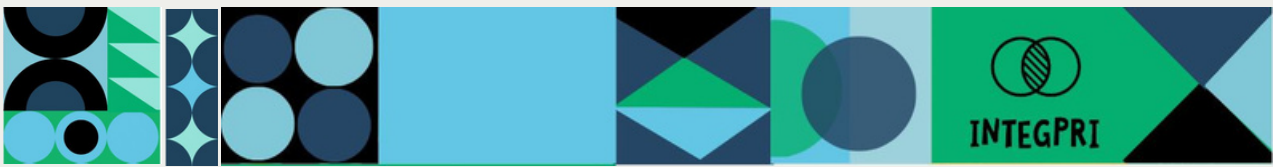




Chapter 6

**How to implement RPL
in refugee and migrant
adult education**



In the past decades, we have witnessed an increased level of migration, either with the purpose to seek refuge and protection or in search of better economic possibilities such as better jobs. In 2020, 3.6% of the entire world population, or 280 million people were immigrants (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

Furthermore, on a global level, 1 in 30 people migrates and eventually stays in the country of their migration. The number of migrants has risen across the globe, however, compared to the rest of the world the number of immigrants in Europe and Asia has risen steadily since 1990 (Ibid, 2020).

In 2022, Third country nationals represent 4,2 % of the entire EU population (European Commission, 2022). Despite the large percentage, non-EU migrants are facing several challenges which have a significant impact on their social and economic status, and overall quality of their life.

This is due to the lower employment rate compared to European citizens. For instance, in 2017, an average employment rate for non-European migrants was 55%, compared to the 68% of the host nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that 5.7 million, or 39% of non-European migrants are living in poverty (Ibid, 2022). Moreover, their situation has been affected also with the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic.

There are many reasons that contribute to the lower social and economic status of the migrants in the European Union including social exclusion, which is a result of othering refugees and migrants, as they are perceived as a security threat, as well as unrecognition of prior learning skills.

The lack of recognition of prior learning (RPL) skills among refugees and migrants is not a new phenomenon and has been widely discussed in the last three decades. In 2003, Bauder conducted research about the prior recognition of learning skills among Yugoslavian refugees and South Asian immigrants.

The study has shown that unrecognition of prior learning skills led to ““brain abuse”, which occurs because of de-skilling and the non-recognition of credentials in the host nation, as well as a "brain outflow" from the place of origin” (Bauder*, 2003, in Andersson, 2020, p. 13). Therefore, the unrecognition of prior learning skills does not only affect their current economic status and well-being, but it also affects the perception of their own cultural identity.

* Bauder, H. (2003). ““Brain abuse”, or the devaluation of immigrant labour in Canada”, *Antipode*, 35(4): 699–717.

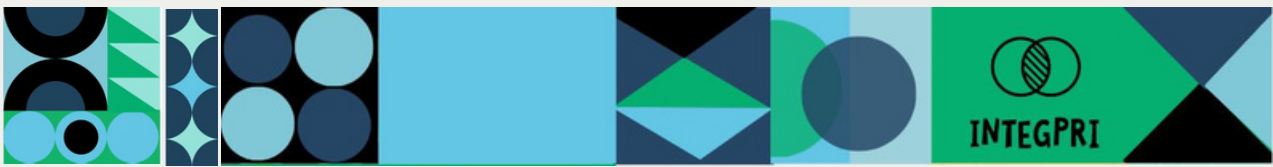
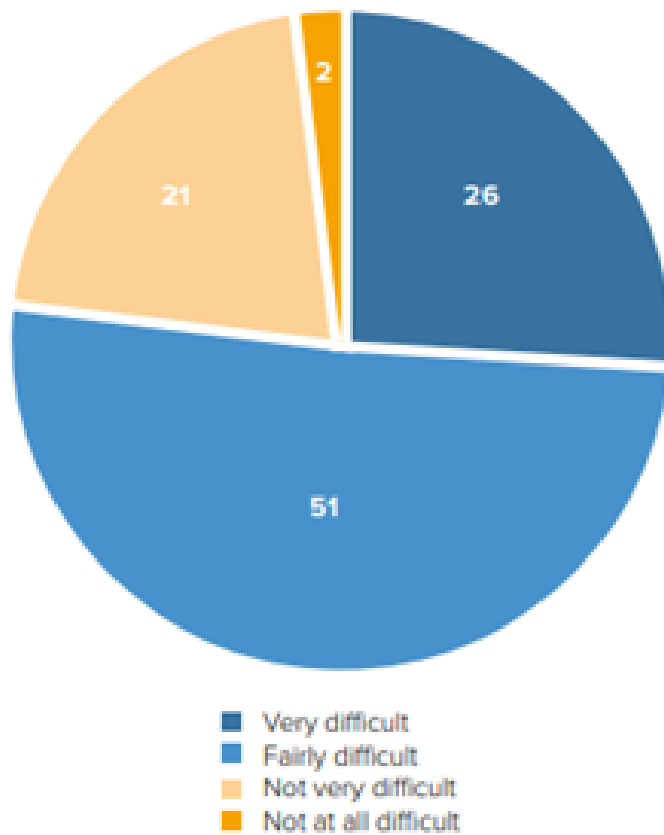


Figure 1: Difficulty finding employees with the required skills (EU-27; %)



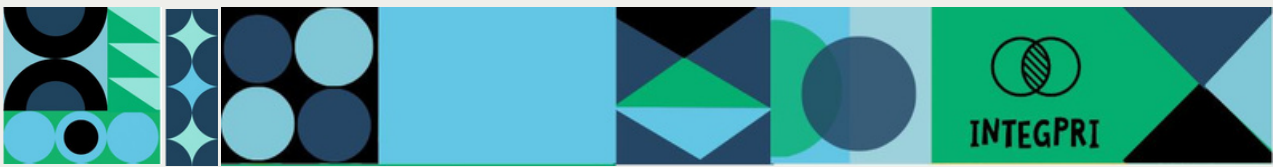
Source: Eurofound and Cedefop (2020), European Company Survey 2019: Workplace practices unlocking employee potential, European Company Survey 2019 series.

Despite its establishment and usage, RPL is still undeveloped in many sectors across Europe. For instance, in 2016 at the peak of the Refugee and Migration crisis, only 4 out of 36 European countries adopted a unified strategy spanning all sectors, meanwhile, 13 European countries targeted specific sectors (UNESCO, 2018, p. 13).

This implies that PRL does not target specific competencies, leaving migrants with no option, but taking underpaid and low skills jobs, for which some refugees and migrants might be overqualified.

Due to that, PRL has faced many criticisms, including that it serves as a sorting mechanism for exclusion, rather than inclusion, as institutions do not know how to adapt to their actual needs. To solve those issues efficient national and regional strategies are necessary.

Particularly large problems arise in recognition of the previously completed vocational training due to issues with the recognition of international credentials and expertise (Ibid, 2015, p. 18) Therefore, according to Aggarwal (2015, p. 15) a properly adopted RPL, and defined institutional structure for administration and planning are needed.

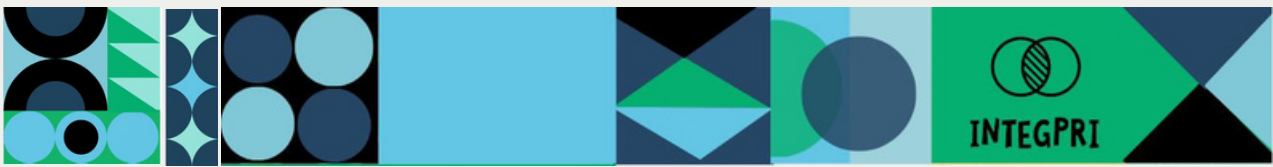


However, many nations hand over the responsibility of executing RPL to current partner organizations without considering their capacities or supporting them financially, as most organizations struggle in the fields of assessment and development (Ibid, 2015, pp. 16-17).

One of the ways to remove economic and social obstacles for the migrants is to encourage them to take adult education courses offered in the host nation. This not only promotes the integration of the migrants into the European society but also raises awareness of their situation among the host population, thus eliminating prejudice and overall contributing to a more tolerant society.

Furthermore, with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of adult training has become even more important, as it increased the demand for newer skills. It is expected that in the near future 1 in 2 adults will need a reskilling, or 112 million people, leaving the migrants in a state of uncertainty and bigger social and economic exclusion (Fernandes & Kerneis, 2020, p. 27).





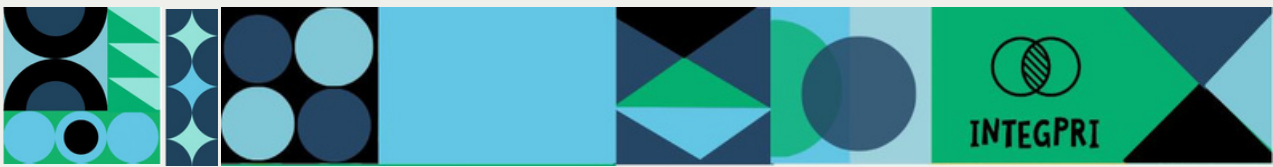
This chapter aims to present the implementation of the RPL, focusing on adult migrant and refugee education. This chapter will begin with a brief characteristic of adult education, its benefits, and the difficulties it encounters.

Next, we will elaborate on the difficulties migrants and refugees are facing while trying to enter the European working market and how that affects their own perception and consequently adoption into the hosting society. In the last part we will be presenting RPL, its purpose and benefits for adult migrants and refugees, its short comes, and possible solutions for its improvement.

6.1 Adult education



Adult education, also known as continuing education, is any type of education pursued by or offered to adult men and women, who have finished some level of education, although this is not a requirement (Encyclopedia Britannica, n. d). Similar to any type of regular education, adult education is a lifelong process that aims to fully develop one's personality and contribute to the individual's active and successful participation in society. Therefore, it is viewed as a universal human right, that should be accessible regarding age and gender (Right to education, n. d.). There are different ways adults can enroll in adult education. The most common is through vocational training, which can either result in upskilling or, it



may provide new skills for the necessity of the new occupation. Adults can also enter adult education through programs related to health and welfare, and education for civil, political, and community competencies, which provides courses and competencies related to politics, public affairs, and other related topics (Encyclopedia Britannica, n. d.). Lastly, it includes education for self-fulfillment.

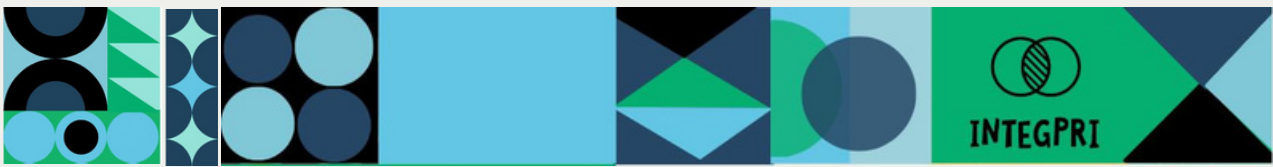
Adult education does not only positively affect self-awareness, but it has a greater impact on the whole society, as increases national literacy, enables easier adaptation to the demands of the labor market, and consequently increases the country's competitiveness and capital, as it reduces marginalization. Most importantly, it fosters active citizenship, which increases the level of democratization.

Although adult education has many social and economic benefits, it is still widely neglected compared to children's and youth's education. For instance, according to UNESCO's report on literacy in 2016, only a small number of the world's countries allocated 3% of their national education budget to programs related to adult education (Right to education, n. d.). This results in poorer participation in adult programs, as due to the lack of financial funds, many programs require self-payment (Ibid, n. d.).

Moreover, adult education is still exposed to many prejudices, as it is believed that only those who have not completed their primary or secondary education opt for such programs. To reduce prejudice, and provide access to adult educational programs, in 2016, 57% of 130 countries across the world reported that they will expand financing for adult education and learning in the future (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning**, 2016, in Right to Education, n. d.).

One of the political actors that have recognized the importance of adult education and its benefits for society as a whole, is the European Union. For the European Union adult education is viewed as a strategy to fulfill the standards for the Single European Market and a way to deal with the issues such as growing structural unemployment and the aging of European society (Formosa, 2014, p. 13).

**UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning. (2016). Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education. [https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNESCO Third global report on adult learning and education 2016 En.pdf](https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNESCO%20Third%20global%20report%20on%20adult%20learning%20and%20education%202016%20En.pdf)



In 2009, the EU Council agreed on a standard for adult learning, whereby in 2020, at least 15% of European adults aged 25-64 should participate in adult learning (Fernandes & Kerneis, 2020, p. 24) However, only 10.7% of adults participated.

Despite many financial investments, the enrollment in adult education among Europeans is still relatively low.

There are various reasons for this. In the survey done by the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training, 40.7% of participants listed lack of time, as the main reason, followed by high costs of the courses (31.9%) (Fernandes & Kerneis, 2020, p. 30). Among the other reasons are also family reasons (31.3 %), lack of support from their employers (24%), and the lack of variety of educational and training courses (24%) (Ibid, 2020, p. 30).

The enrollment into adult education programs was worsened by the emergence of Covid-19, as due to maintaining the distance, many programs were interrupted, or postponed, leaving millions of Europeans underqualified for the job market. To address those changes and challenges brought by the emergence of the Covid-19 Pandemic, in 2021 the Council of the European Union adopted New Agenda for Adult learning.

This agenda aims to adjust to the needs of adults, cooperate with national governments and stakeholders, contribute to sustainable finances, and put focus on quality assurance, staff mobility, adult learning staff professional development, and active assistance for underprivileged populations (The European Commission, 2021). But the pandemic has not just drastically affected the employment of Europeans, but it has also left millions of non-European migrants, especially women in uncertainty, as the outbreak of Covid-19 reduced their competitiveness in the labour market.

Migrant adult education and its effects on integration have been widely discussed since 2015 with the occurrence of the Refugee and Migrant crisis. Already at that time, the established adult programs for migrants faced many criticisms, as the programs lack key content that would successfully integrate migrants into a host nation.

However, since the educational policy is the responsibility of the host country itself, many countries do not know how properly target the needs of the adult migrants, but rather focus on their economic needs.



This creates difficulties in integration, as according to Morrice, Shan, & Sprung (2017, p. 131) social networks created in the learning communities play a crucial role in how migrants control their identities to integrate into society and find employment.

Over the years of researching migrant adult education, several suggestions for improvement have been made. According to Morrice et al. (2017, p. 133), educational centers should invest more in new portable technologies, which will reduce the gap in the possession of digital skills among the migrants and host nationals and invent an effective method that would help adult educators addressing adult migrants' actual needs.

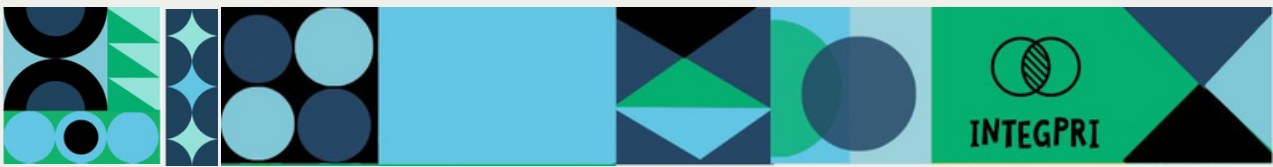
6.2 Challenges adult migrants and refugees encounter as adult learners

Despite the common belief that education and attending adult education programs contribute to the social, economic, and cultural integration of the migrants into the new environment, it is observable that many adult migrants face various difficulties, including professional degradation, racism, violence, exploitation, othering, mental health struggles, and more.

Those issues occur due to pre-existing prejudice, lack of understanding of the host educational system, language, cultural barriers, and more. This section aims to address each of those challenges, and the effects they have on both migrants (specially women), and the host country.

The first issue migrants and refugees encounter in their host country is equalization between long and short-term migrants who do not see the importance of enrolling in adult education programs to improve their competencies and therefore do not have issues accepting low-paid jobs.

This becomes particularly problematic when it applies to migrants and refugees who are escaping war or poverty, as it preys on people's precarious circumstances and vulnerability (Kloubert & Hoggan, 2021, p. 36).



This misperception and equalization create further issues, as the majority of adult education programs are created without prior consideration of the interrelationships between the various parts of the broader system and the difficulties experienced by migrants (Kloubert^{***}, 2019, in Kloubert & Hoggan, 2021, p. 30).

Furthermore, in the majority of cases, adult education programs are adapted to the immediate needs of the host nation and its society, disregarding the long-term consequences these employment decisions have on migrants' and refugees' lives, and their overall integration.

The integration of refugees and migrants into the labor market is also made difficult by employers, and their unrealistic expectations and lack of understanding of the process refugees and migrants go through.

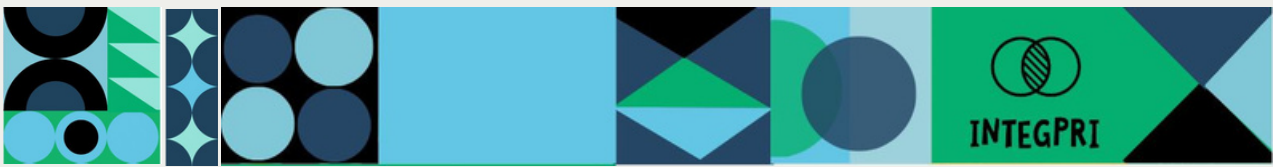
Many employers anticipate highly skilled, specialized professionals who perfectly match their specific workplace's cultural, linguistic, and professional norms (Kloubert & Hoggan, 2021, p. 36).

However, many employers do not realize that refugees and migrants are usually trapped in a system that does not match their needs, and it is hard to understand, due to linguistic barriers. This makes their situation even more difficult, as they receive no explanation about the system, and are forced to start their future on the wrong basis (Ibid, 2021, p. 34). This has a negative outcome for the host country's economy, as the inappropriate choice of qualification and profession reduces the quality of services and the economic development of the country.

Due to a misunderstanding of the system, which does not recognize their previous professional credentials and degrees, many highly educated refugees and migrants are forced to take low-skilled jobs for which they are overqualified, or they do not want to feel like a burden to a host country (Hill, Carr-Chellman, & Rogers-Shaw, 2021, p.4).

Moreover, many experience occupational downgrading, which occurs when a person loses their occupational status and income when they start a new job or a new life in a foreign country (Lange & Baillie Abidi, 2015^{****}, in Hill et al., 2021, p. 3).

^{***}Kloubert, T. (2019). Democracy education in the context of German "Orientation Courses" for migrants. In T. Kloubert (Ed.), *Erwachsenenbildung und migration* (pp. 115–132). Springer.



As a result, they develop a sense of inferiority, and unworthiness, which affects their further employment decisions, as many refugees and migrants leave in fear that they are not qualified enough, or that their language skills will never be good enough, for further advancement.

Further issues arise for the refugees and migrants with kids. As studies have shown, children can experience their parents' traumas second hand (Migration Policy Institute, 2020, p. 6). Therefore, the economic integration of parents plays an important role in their kids' social and cognitive skills and academic performance.

According to European Network Against Racism (2017, p. 25), a common misconception among migrants and refugees is that taking language classes and knowing the language will provide them immediate access to the social networking sites, job market, housing, etc. However, many language courses only provide a basic level that is not sufficient for taking highly skilled jobs.

Even after migrants and refugees become proficient in host language, they still feel their language skills are not enough. Furthermore, many migrants and refugees have an impression that their lack of language proficiency is used as an excuse to deny them access to better employment (Ibid, 2017, p. 25).

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Il Viminale certifica: più della metà di tentati omicidi e rapine sono opera degli stranieri
Immigrati, in Umbria i peggiori

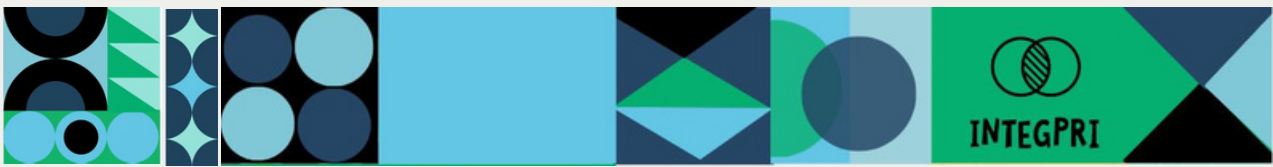
In provincia di Perugia il 64% dei denunciati e il 75% degli arrestati è rumeno o extracomunitario
Immigrati re del crimine

PRIMO PIANO
Commissione speciale
Intesa Lega-M5s
su Giorgetti
a Montecitorio

E il procuratore marca stretto i politici

PERUGIA
"La strategia vincente sta nelle espulsioni, soprattutto in quelle con accompagnamento alla frontiera o ai centri permanenti per il rimpatrio". Insomma, le espulsioni effettive. A dirlo è il questore di Perugia Giuseppe Bisogno nella cornice di piazza del Bacio, ossia il cuore di Fontivegge, una zona ancora da riscattare arcaico. In un anno so-

**** Lange E., Baillie Abidi C. (2015). Rethinking social justice and adult education for welcoming, inclusive communities: Synthesis of themes. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 146(2015), 99–109.

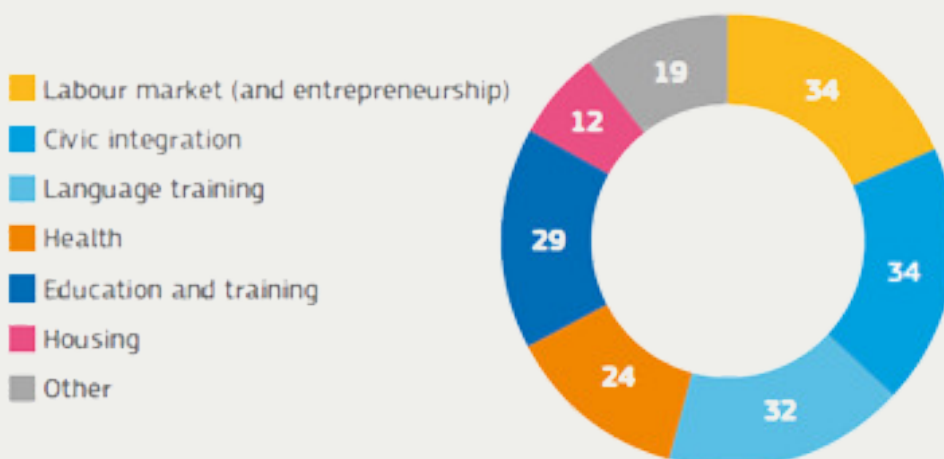


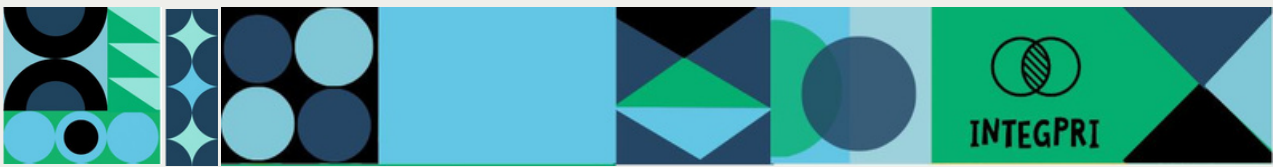
Additionally, their economic and social integration has been made difficult due to pre-existing prejudice and racist labels. Since the outbreak of the refugee and migrant crisis in 2015, the number of racist and xenophobic narratives towards refugees and migrants of Muslim and African origins has risen. With the help of mass media, migrants and refugees have been othered and framed as problematic individuals, that refuse to adapt to the European lifestyle, and therefore represent a danger to European cultural identity.

Furthermore, in many member states, refugees and migrants were forced to attend integration courses to maintain social assistance. It was especially difficult for men, who have been framed according to every issue Europe was facing at that time. Furthermore, according to Amnesty International, numerous Member States have drawn a connection between migration flows and the threat of terrorism, stating further that counter-terrorism measures have proven to be discriminatory on paper and in practice (European Network Against Racism, 2017, p. 22).

It was also hard for refugee and migrant women who were denied access to educational programs and rejected when looking for work because of wearing the hijab. But racism and discrimination, continue even after securing job and enrollment into adult educational programs.

Figure 12: Overview of policies addressing migrant women





Due to the increasing migration, the number of jobs on the black market has also increased, among both registered and undocumented migrants and refugees, creating a space for illegal activities. Even though this type of employment is usually short-term, migrants and refugees are facing various exploitations, such as working in poor conditions without many breaks, irregular payment of wages, nonpayment of social contributions for pension, health insurance, and more.

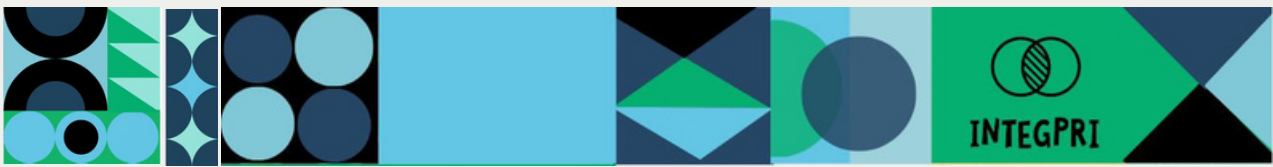
Since, the legislation does not protect refugees and migrants, especially undocumented ones, many refugees, and migrants become a subject of blackmailing by their employers, who took the advantage of their situation and vulnerability.

To prevent deportation many refugees and migrants continue working under these circumstances for years until they find better opportunities. It is especially difficult for refugee and migrant women, as their social and economic indicators are worse than men.

Upon their arrival in the new country, a small percentage of women decide to enroll in language school and start actively searching for work, even though studies have shown that women that had learned the language have a 40% higher chance to find work (Migration Policy Institute, 2020, p. 6). However, the research conducted by Migration Policy Institute (2020, p. 8) found that migrant and refugee women that did not have children before arriving in the host country are more likely to start a family during the first years in the host country when most courses are offered. Even though women expressed a desire to work and learn a language, many women do not have organized childcare, or they have issues with mobility.

Also, many religious refugee and migrant women have never attended mixed classes and feel discriminated against for wearing hijabs. Women's situation has been worsening by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemics, leaving millions of refugee and migrant women, without work, alone with kids without the possibility to extend their social circles, and improve their economic status.

However, according to the European Migration Network study (2022, p. 1), only a small number of the national integrational strategies specifically include women. Moreover, the majority of Member States did not create new integration measures or modify existing ones to lessen the COVID-19 pandemic's detrimental effects on migratory women (Ibid, 2022, p. 1).



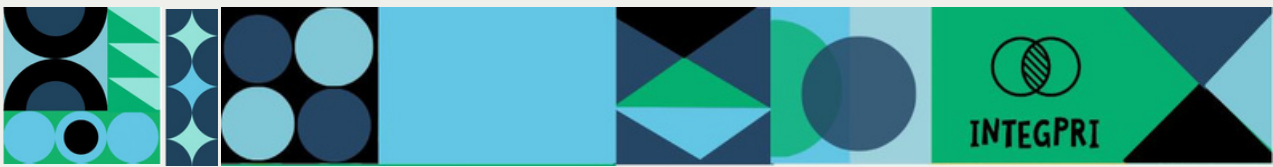
Due to that more member states have started prioritizing women's integration into the labor market, women's health, and access to housing and education. Although the situation is slowly improving, a lot still needs to be done in the field of improving the economic and social status of women.

Image by javi_indy on Freepik

Since the Refugee and Migrant crisis in 2015, the EU has invested billions into integration agendas, funds, and projects.

Despite numerous investments into the agendas, strategies, the integration, and the social-economic status of refugees and migrants has not improved significantly. In 2017, the EU launched the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third country nationals, which is still operating.

This tool aims to encourage early skill profiling of immigrants, refugees, and non-EU residents living in the EU (The European Commission, 2022, p. 1). Although the establishment of the EU Skills Profile Tool and increased usage of RPL represents a step forward in the recognition of migrants' prior skills and knowledge, challenges remain.



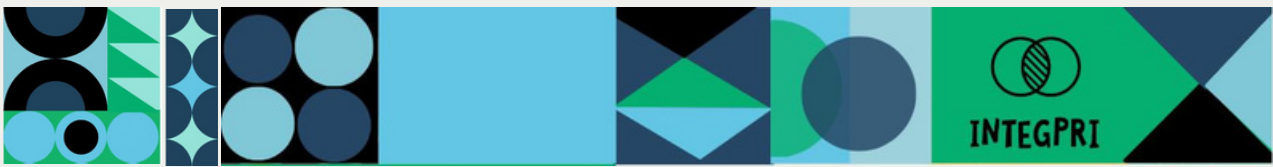
5.3 Some challenges of RPL



It can occur that the assessor of prior learning and the system are unable to communicate their requirements, which results in the inability to submit the proofs and identify the skills (Andersson, 2020, p. 21; Aggarwal, 2015, p. 29). Next, according to Aggarwal (2015, p. 18, 29), there is a low social engagement between different levels of authority, as in most countries, the state authorizes NGOs or other social institutions to implement RPLs that do not have adequate capacities. Therefore, according to Andersson (2020, p. 22) without a well-designed RPL process, the result might be exclusion rather than recognition.

Additional challenges occurring in RPL are inadequate funding and limited knowledge of the benefits of RPL which occur due to a lack of quantitative data on the RPL.

Although many proposals have been made to improve RPL globally, the implementation of RPL remains under the responsibility of the individual state. In addition to investing in new technologies that will enable the distinction between refugees and migrants and their different needs, it is also necessary to improve organization and management.



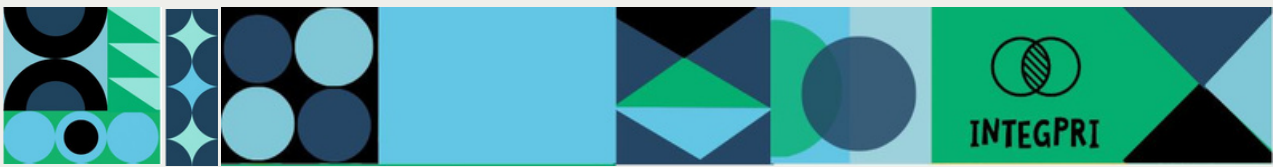
With that purpose, Aggarwal (2015, pp. 29-30) proposed 12 steps to help the countries improve the RPL system. The first step is to increase awareness of RPL and offer RPL applicants efficient vocational support and counseling. This cannot be done without the support of the institutional and legal systems.

To achieve effective institutional and legal systems, the countries must put RPL into the agenda of educational and training policies. Next, to improve the RPL system, countries should foster the active participation of different social partners and stakeholders (Ibid, 2015, p. 30). In the upcoming step, the countries should ensure enough qualified RPL professionals.

According to Aggarwal (2015, p. 30), this will provide a better understanding of the needs and therefore create better opportunities for the candidates. In the last part of his report Aggarwal (2015, p. 30) proposes the formation of a monitoring and evaluation system that will provide decision-makers and social partners with data for future improvements.

Despite the criticism and remaining challenges, RPL remains the best tool for assessing refugees and migrants with the recognition of their prior acquired competencies and knowledge. With the upcoming challenges such as wars and environmental migration, the use of RPL will become even more frequent and important.

Since RPL has an important effect on both society and individuals, decision-makers need to prioritize RPL on their agenda. Only this will help to solve the remaining challenges connected to the RPL, including misunderstanding of the actual needs, which make candidates feel neglected and that can lead to “brain abuse”.



Reflection and discussion

Have you ever heard about RPL before reading this handbook? If yes, what did it mean for you? Does your definition and perception match the description in the handbook?

Were you acquainted with the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning processes? How would you describe them?

According to you, why has RPL become a topic of increasing interest as well as policy and practice around the world?

Is it necessary for you to know the distinction between formal, informal and non-formal learning process?

Have you ever found yourself in a position where using RPL was necessary?

Before reading the handbook, were you familiar with the issues faced by migrants?

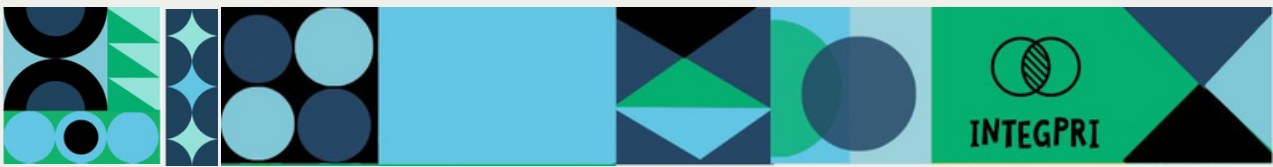
Were you aware of the tools that were created to enable the recognition of migrants' prior knowledge? Did you know that some programs and actions exist in other European countries?

Were you aware that RPL had more benefits than just financial gains such as human and social gains?

Are you aware of the difficulties refugees and migrants face during the learning process? Of the long term consequences that it could cause to them?

Do you have an example of a time where RPL made an impact on someone you were teaching / educating ?

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to take into consideration the differences of levels between people you were tutoring? If yes, how did you manage to make it work?



What can you implement or have already implemented to make sure the migrants use their imagination, that they are captivated and curious about what they are learning?

“It is very important to individualize a class. We are very different, we don't all have the same capacities and need to learn. So it is important to take this into account before teaching a class”

What do you think about this statement? Do you agree or disagree with it? If you agree but haven't implemented it, how can you do so?

How can RPL be beneficial for Companies, society and individuals?

Is the recognition process of prior knowledge something linear according to you? If yes, why? If not, why and explain some of the nuances you can have.

Were you acquainted with the concept of "brain abuse" and "brain drain"?

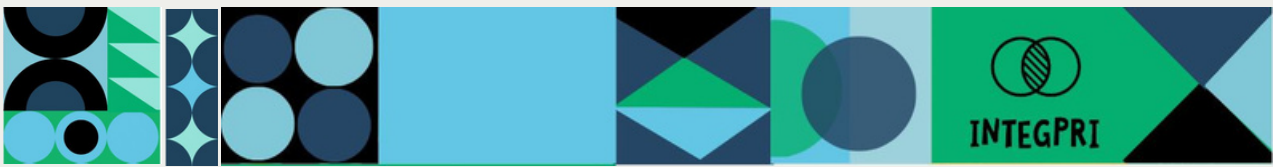
Were you aware of the variety of problems refugees attempting to enroll in college face?

What can be The advantages of recognizing prior learning in minors?

According to you, why is it important that participants and teachers have a trusting relationship? Have you ever experienced a situation where you had to work with someone you didn't trust? How did it affect your work?

Were you familiar with the 3 configurations described by Ralphs (2016)? Have you ever integrated those configurations to your classes or teaching process? If not, would you do it? What benefits do you think that it could bring both to you and the one learning?

Were you acquainted with the "portfolio of evidence"? According to you, how could it be beneficial?



Were you acquainted with the "UNESCO-developed Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-Formal and Informal Learning" or the "learning package" released by the ILO?

- If yes, were you able to implement some of the knowledge from those two outlets in your different work?
- If not, think of ways you could incorporate those different outlets into your work. What are some of the benefits that you could get from doing so?

What does "Assessment-driven RPL practices" mean to you? How could those practices facilitate the migrants' integration and prior knowledge recognition?

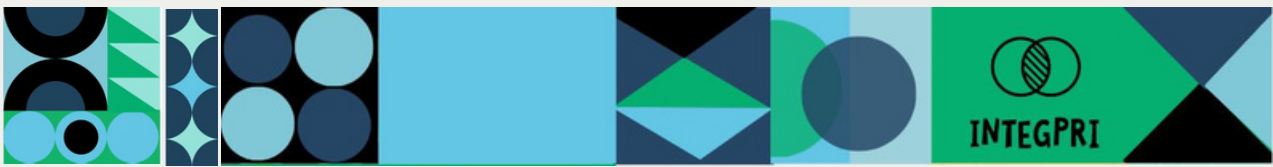
Were you familiar with the activities in Chapter 5? If yes, which ones? Have you implemented them and how? What was the outcome?

If not, would you implement one of them? Which one could it be? For which reasons? What would be your expectations on the outcomes of the exercise?

Were you acquainted with "adult education"? What does it mean for you? Does your definition and thoughts about it match the handbook's description?

What are some of the difficulties that you have encountered working in adult education? What are some solutions you could think of to make it easier for you and for the learner?

Were you aware of the difficulties that migrant women face? Did you ever have to deal with a complex situation where a migrant woman was involved in one of those difficulties mentioned in Chapter 6?



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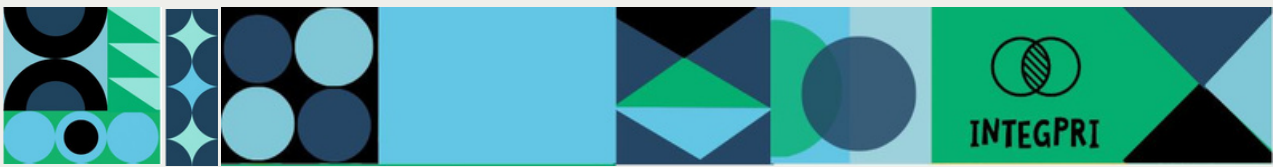
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