pathways.

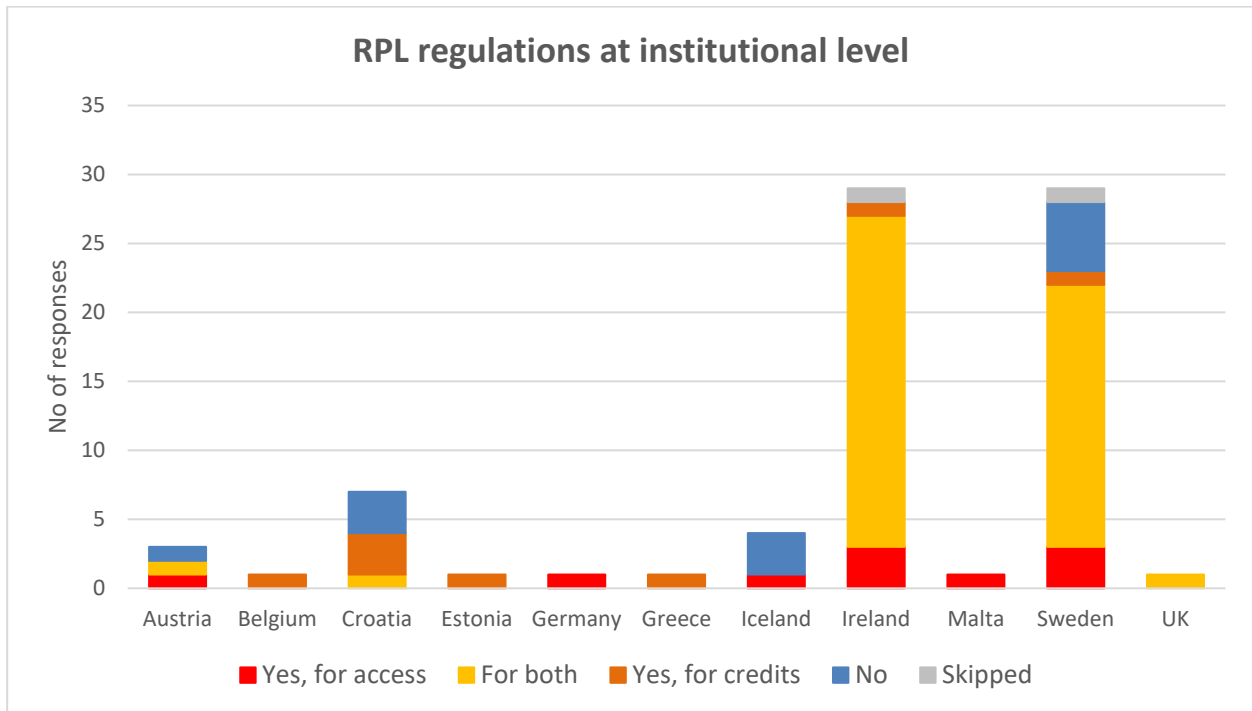
**Formal regulations on RPL
in the country**



**Formal regulations on RPL
in the institution**

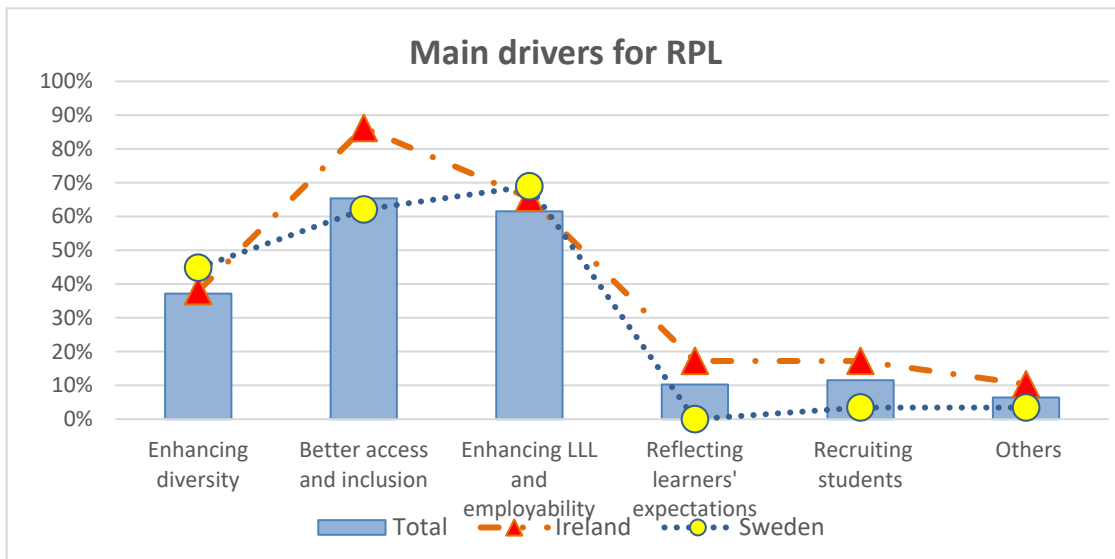


Therefore, the survey results may better serve in mapping the institutional practices and policies. The following graph shows availability of internal policies or regulations for RPL for either access and/or credit award at institutional level. It is difficult to make any conclusions regarding the situation in different countries, except underlining the advanced situation at most of the Irish and Swedish higher education institutions and challenges to more systemic approach at Icelandic universities should the circumstances lead to enhanced demand for RPL. Further analysis hasn't shown any substantial differences between different strands of higher education, both universities, universities of applied sciences and other institutions seemed to be responding to the challenges in a similar way.



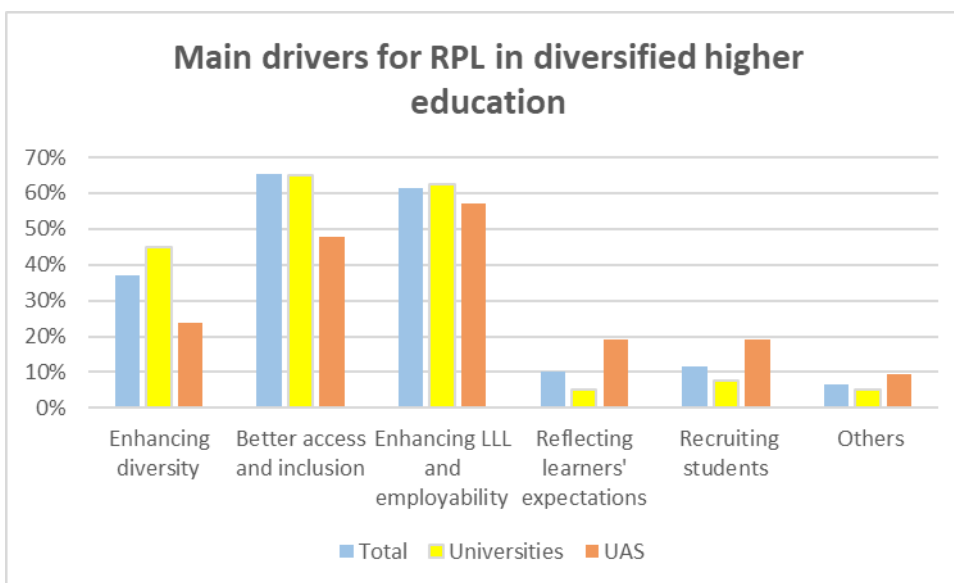
Drivers to perform RPL

There are seen three prevailing drivers for introducing and developing RPL at higher education institutions – providing better access and inclusion in higher education (65 % of respondents), strengthening lifelong learning and employability (62 %) and enhancing the diversity of the institution’s student population (37 %). Among other reasons the legal requirements for RPL provision.



Like in some other cases the sample of responses from two countries – Ireland and Sweden – allowed some detailed view and comparison. One can see that there are no substantial differences in motivation for RPL in both countries but some slightly stronger attention to access and inclusion in the Irish situation.

The drivers are relatively similar across higher education irrespective of the institutional mission, yet some slight differences may be seen between universities and universities of applied sciences which provide profession-oriented higher education. While universities see the main drivers similarly to those reflected in overall results,



universities of applied sciences seem to consider the potential students' expectations and efficiency of learning process more than others. This may be probably due to already quite diversified students' population in professional higher education, already strong focus on skills and employability in their programmes and also various up- and reskilling provisions.

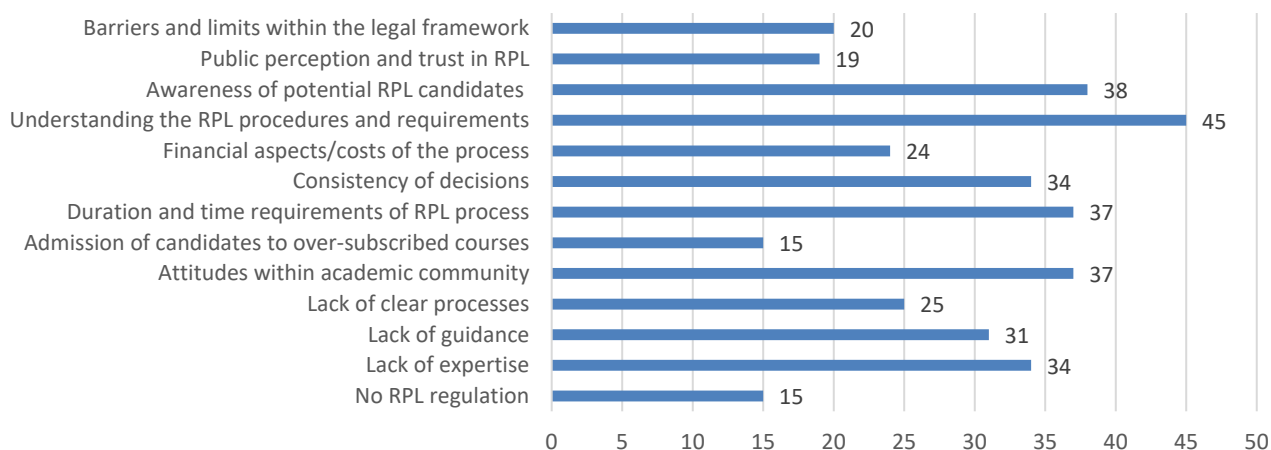
Challenges in working with RPL

Different national arrangements and different cultural patterns may bring also different challenges to introduction and implementation of RPL procedures. The consideration was given also to possible differences between two different objectives of RPL of non- and informal learning – providing access to higher education and allocation of relevant credits.

From among various different challenges related to recognition of prior learning for access to higher education respondents emphasised mainly the difficulty in understanding RPL procedures and requirements both by RPL candidates and other stakeholders as a main challenge (58% of respondents).

Challenges for access to higher education

No of responses, total of 78 responses

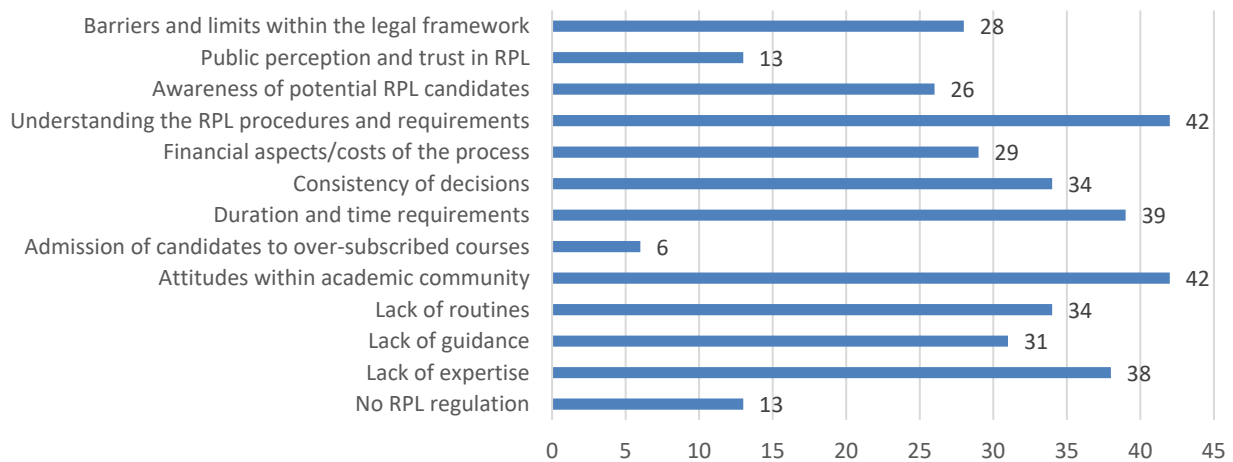


However, duration and time demands of the procedure (50%), low awareness among potential candidates on the possibility of using RPL (46%) and readiness and capacity of academics – staff attitudes (45%), lack of expertise (44%) and consistency of decisions (44%) may strongly affect the trust in the procedure, its attractiveness for potential candidates.

The same challenges were identified when considering the recognition of prior learning regarding the credits to be accounted for a programme and/or towards a degree, just probably with slightly less urgency. Even in this case, the low understanding of the RPL procedures and requirements was indicated as the main challenge (50 % of responses) together with the attitudes within the academic community in the institution (50 %), lack of expertise (46 %) and consistency of decisions (45 %). The long duration and time requirements of the RPL process was again perceived as a challenge (47%) for candidates.

Challenges for credits to be accounted for a programme/towards a degree

No of responses, total of 78 responses

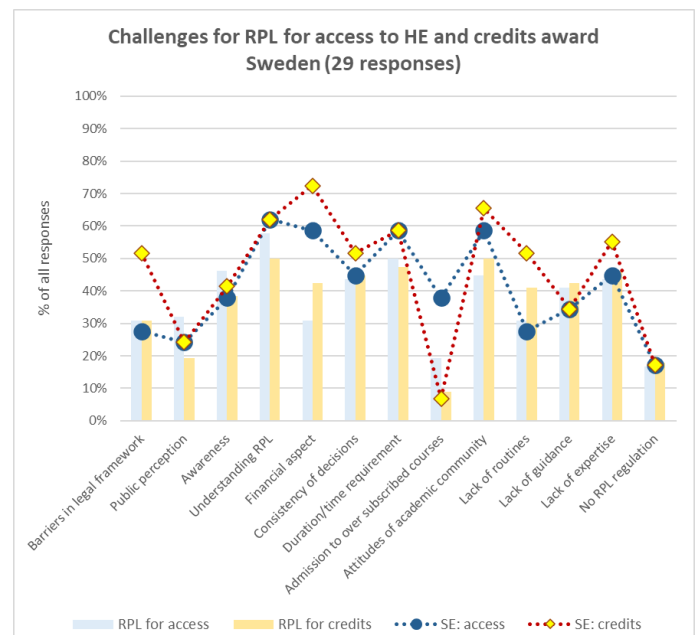
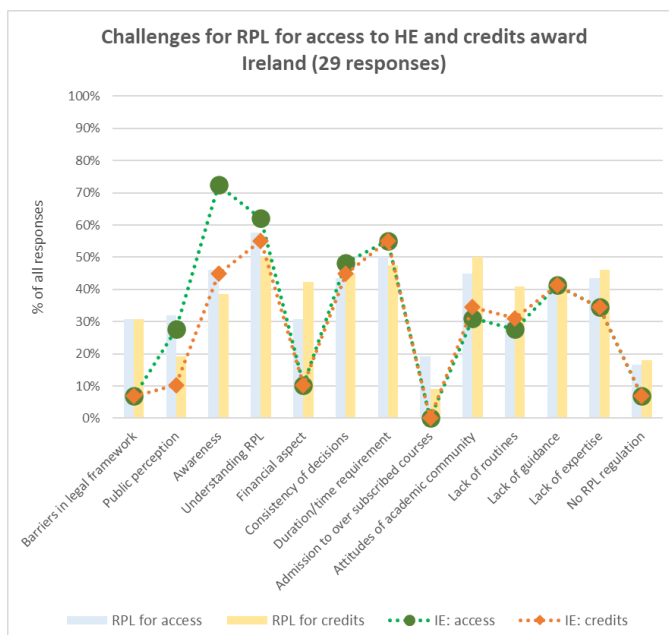
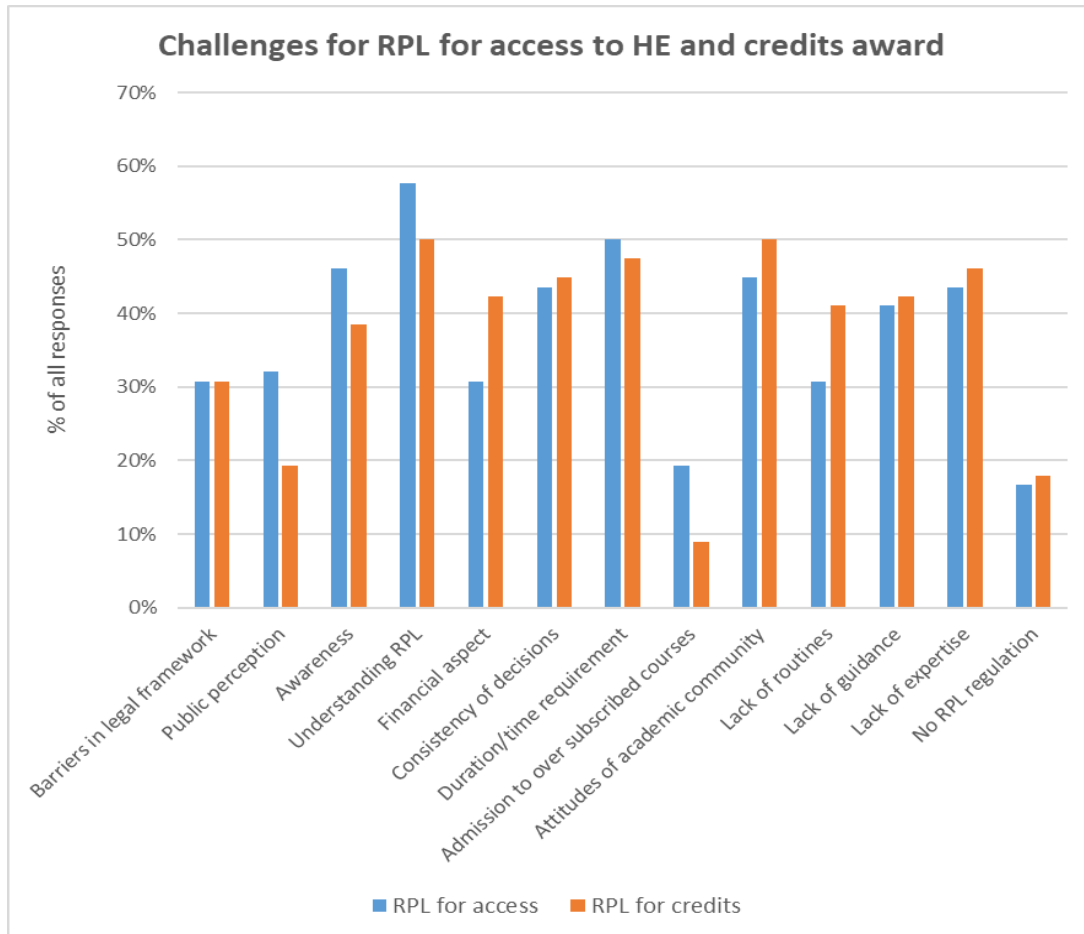


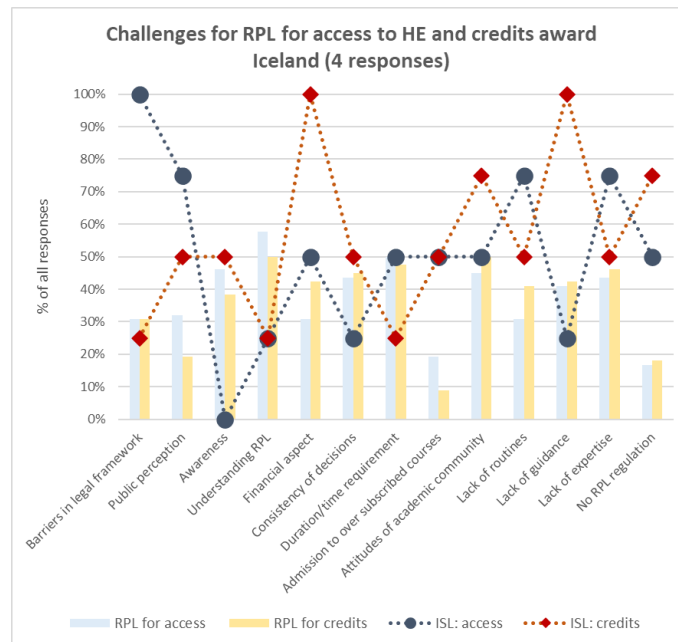
Comparability of main challenges is visible when comparing both sets of answers looking at RPL from the perspective of access to higher education and awarding credits. While the RPL for access seems to suffer more from lack of understanding and awareness, the responses indicate that the recognition for credits may be under even more scrutiny of academics taking care of their subject and expert area. In any case, the challenges are rather similar in both cases and the frequency of their indication should be taken seriously.

While these comments were built on gathered “European sample – taking into account a limited sample and absence of responses from various other countries, it might be possible to look to specific situation of three countries – Ireland and Sweden with 29 responses each and Iceland where the national coordinators tried to invite relevant officers from all 7 universities and 4 responses will cover more than half of them.

Especially when comparing the country cases with “European results” and with each other, some specifics attract the attention. In the *Irish case*, the system is most likely reasonably well developed and implemented, yet there is a lasting strong concern about its attractiveness, effectiveness and perception by potential candidates and their awareness of the opportunities. Main concerns of *Swedish* higher education representatives regard the financial aspects, probably financial demands on institutional budgets, understanding the concept and capacity of staff to handle RPL properly. RPL for credits award

seems to be less systemised than RPL for enhancing the access to higher education, including any necessary regulations. The results in *Iceland* are still rather sketchy for more plastic view, yet the main issues to consider seem to be some legal/regulatory framework followed by necessary guidelines while supporting the institutional capacity building.





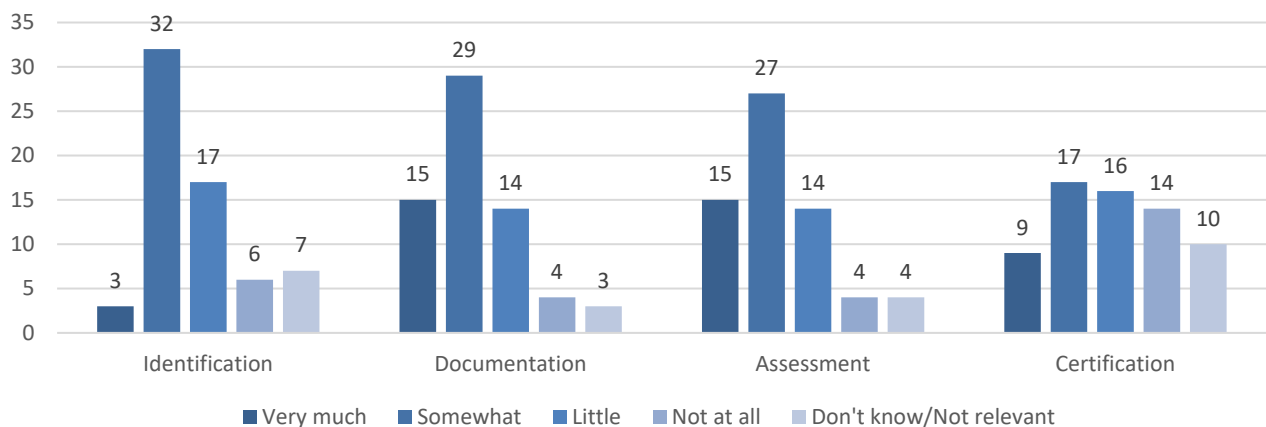
Practices of Recognition of Prior Learning at Institution

The possible challenges and main issues within four stages within the RPL process (identification, documentation, assessment and certification, see definitions in Annex 2) were scrutinised in order to identify possible bottleneck and potential good practices. For obvious reasons the following set of questions was only addressed to those respondents who had experience with RPL and were aimed at understanding the RPL practices adopted by the institutions represented, in terms of drivers for RPL, the validation process itself, institutional capacity and financial aspects, as well as integration with the quality assurance system.

Validation process

Regarding validation, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent, on a scale from *very much* to *not at all*, they encountered challenges in the four phases of the process (identification, documentation, assessment and certification). Responses were diversified; however, the majority of respondents

To what extent there are challenges for validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) in the institution?

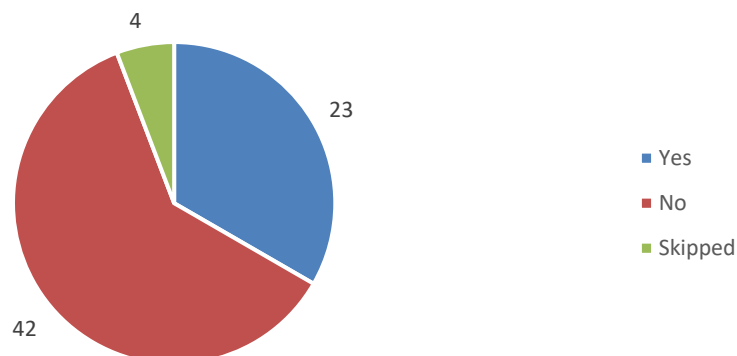


identified at least *somewhat* extent of challenges in the identification (48%), documentation (43.5%) and assessment (40.5%) phases. The final certification stage may benefit from a more clear, administrative nature of the procedure. It is worth noticing that the structure of perceived challenges was relatively corresponding across various country samples, especially those where the volume of responses made the sample more reliable.

Assessment process

The practice of awarding grades within the RPL process was another issue. Respondents were asked whether the RPL application assessment results in somewhat similar grade used for the standard assessment at the institution. The majority (61%) replied negatively while only the 33% of them stated that the two assessment processes are in line with each other. It is important to underline that many of the respondents who gave a negative answer to this question commented that their response was due to the fact that the result of the RPL process is not a grade, but an exemption and that there may not be a solid basis for detailed grading. Some respondents also commented that the level of those applying for recognition is usually higher due to their substantial experience, but still agreed on no grades.

Is the assessment of a RPL application in line with the regular assessment process of the institution?



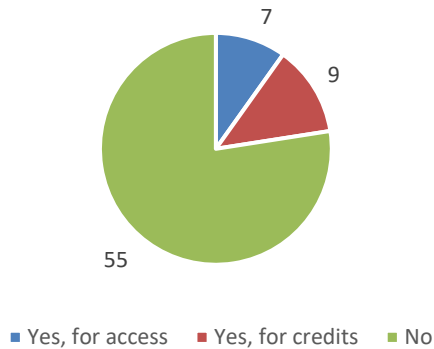
Costs of RPL and financial incentives

The financial aspect was – and probably remains even after the survey covering mainly the project countries – one of rather less analysed aspects of RPL, yet having potentially quite an impact on its attractiveness for a candidate or a relevant higher education institution. The costs, price and their coverage for various settings may be an issue for further data collection – and may reflect different national cultural and policy settings. Again, it is worth noting that some European countries with substantially developed, yet different approaches to RPL were not represented in the survey.

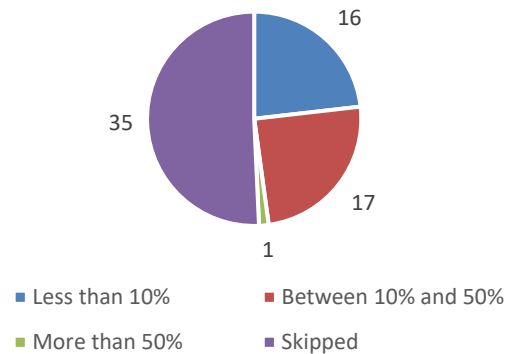
The majority of respondents (77.5%) declared that there were no costs for a person going through a RPL process at their institution. The rest was distributed almost evenly to both RPL for access to HE and credits award. It may be difficult to understand national context and amounts when comparing fees in international environment. Also, the respondent might not have had the concrete amounts available when answering the survey. Therefore, the survey asked for an expert estimate of the relation of the charged fee for RPL to the amount provided for a relevant study block in full-time mode by public funding. From those referring to some fees compared the RPL costs borne by a candidate to the, the majority (51%) skipped the question. However, out of the 34 responses received, 17 (50%) indicated that the RPL costs

may equal between 10% - 50% of the relevant public funding, 16 (47%) indicated that it is less than 10% and just 1 respondent indicated that it is more than 50%. The comments referred mostly to administrative fees.

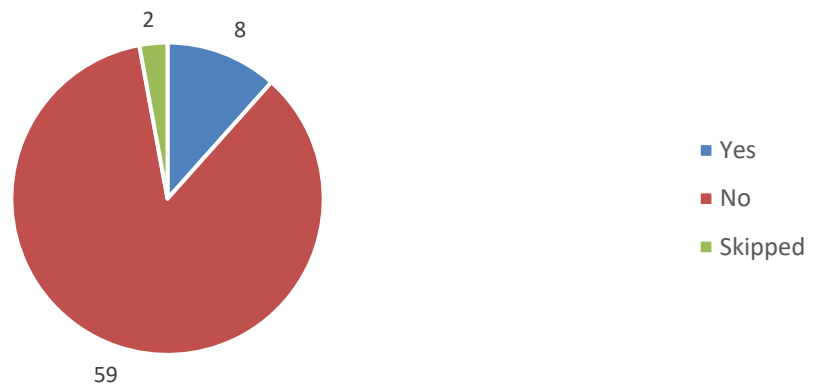
Are there any costs for a person going through a RPL-process in your institution?



Amount of RPL costs compared to the public funding of a relevant study block in full-time mode



Financial incentives for your institution to perform RPL



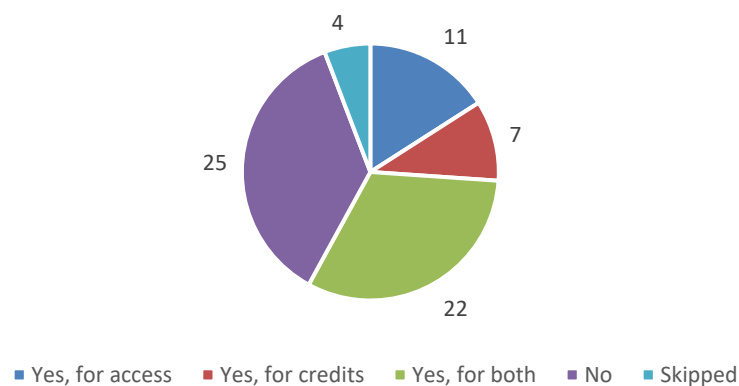
Moreover, according to the survey's results (85.5% of respondents), higher education institutions do not receive any type of financial incentives to perform RPL. Due to the sample of responses, it is rather difficult to comment on more specific country situation. There are most likely not many financial incentives for higher education institutions in the respective countries or may be included in the overall funding formula, yet some institutions seemed to be concerned about bearing the costs of RPL. The comment from Belgium pointed that tasks performed in relation to RPL may add extra requirements to the existing ones without any incentives.

On the other hand, several respondents mentioned financial incentives and benefits for students who may pay lower fees for the parts of studies which were a matter of recognition of prior learning, have shorter duration of their studies and in some cases, RPL enhances the likelihood of enrolment into studies in general.

Statistics on decisions regarding access and credits

According to survey's responses, a common practice regarding the collection of statistics of RPL decision regarding access and credits does not seem to exist, both across different European countries and across different higher education institutions in the same country. In general, the 36 % of respondents declared that their institutions do not gather any statistics on RPL decisions, while the 31 % of respondents said that these statistics are instead gathered both for access and for credits, 26 % respondent's institutions collect data on either RPL for access or credits award. Due to advanced experience the collection of relevant data seems to be more used in Ireland and Sweden (if compared to the overall result), but due to limited number of responses it is not possible to comment on other countries in more detail.

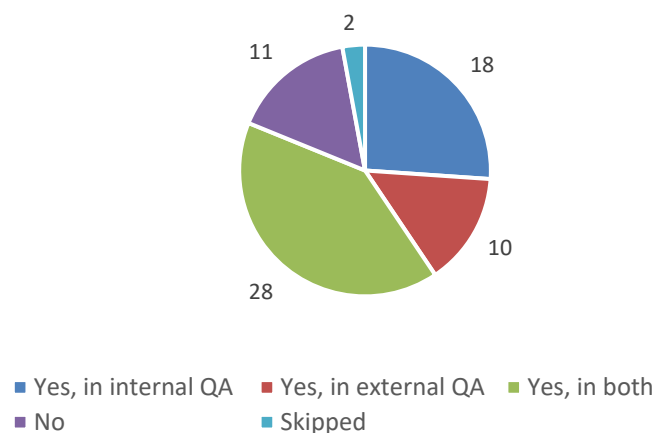
Does your institution gather statistics of RPL decisions?



RPL and quality assurance

A vast majority (80 %) of institutions with some RPL experience have integrated RPL procedures into their quality assurance (QA) system, most often reflecting also the requirements of external quality assurance mechanism (56 %). Data from Irish respondents point to a well-coordinated system of internal and external QA covering also RPL as 55% of Irish respondents referred both to internal and external QA, other 17 % to their internal system and 7% seem to rely on external QA. In Swedish case 30 % of respondents referred to a synergy between external and internal QA, 26 % report on having internal institutional QA system and 22 % rely on external QA. Again, it is not possible to make any conclusions regarding other countries in the survey.

Are RPL procedures integrated in the quality assurance system?



Implementation and development of Recognition of Prior Learning

With a set of three open questions, the survey tried to understand the views on possible further steps leading to further implementation and development of RPL at the institutional, national and European levels. In particular, to identify these steps, respondents were asked to indicate three issues that should be addressed in each of the three different levels.

The most frequent answers were:

At the institutional level

- More and better training for the staff in charge of RPL, as well as for other academics
- Raising awareness among the staff and the students
- Better support and guidance for students, internal policies
- Better funding and resourcing
- Creating a database of good practices
- Creating a uniform approach

At the national level

- Creating a uniform RPL process with national guidelines
- Clear regulations, legal basis for making RPL a standard part of HE activities
- Creating a national platform (e.g. a national center for RPL, community of practice)
- Better funding and financial incentives
- Increasing public awareness of RPL and its process
- Support for RPL staff, training

At the European level

- Defining a harmonised framework for RPL
- Harmonisation of qualifications
- Creating a database of good practices, champion best practices
- More incentives for countries to develop RPL
- Raising awareness, promotion
- European centre for support of national centres
- Supporting peer learning and experts' capacity building
- Funding projects

Conclusions

The aim of the survey was to map lightly the situation and practices used for recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning at institutional level and the national context across Europe. The survey was not able to achieve a well-proportionate representation of European countries, only eleven countries were represented and, out of these, the majority of responses came from Sweden and Ireland. From Iceland arrived four responses which – considering existence of seven Icelandic universities in total – may indicate some trends, but not all issues were answered. The sample was not selected in a way which would allow more accurate conclusions. It is therefore difficult to project any results on a European scale. Still, some general observations and conclusions follow.

- Recognition of Prior Learning is largely performed across European higher education institutions, especially at the EQF6 (Bachelor) and EQF7 (Master) levels. Its potential is likely to grow, especially at dynamically developing EQF5 (short-cycle), with micro-credentials development, further enhanced flexibility of learning pathways.
- Formal regulations for access and credits are not equally developed in higher education institutions both in the same country and in different ones. There seems to be urgency of introduction or

harmonisation of relevant regulations, clarification of the RPL role and position within higher education landscape, at least in some of the concerned countries.

- However, the major challenges regarding RPL have not been seen at regulatory level (yet not underestimating its importance), but in capacity building and expertise throughout academic community and in public promotion and awareness raising for better understanding the opportunities and requirements of the process. The challenges seem to be the same irrespective whether the recognition of prior learning for enhancing access to higher education or for awarding relevant credits. Challenges regard the attitudes of RPL applicants (both potential and actual), , as well as institutions' staff who all are often not sufficiently aware of the possibilities offered or do not fully understand the process. The long duration, time requirements and low comprehension of the procedure may discourage potential applicants to undergo through the RPL procedures and institutions to allocate necessary resources to support the process.
- At the same time the opportunities brought by RPL seem to be widely shared and understood – supporting further access to higher education, addressing non-traditional learners, enhancing flexibility of learning pathways and efficiency of learning, especially within the life-long learning concept.
- It appears that most of candidates do not incur any costs – or rather low ones if there are some fees – when undergoing the RPL process. There are rather financial benefits in cases when the regular student fees are reduced because of recognition of some part of study programme and shortening study duration. At the same time, institutions do not receive any specific financial incentives to perform RPL which may result in lack of capacity or expertise.
- As RPL is strongly based on trust of all actors, it is very positive to learn that RPL procedures have been in most cases integrated in the Quality Assurance system of the institutions and external mechanisms. But also here the arrangements and “maturity” of the system may differ between various countries.
- To support the further development and implementation of RPL, higher education institutions should concentrate their efforts in providing a better and more consistent training for their staff, in order for them to be able to offer a better guidance to the students and strengthen consistency of procedures and decisions taken by different academics. This can be supported by the creation of a database of good practices and by allocating better funding to the RPL process. Higher education institutions should also work together in order to create a harmonised approach to RPL, which will not only facilitate the process but also help in raising awareness among both the staff and students on the opportunities and procedures of RPL.
- At the national level, the development of RPL will benefit from the creation of a national platform (e.g., a national centre for RPL or community of practice) and national guidelines that would create a uniform and common process for higher education institutions to follow. In some countries, there seems to be an urgent need for clear, transparent legislation or other regulation which would codify the RPL, but also clarify its role within higher education. National governments should also allocate better funding and financial incentives for the development and implementation of RPL processes. National actors may join forces in tackling the problem of low awareness of RPL among potential candidates, but also higher education staff and students, e.g., by national campaigns on RPL.
- At the European level, there seems to be a need for harmonised framework for RPL, which can be supported by the creation of a common database of good practices, peer learning and recognition of best practices. The framework should be supported by qualification frameworks and further agreements on qualifications. RPL will be definitely one of the key elements of further policy discussions on flexible learning within the European Education Area and European Higher Education



Area (“the Bologna process”), especially considering the progress of work regarding micro-credentials. European Commission may thus include RPL into discussion with national government representatives, academic and other stakeholders and their fora. While Cedefop plays a great role in development of guidelines, there may be some platform for addressing specific issues of RPL in higher education, be it a centre, network or some sub-group within the already existing structures. As the survey partially shows, some countries have an extensive and consolidated experience with the RPL process – some other countries with well advanced RPL mechanisms haven’t been involved in the project and the survey – and their expertise could therefore be beneficial for countries with less developed RPL systems. Sharing good practices and success stories can also help raising awareness on the importance of performing RPL in the institution. European projects may provide a great opportunity to set a basis for such cooperation, but also for update, harmonisation and further development of various tools, instruments and awareness raising. funds and the creation financial incentives for countries to perform RPL are also needed.

The RPLiP project consortium



Annex I – Survey

Mapping Institutional Experience of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Higher Education focus on non-formal and informal learning

Dear colleagues,

We would like to invite you to share with us your views and experience with Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies, approaches and challenges at the level of individual higher education institutions.

The survey focuses on **recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning** for both access to higher education and provision of credits for academic purposes. Some of the definitions are provided in the annex in the PDF version here.

The survey is online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6765ZT6>. There are 23 questions which should not require more than 20 minutes of your time to answer. The survey format allows returning back to your answer to edit them until the survey is officially submitted. If you would like to have your answers ready before responding to the survey, you can have a look at the questions in advance by downloading the PDF version here.

Most of the answers are not compulsory to allow you to address only the relevant parts of the survey. Should you have any questions or comments, please, contact EURASHE secretariat at federica.garbuglia@eurashe.eu. We will keep the answers discrete and show the summative results or quotes without any direct reference to respondents.

Thank you for your interest and willingness, we would be ready to share the results of the survey with those interested. On behalf of the RPLiP project partnership

Anders Ahlstrand, The Swedish Council for Higher Education, the project coordinator

Michal Karpisek, EURASHE, the partner in charge of the survey

Survey

1. Country (scroll-down list of EHEA countries + other/specify, please).

Obligatory answer, one option

2. Do you represent:

- a) University
- b) University of applied science or similar institution of professional higher education
- c) Higher/Tertiary Education College
- d) Other higher education provider
- e) Other (e.g. national representation, stakeholder...), please, specify

Obligatory answer, one option



3. Which higher education qualifications levels are provided at your institution? (please, tick all relevant)
- a) Short-cycle higher education programme(s) (EQF5)
 - b) First cycle – Bachelor degree programme(s) (EQF6)
 - c) Second cycle – Master degree programme(s) (EQF7)
 - d) Third cycle – Doctoral programme(s) (EQF8)
 - e) None of these

Obligatory answer, one option

4. Does your institution have an experience with use of recognition of prior learning (RPL) at your institution? Please, keep in mind that we focus on recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning.
- a) Yes
 - b) No

Comments

Obligatory answer, one option. If 4b) skip questions 10 - 17

5. If you have experience with use of RPL at your institution at which qualification level has it been practiced?
- a) Short-cycle higher education programme(s) (EQF5)
 - b) First cycle – Bachelor degree programme(s) (EQF6)
 - c) Second cycle – Master degree programme(s) (EQF7)
 - d) Third cycle – Doctoral programme(s) (EQF8)

Comments

Optional answer, more options

6. Are there formal regulations (national or regional) on RPL – non-formal and informal - in your country?
- a) Yes, for access to Higher Education
 - b) Yes, for credits (to be accounted for in a programme/towards a degree)
 - c) Yes, for both access to Higher Education and recognition and transfer of credits
 - d) No national RPL regulations

Optional answer, one option

7. Are there any institutional policies and/or regulations on RPL – non-formal and informal - at your institution?
- a) Yes, for access to Higher Education
 - b) Yes, for credits (to be accounted for in a programme/towards a degree)
 - c) Yes, for both access and recognition and transfer of credits
 - d) No institutional RPL regulation

Comments to questions 6 and 7

Optional answer, one option

8. In your view, what are the challenges in working with Recognition of Prior Learning for access to Higher Education? (You can tick more than one option.)
- a) Barriers and limits within the legal framework which is not adapted for RPL
 - b) Public perception and trust in RPL
 - c) Awareness of potential RPL candidates as regards possible use of RPL
 - d) Understanding the RPL procedures and requirements by RPL candidates and/or stakeholders
 - e) Financial aspects/costs of the process
 - f) Consistency of decisions
 - g) Duration and time requirements of RPL process
 - h) Admission of candidates with RPL to already over-subscribed courses or programmes
 - i) Attitudes within academic community at the HE institution
 - j) Lack of clear processes within the HE institution
 - k) Lack of guidance of the candidates for RPL
 - l) Lack of expertise and personal capacity within your HE institution
 - m) Other (please, specify)

Comments to the answers above

Optional answer, more options

9. In your opinion, which of the alternatives below are challenges in working with Recognition of Prior Learning for credits to be accounted for in a programme/towards a degree? (You can tick more than one option.)
- a) Barriers and limits within the legal framework which is not adapted for RPL
 - b) Public perception and trust in RPL
 - c) Awareness of potential RPL candidates as regards possible use of RPL
 - d) Understanding the RPL procedures and requirements by RPL candidates and/or stakeholders
 - e) Financial aspects/costs of the process
 - f) Consistency of decisions
 - g) Duration and time requirements of RPL process
 - h) Admission of candidates with RPL to already over-subscribed courses or programmes
 - i) Attitudes within academic community at the HE institution
 - j) Lack of routines within the HE institution
 - k) Lack of guidance of the candidates for RPL
 - l) Lack of expertise and staff capacity within your HE institution
 - m) Other (please, specify)

Comments to the answers above

Optional answer, more options

10. Validation is usually divided into four phases: Identification, Documentation, Assessment and Certification (see definitions). To what extent do you experience challenges at your institution with each of the phases?

	Very much	Somewhat	Little	Not at all	Don't know/not relevant
Identification					
Documentation					
Assessment					
Certification					

Optional answer, one option for each row

11. Does the assessment of an RPL application (for a module) result in a grade in line with the regular assessment processes of the institution?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Comments

Optional answer, one option

12. Are there any costs for a person going through a RPL process in your institution? Please, indicate in the comment.

- a) Yes, for access
- b) Yes, for credits
- c) No

Please comment and specify

Optional answer, more options

13. Should there be costs of RPL for a person (answer yes in question 12), the amount compared to the public funding of a relevant study block in full-time mode is (please, provide an expert estimate):

- a) Less than 10%
- b) Between 10% and 50%
- c) More than 50%

Optional answer, one option

14. Are there any financial incentives for your institution to perform RPL?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Please elaborate:

Optional answer, one option

15. Which of the following would describe the main drivers for RPL at your institution? Indicate max 2

- a) Enhancing the diversity of institution's student population
- b) Providing better access and inclusion in higher education
- c) Strengthening life-long learning and employability
- d) Reflecting learners' expectations
- e) Recruiting a sufficient pool of students
- f) Other, specify below

Comments

Optional answer, max 2 options

16. Does your institution gather statistics of decisions on access or credits awarded on basis of Recognition of Prior Learning?

- a) Yes, for access
- b) Yes, for credits (to be accounted for in a programme/towards a degree)
- c) Yes, for both above mentioned
- d) No

Comments:

Optional answer, one option

17. Are RPL procedures integrated as part of the regular quality assurance system?

- a) Yes, in the internal quality assurance (within your institution)
- b) Yes, in the external quality assurance (within the country/national system)
- c) Yes, in both above mentioned
- d) No

Comments:

Optional answer, one option

18. What, in your opinion, should be done at your institution in terms of systemic implementation and development of Recognition of Prior Learning? Please, list maximum 3 issues.

- a) ...
- b) ...
- c) ...

Optional answer, max 3 issues, 100 characters

19. What, in your opinion, should be done at national level in terms of structural, legal or operational issues when it comes to Recognition of Prior Learning? Please, list maximum 3 issues.

- a) ...
- b) ...
- c) ...

Optional answer, max 3 issues, 100 characters

20. What, in your opinion, should be done at European level in terms of structural, harmonisation or support measures when it comes to Recognition of Prior Learning? Please, list maximum 3 issues.

- a) ...
- b) ...
- c) ...

Optional answer, max 3 issues, 100 characters

21. What works? Would you be, able and willing to share good examples of practices/routines/methodologies? Please, leave a contact or write to eurashe@eurashe.eu.

- a) Yes
- b) No

Please, comment or briefly summarise the good practice (max 100 characters)

Optional answer, max 100 characters

22. Please provide a reference or weblink to any other relevant national and/or institutional guidelines, checklists and manuals.

Optional answer, max 100 characters

23. Should you be interested in getting the results and more information, please, leave us your

- a) Name and surname
- b) Organisation
- c) Position
- d) Email

Optional answer

Thank you very much for your time and commitment. We appreciate it and hope to build further on it, we will share the conclusions with those interested and find further opportunities for sharing the experience.



Annex II – Definitions

Agreed definitions concerning RPL within the project RPL in practice⁴ (The focus of the definitions and of the project is on Higher Education)

Formal learning

Learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and which 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. (CR⁵)

Non-formal learning

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 programmes 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 organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public. (CR)

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure which is not organised 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 or organisational 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). (CR)

Qualification

A formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. (CR)

Learning outcomes

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. (CR)

(National) qualifications framework

An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society. (CR) There are different Qualification Frameworks, related but established in different contexts.

⁴ The project and the survey concern only RPL from non-formal or informal learning; not formal learning.

⁵ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>



European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning is a common European reference framework which enables countries of the European Union to link their qualifications systems to one another. It was adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The EQF uses eight reference levels based on learning outcomes that are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. It shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. It makes qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in the European Union. (ECTS Users' Guide, 2015)

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

In the European Higher Education Area, qualifications frameworks are found at two levels. An overarching framework (QFEHEA) has been adopted in 2005 and all member countries committed themselves to develop national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with this overarching framework. A national qualifications framework for higher education encompasses all the qualifications in a higher education system. It shows the expected learning outcomes for a given qualification and how learners can move between qualifications. The aim of QF-EHEA is to organise national higher education qualifications into an overarching European-wide qualifications framework. Within this framework, qualifications are defined according to levels of complexity and difficulty (Bachelor, Master, Doctor). (ECTS Users' Guide, 2015)

Validation

A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

1. **IDENTIFICATION** through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual.
A model to identify knowledge, skills and competences of a potential candidate for RPL.
2. **DOCUMENTATION** to make visible the individual's experiences.
The provision of evidence of the knowledge, skills and competences.
3. A formal **ASSESSMENT** of these experiences.
The phase in which the documented evidence of the individual's knowledge, skills and competences are compared against specific standards/Learning outcomes.
4. **CERTIFICATION** of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.
The official recording confirming the achievement of learning outcomes against a specified standard.

Recognition of prior learning

The validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation. (CR)

From the Lisbon Recognition Convention

Access (to higher education)

The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education.

Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes)

The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme.

