EURO-MEDITERRANEAN INTEGRATION THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING (EU-MILL)

A memory of cooperation and dialogue on Education in the Mediterranean basin

530401-TEMPUS-1-2012-1-ES-TEMPUS-SMHES (2012-2995/001-001)

Editorial Universidad de Sevilla

Sevilla 2017

Colección: Divulgación Científica

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN INTEGRATION THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING
530401-TEMPUS-1-2012-1-ES-TEMPUS-SMHES

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Editorial Board
José Beltrán Fortes
(Director de la Editorial Universidad de Sevilla)
Araceli López Serena
(Subdirectora)
Concepción Barrero Rodríguez
Rafael Fernández Chacón
María Gracia García Martín
Ana Ilundáin Larrañeta
Emilio José Luque Azcona
María del Pópulo Pablo-Romero Gil-Delgado
Manuel Padilla Cruz
Marta Palenque Sánchez
José-Leonardo Ruiz Sánchez
Antonio Tejedor Cabrera

Any reproduction extracted of this work is forbidden

Editorial Universidad de Sevilla 2017
C/ Porvenir, 27 - 41013 Sevilla.
Tlfs.: 954 487 447; 954 487 451; Fax: 954 487 443
Email: eus4@us.es
Web: http://www.editorial.us.es

Coordinators

© Encarnación Mellado, 2017
© Bosco Govantes, 2017

Printed in Spain-Impreso en España
ISBN: 978-84-472-2104-2
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12795/9788447221042

"I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures… I divide the world into learners and non-learners."

Benjamin Barber

Contents

Para ir a página pulsar en la línea

This book recompiles the different documents generated by the partners during the EUMILL project.

The following participants from the partner institutions have been involved in some of the activities performed in the context of the EU-MILL project:

George Anthony Abdelnour Notre Dame University-Louaize, Beirut, Lebanon
Kamal Abouchedid Notre Dame University-Louaize, Beirut, Lebanon
Mariano Aguayo University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Mohamed Bakkali University Abdelmalek Essadi, Tétouan, Tangier, Morocco
Fawzi Baroud Notre Dame University-Louaize, Beirut, Lebanon
Ahmed Belhani University of Constantine 1, Constantine, Algeria
Nard Bennas National Union of Moroccan Women, Provincial Office of Tétouan, Morocco
Zoheir Benyelles University AbouBekr Belkaid Tlemcen, Tlemcen, Algeria
Mahmoud Bouhafs Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Tunis, Tunisia
Djamel Boukezzata Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Algiers, Algeria
Miguel de Castro Neto University Nova of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal
Anouar Derguech University of Gabes, Gabes, Tunisia
Abdelkbir Errougui Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Training, Rabat, Morocco
Abdelkarim Filali-Maltouf Universidad Mohamed V, Rabat, Morocco
Bosco Govantes University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Marta Gutiérrez University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Hocine Hamdi University of Constantine 1, Constantine, Algeria
Fuad Hashwa Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon
Farida Hobar University of Constantine 1, Constantine, Algeria
Ana Irimia University of Seville, Seville, Spain

Raouf Jaziri University of Sousse, Sousse, Tunisia
Hadjira Kara Terki University AbouBekr Belkaid Tlemcen, Tlemcen, Algeria
Adel Khalife Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Beirut, Lebanon
Amin Laglaoui University Abdelmalek Essadi, Tétouan, Tangier, Morocco
Laayouni Loubna Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Training, Rabat, Morocco
Michel Majdalani Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon
Faysal Mansouri University of Sousse, Sousse, Tunisia
Carlos Marcelo University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Carmen Márquez University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Mohamed Mars University of Gabes, Gabes, Tunisia
Justine Martin Maghreb office of the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, Rabat, Morocco
Encarnación Mellado University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Jorge M. Mendes University Nova of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal
Mustapha Missbah El Idrissi Universidad Mohamed V, Rabat, Morocco
Asma Msougar University Mohamed V, Rabat, Morocco
Abderrahim Ouabbou Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and training, Rabat, Morocco
Victor Hugo Perera University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Sirpa Purtilo-Nieminen University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland
Cristina Robalo Maghreb office of the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, Rabat, Morocco
Sidi Mohammed Sahel University AbouBekr Belkaid Tlemcen, Tlemcen, Algeria
Skander Slim University of Sousse, Sousse, Tunisia
Benaich Souad Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Training, Rabat, Morocco
Abderrazak Souai University of Gabes, Gabes, Tunisia
Mª Carmen Talavera University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Juan Jesús Torres University of Seville, Seville, Spain
Helka Urponen University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland
Nadia Ykhlef University of Constantine 1, Constantine, Algeria

4

Towards recognition of Lifelong Learning

The recognition of LLL programmes by educational institutions is a cornerstone of the EU-MILL project.

In this chapter, we summarize the project approaches towards the recognition of LLL, including the implementation of a Methodological Framework, a Credit and Competences system, Quality Assurance assessment and Regional and National Qualification Frameworks. The development of these instruments is a key aspect to assist recognition and increase transparency and comparability, providing great benefits to lifelong learners. Taking into consideration the importance of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) as a reference in the south Mediterranean context, an extensive summary of the main elements of the ECTS user's Guide (European Commission, 2009, 2015a) is present in the current chapter.

4.1. Methodological framework

As a first approach, it is necessary to consider that all learning activity developed throughout life has as aim the improvement of knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (European Commission, 2001). The acquisition of competences is probably the main axis of a Lifelong Learning process; in keeping with this approach, a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 2006 on key competencies for Lifelong Learning, stated:

> "key competencies in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. They provide added value for the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation" (cited on Duvekot et al., 2007).

A key objective established by the consortium is to develop a general methodological framework for LLL programmes offered by Higher Education Institutions. In the context of the WP2 of EUMILL project, a methodological framework has been designed as a prototype model for Lifelong Learning (LLL) short curricula and projects, including the workload and the expected learning outcomes to be implemented in the South Neighbouring area. For its design, a bottom-up approach was conducted, starting by identifying the needs of the target groups in order to meet them through the LLL curricula and projects design.

Taking into account, the field of advanced continuing education is at the intersection between university, professional practice and general vocational, these programmes are characterized by features, which quite frequently, differ substantially from mainstream courses. Therefore, there is clear evidence on the necessity of developing and sharing specific tools in an international perspective (Field, 2006; Pastore, 2007).

The current chapter specifies the key elements to develop a specific methodological framework appropriate for the implementation of LLL courses.

4.1.1. Aspects for the development of a Lifelong Learning methodological framework

Training nowadays is primarily assumed as a process that allows us to better position ourselves in this complex and competitive world, guaranteeing the acquisition of personal, social and professional skills. Nonetheless, in order to acquire those skills, it is necessary that the procedures and methodologies are adapted to the learners' necessities.

Within this context, it's unavoidable to approach concepts like flexibility deeply related to open learning. The capacity of being flexible or adaptable to the student or the labour market's requirements is not incompatible with the necessity of receiving a proper recognition in the own country as well as in the others, something that has been pointed out by Werquin (2010) on his interesting study about recognition of Lifelong Learning in 16 OECD countries.

A. Designing the training

Training, regardless of its modality, should be planned or designed in order to ensure that the processes are not improvised and they have the aim to improve the recipients' skills for a better professional development. The training design should begin with the study of the current situation of acquiring competence by the participants in the training programme. To meet these requirements, a specific structure will be designed to allow the development of the learning as described in programme's learning outcomes. The design of Lifelong Learning training activities has some special characteristics.

As previously stated, a training course planning and design should always include the following elements: analysis of training demands, project design, coordination and implementation of a monitoring system and finally an evaluation of training impact (CEDEFOP, 2011).

A.1. Recipients: The design of a training activity, whether it will be developed on site or online, must bear in mind to whom is this action is addressed to. Sometimes the recipients are clearly known, because they are part of an organization or company. On many other occasions, training offers are open and are eligible to benefits from a wide variety of people in very different situations and conditions. This aspect, which makes the design process more difficult, must be taken into consideration, so as to the final product is flexible and can conform to different recipients such as people coming from a variety of socio-demographic conditions, with a variety of prior knowledge and experiences, different levels of use of technology, different levels of motivation or the diversity of skills.

In the moment it is approached the planning of a training course, the participation of stakeholders must be considered, especially on the study of the training demand. Nonetheless, the active participation of stakeholders may be desirable on the planning and implementation of the course as well.

The settlement on the territory can be revealed in different aspects:

a) Answering specific demands of local stakeholders from public or private sector (enterprises, associations, local entities, etc.)
b) Shared individualization on training itineraries tailored out of the application of sectorial or general political priorities.
c) Shared individualization on training itineraries tailored out of the study of the specific needs on the territory, which are not the application of political demands.

A.2. Objectives of the Programme: Lifelong Learning must specify learning goals (general and specific) to be pursued. It is agreed that the most effective training programmes are those that clarify their objectives in terms of teaching skills and learning outcomes of students.

- The objectives must be expressed in terms of professional skills for the students to acquire.
- The objectives of the programme must promote values and attitudes of Lifelong Learning.
- The objectives of the programme have to be consistent with existing regulations and legislation.
- The objectives of the programme must bear in mind the labor market requirements.
- The objectives of the programme must be related to the training needs identified by business oganizations and unions.

A.3. Teacher oriented: Lifelong Learning can take different consistent models with different approaches on how to learn to teach. We can identify from more transmissible models in which professors learn contents already designed to collaboration and research based models. Research tends to evidence that training is most effective within contexts of collaboration among professors, applying the training contents in the classroom leaving spaces for feedback and reflection.

- Based on the acquisition of information: students are expected to study, internalize knowledge and learn through interaction with course materials usually presented on physical formats, including the punctual use of multimedia supported materials.

- Based on self-learning: the student is expected to learn independently, organizing their own learning pathway throughout the programme. In order to achieve this, material resources are provided and students are encouraged to research some of the contents to fulfill all the programme outcomes. The tutor role is being facilitator of an open process.
- Based on the collaboration among students: learning is expected to be supported mainly on the process of collaborative work. A problem-solving group approach is promoted as primary form of learning.
- Based on practice: students are expected to demonstrate their competence in the practical application of the programmed contents. It is expected that the tasks to be developed, individually or in groups, will enhance the transfer of learning and reflection on practice.

A.4. Syllabus contents: A Syllabus is what students learn as a result of the training programme. Research has shown that training is only effective in case students get to understand the contents and especially if the contents are presented in a language of practice that responds to the student's learning needs. A syllabus should:

- Introduce multiple perspectives and conceptual approaches to students, based on research findings and practical experiences.
- Present examples and cases of practical application of the knowledge students are expected to acquire.
- Be open and allow students to deepen their interests and work together to build shared knowledge. So, the training materials must offer links to additional information to fulfill this aim.
- Promote consideration on values like equality, equity, social justice, tolerance and coexistence in contemporary societies.
- Be consistent and relevant to the competencies required by the labour market and the requirements detected on the analysis on professional qualifications.
- Promote reflection and critical thinking by students.

A.5. Learning Strategies: The training models are specified in learning strategies, involving students in performing different tasks and learning activities. The impact of these tasks on the

students' outcomes differs according to the significance, activity orientation, collaborative environment and transferability of the learning outcomes to a job position.

Lifelong Learning has its own specific strategies applicable to all kind of profiles of learners and is has become one of the main exes of the European High Education Area (EHEA).

Learning strategies:

- Are consistent with the objectives and contents of the programme, to facilitate the achievement of the programme's objectives through them.
- If applicable, they provide an appropriate combination of classroom and online strategies to promote student learning.
- Provide flexibility to develop a wide variety of learning paths throughout the training programme.
- The design offers a suitable justification on the adequacy of the teaching strategies with the expected learning goals of the programme.
- The complexity of the tasks is appropriate to the content addressed in the training programme: not too easy or simple, not too complex.
- The time devoted for the development of tasks (depending on their complexity) is appropriate.

A.6. Teaching resources: Training requires access to resources accompanying the process of the student learning. Lifelong Learning programmes for adults should ensure at least:

- A variety of resources: textual, graphic, multimedia.
- There is coherence between the resources used and the programme contents.
- Allow adequate interaction among students.
- Provide motivational skills to students.

B. Design of the training. Optional in case of face-to-face or blended training models.

When a training programme is developed through an e-learning or blended mode, the designed process requires the use of a virtual learning environment. This design process results in determining

which technology platform will be used and its characteristics. This procedure, logically, requires internet accessibility conditions to allow distance learning.

A virtual learning environment provides a teaching-learning space, where educational materials and communication tools are integrated in the same virtual space (Hercules, Portal de E-learning, 2015).

These environments must support the training process by a friendly interface between people and computers. In addition, they should provide adequate flexibility understanding, as the ability of the learning setting space to be sensitive to different motivations, interests and learning styles.

The e-tutors have to be familiarized with the virtual environment, being capable to elaborate accessible teaching material to orientate the students in the optimal use of the course resources and to communicate with the students through the platform (Blazquez and Alonso, 2009).

Internet learning is developed nowadays through 'technological platforms' or 'Learning Management Systems (LMS)'. These technology platforms are software hosted on Internet servers, allowing individuals with an Internet connection to access these spaces. Access is generally protected by a password students receive from the training organization. The platforms include tools to design different training models from transmissible collaborative models.

- The technology platform used is adequate and appropriate for the target as well as the learning objectives.
- The technology platform allows students to customize some elements (Calendar, Schedule, color of modules).
- The technology platform used has an intuitive interface and it is easy to understand for users.
- The technology platform offers various communication tools: email, forums, chats.
- The technology platform has tools for managing and monitoring the student progress.

C. Set up of the training programme.

Once the training programme has been designed, it is required to set up a management procedure, including the quality of the information provided on the programme, the availability of access to

teachers and the guidance provided. Similarly, at the end of the training programme there are management issues to be considered, as they are important to ensure the quality.

C.1. Information and guidance on the course syllabus: The accuracy of the information provided to students before the programme constitutes a key element to ensure the clarity of a training programme. Students must receive as much detailed information as possible to enable them whether to participate in the programme or not. This information has to include the programme itself, technical requirements as well as the type of activities and expected workload.

- Adequate information concerning the target student profiles
- Information about the teachers of the course: qualifications, experience, type of tutoring along the course, etc.
- Information about the period of development of the programme.
- Clear and concise information on the training programme: files, programmes, duration, etc.
- Information for students about the type of assessment to be conducted in the course: individual work, group work, exams, term paper, etc.
- Information about possibilities to continue the programme in case it is not concluded in the expected period.
- The communication of the administration of the programme with students before the course starts has to be fast and efficient.
- Use of e-management for all documents related to the course.
- Information on funding opportunities for students about programme costs, fractionation payments, etc must be provided.
- A Quality commitment with the students exists and it is public.
- Information on claims and problem resolution have to be available to students.

C.2. Enrolment, selection and certification: For the implementation of a training programme it is necessary to provide students adequate and reliable information regarding the entry requirement, selection and accreditation processes.

- Facilitate students clear and accurate information on the registration process: documentation to submit, deadline for submission of documentation, etc.
- If the programme requires selection of candidates, information about the selection criteria is provided, including selection committee, deadlines and appealing forms.
- Information is provided to students about the process of accreditation of the course if any, as well as about the procedure.
- The organization of the programme will send diplomas and certificates on the expected time, evidencing completion of the programme.

D. Implementation of the training programme

For a proper implementation of a programme for adults, it is essential the support and motivation efforts made by trainers as well as the use of technical and human resources. Finally, evaluation must be present at all stages of development of the training plan.

D.1. Trainers: In adult education, a key element is the quality of trainers. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure that the people performing functions in training for trainers possess the necessary qualifications not only as specialists in the content they teach, but also in teaching methodologies for a proper development.

- Trainers of the programme have adequate skills: know the characteristics of adult learning, have competencies to perform group dynamics, etc.
- Trainers have a proper level of competence in keeping to the contents of the training programme.
- Trainers programme demonstrate competence in managing the collaborative work of students.
- The organization of the programme counts with mechanisms to ensure coordination among the trainers of the course, so that there is congruence between their units and evaluation tasks developed by the students.
- Trainers programme show high quality in relation to assessments made on the tasks performed by the learners either individually or in groups.
- The programme incorporates different teaching systems: various trainers depending on the specialty of the contents and the different functions expected to be performed (dynamic, evaluator, etc.).

D.2. Learning processes: Any Lifelong Learning programme aims to make adults gain the personal or professional qualifications indicated in the objectives. In other to achieve this, it is important that throughout the training process, the adults get involved in learning situations leading to understanding of contents, inquiries, reflections and practical experimentation.

Learning of adults is caused by the involvement of these ones in planned situations that allow them to acquire and/or develop new skills. To accomplish this aim, there are some principles that research on training has been developing to help establishing clear criteria regarding the quality of them. Among these principles we can remark the following:

- Participation: the programme allows students to make proposals in relation to the learning activities in which they are involved.
- Practical implementation: Learning situations are oriented to facilitate students to apply the course contents to their own professional or personal pathway.
- Inquiry: All through the programme students are encouraged to research in keeping with the contents of the training program.
- Interaction: The programme promotes a wide communication at all levels: students with trainers, student-student, etc.
- Collaboration: The programme promotes opportunities for collaborative work. Trainers must provide adequate and constructive feedback.
- Reflection: The programme promotes individual and collective reflection by the students.
- Comprehension: The contents and strategies of the programme encourage a deep comprehension of the contents.
- Coherence: The programme bears in mind the existence of an appropriate coherence between objectives and contents and the learning situations proposed by the students.
- Flexibility: The programme promotes the use of flexible learning situations that may be composed by a balanced combination of face-to-face and online strategies, or the application of different online situations.
- Belonging: The programme promotes the development of a "belonging feeling" among the students group. In order to do so, different activities are designed to favor social spaces and interaction.

E. Evaluation of the Programme and Students

A training programme should incorporate evaluation as an essential element that has to be present in each one of the development phases. The assessment helps design and redesign programmes in order to improve processes. Similarly, the evaluation provides credibility to the training and promotes better student involvement.

Evaluation is a process to be developed throughout the training process. Formative evaluation helps improve the functioning of the programme. To this end, this evaluation should not be only based on the student learning, but also in relation to the programme, content, tutorials, tools, etc. Within this logic assessment occurs:

- Throughout the programme: learners are expressly asked to evaluate the quality of the contents, learning tasks, work developed by the trainers or resources used.
- Upon completion of the training: students have the opportunity to express their satisfaction with the quality of the programme.
- Upon completion of the programme: the student learning is evaluated in keeping to programme contents. This evaluation can use a wide variety of assessment techniques.

F. Monitoring results and alumni

One of the characteristics of effective training programmes is related to the time of contact between the students and the organization after the formal ending of the training activity. The ability to receive advice and support from instructors or other students participating in the program constitutes one of the most important elements to ensure that the learning is consolidated and overcoming the difficulties of practical application.

F.1. Evaluation of results:

- Upon completion of the programme, the degree of practical application of learning is evaluated.
- A deferred assessment of the training programme is conducted.

F.2. Tracking graduates:

- Forums, collaborative tools, sharing tools, etc

- Creating a network of students involved in the training programme using technology resources is promoted: forums, collaborative tools, sharing tools, etc.
- Students advice and information is offered to facilitate job finding.
- The organization promotes and manages an employment exchange service for students once the training program is completed.

4.1.2. Template for the design of LLL programmes

The proposal of a LLL programme should include a description of different general characteristics as indicated below, as well as other elements each hosting university may consider necessary.

- **Description:** Each proposal must include an adequated and consistent description with the type of course offered that should not lead to confusion towards its content, professional aspects and/or external entities involved in the proposal.
- **Organization:** Identification of the LLL Unit or LLL Center responsible of the organization and management of the course.
- **Coordination of the course:** The coordinator of the course must be a member of the academic staff of the hosting HEI.
- **Dates:** The key dates for the development of the course must be clearly identified.
- **Justification:** Every programme must include a description of the singularities and relevance in case of the novel programmes and information supported by the appropriate references.

  Each course proposal must be relevant according to the training and/or research experience, appropriate to the academic field referenced and/or in accordance with existing similar studies. The proposed course should be reasonably introduced to society and the academic community. The references or evidence accompanying the proposed course should provide academics, scientific and/or professionals arguments to support it. Companies can offer courses in collaboration with the universities, agreeing the contents, competencies, etc.
- **Objectives, competencies and workloads:** Each course must include specific objectives or training goals to be achieved, whether its profile is professional, scientific, cultural

or personal. As well, it must include specific competences and skills that students will acquire upon the completion of the studies and the expected workload. The skills will be evaluated and must be consistent with the objectives previously stated in order to grant the course Certificate.

- **Entry and admission requirements:** The course will define the profile of the target student (High School or University degree).

  Additionally, the course must ensure transparency in the admission process based on merit, equal opportunity and capacity of the candidate. The candidates are required to provide their CVs and there will be an evaluation process based on several elements, including a personal interview. There will not be any kind of discrimination based on sex, disability, ethnicity, religion or any other personal consideration.
- **Programming of courses and schedule:** The curriculum must have a computed modular structure equivalent to the Credits (1 Credit = 27 hours), consistent with the overall objectives, competencies defined and expected workload. Credits have to consider the time students spend on the course including either face-to-face, online training or homeworking; including participation in seminars, lectures, activities, preparation of reports, etc.
- **Academic staff:** In LLL programmes is recommended to have a fixed number of professors from the hosting university as well as the external academic or professional staff hired for every course.

  Every training programme should add to the university professors, other external professionals enriching the training offer with their daily working experience. The course outline shall determine the percentage of professors per typology and it must be clearly specified the percentage of academic doctors involved in every training programme. It also has to be specified the profile of the training tutors.
- **Evaluation system:** The courses are designed based in a competence acquisition system, what implies a non-conventional evaluation, in order to assess not only the knowledge of the student, but also his/her ability to apply this knowledge in different contexts. Therefore, the assessment must be focused in showing the capacity to achieve the competences, according to the results of the learning. This approach is proactive and aims at designing a personal learning and development path. In order to do so, several assessment tools are required to be used and indicated in the proposal.
- **Material resources and services:** Each course will describe the learning spaces to be

used in case the nature of the course requires special material resources. In the case of online learning, the availability of the platform for future re-editions will be assessed. Likewise, the tools that will allow contact between teachers and students will be introduced. As well, distance learning platforms will be used in a free sources manner in order to ensure the continued use over time.

- **Internship periods:** In case a compulsory period internship in enterprise is established, it must be clearly defined the conditions and the offer of internship available.
- **Quality Assurance System:** The course proposal must include a Quality Assurance System to ensure control, review and continuous improvement. This Quality Assurance System will be based, among others, on the evaluation of the programme performed by the students and professors.
- **Financial report:** The course proposal must be accompanied by a financial report proving the capacity of self-funding.

4.2. Implementation of a Credit and Competences System

Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (CTS) is a learner-centered system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes as well as student mobility by recognizing learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning (European Commission, 2015a).

In Europe, ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) was introduced as a pilot scheme in the Erasmus programme in 1989. Its primary objective at that stage was to facilitate academic recognition for Erasmus students by providing instruments for increased transparency and comparability, to assist recognition and portability of credits obtained in partner institutions.

The system facilitated the recognition of periods of study abroad and thus enhanced the quality and volume of student mobility in Europe. Its use expanded from institution to institution and from country to country.

In the Bologna Declaration of June, 1999, it was recognized the usefulness of a system like ECTS for mobility and lifelong Learning (recognition of prior learning).

In 2003 it was stressed the important role played by ECTS in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development.

It was noted that ECTS was increasingly becoming a generalized basis for national credit systems, and they encouraged further progress towards the goal that ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system, to be applied consistently within the emerging European Higher Education Area.

Nowadays, most students use ECTS for local accumulation of credits, moving from a bachelor to a Master or from one learning environment to another.

In 2005, the ECTS system was identified as one of the key elements of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Qualifications Framework), attaching credit ranges to first and second cycle qualifications (bachelor, Master).

In London, in May 2007, it was stipulated, "Efforts should concentrate in future (…) on proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload."

ECTS Users' Guide, in which this section is based on, stresses the importance of guidance and counseling staff and the importance of documentation produced in a standard and consistent manner.

While the whole process was designed for the benefit of students, it also increased mutual understanding and communication between individual academic staff and institutions.

In summary, ECTS makes study programs easy to read and compare. It can be used for all types of programs, regardless their mode of delivery, including lifelong learning ones.

As part of the implementation of EU-MILL project in partner country universities, University NOVA of Lisbon as WP4 leader, put in place a set of activities to ensure the design and implementation of

a system for validation, recognition and accumulations of credits based on skills, knowledge and competencies in the online courses developed by partner universities. The aim was to facilitate the fulfillment of the EU-MILL strategy to support universities in the Southern Neighbouring Area (SNA) by establishing a common framework for LLL.

The goal was to contribute to the mutual understanding of easily readable vocational qualifications providing a greater control over the individual learning experiences, being easier for students to move between different countries and different learning environments.

The credit system is designed to be flexible enough to follow individual's learning outcomes. According to this approach, learners will be able to accumulate learning outcomes during their lifetime from different countries and situations.

This process was developed by using both ECTS and European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as a role model. Whithin this context, a methodological base has been put in place in order to be able to convert all the partner countries study programs to the credit framework and assignment of credits to course modules.

The implementation of a Credit and Competences system has constituted a key activity of the project and documents the existing systems of credit validation, recognition and accumulation in every partner country as well as the set of identified good practices based on surveys and analysis of several documents. The first stage of the WP was a report on the systems of credit validation at each one of the participating countries, focusing especially on the best-practice models identified in every country. The situation of the SNA can be described as follows:

- All partners are non-Bologna signatory countries, but all have decided to officially embed Bologna Process in the education system; its introduction has been gradual depending upon the different structures created to support the process; so far, Tunisia and Algeria fully implemented in almost all fields of study.
- All partners have in place a three-years academic structure for bachelor programmes and a two-years academic structure for Master programmes corresponding to 180 and 120 ECTS, respectively.

- Tunisia and Lebanon did not have in place a definition of learning outcomes at national level, but a large number of institutions and programmes are using ECTS for both, transfer and accumulation purposes. In the particular case of Tunisia, the allocation of ECTS is based on contact hours or a combination of contact hours and student workload. In Lebanon, several references are used to define the credits.
- Specific bodies are in charge of quality control.
- All partner countries have started the process of implementing a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), despite being in different stages of development.
- A considerable amount of work is still needed to ensure recognition at international level.

Different training activities have been designed related to qualification recognition, credit accumulation and awarding and related concepts (skills, competences, learning outcomes, learning activities, etc.). It was possible to set up a joint credit model that was implemented by in training sessions in every partner country at the next stage of the WP4, using ECTS as role model to record learning as well as to facilitate individual learning paths. Indeed, it was possible to set up the third stage devoted to the implementation of the developed credit system in pilot LLL programmes specifically carried out under a common framework.

The project has contributed to the design of a Credit and Competencies User's Guide providing guidelines for the implementation of a Credit Transfer and an Accumulation System (CTS). The Guide is offered to EU-MILL partner's staff, both academic and administrative, in higher education institutions as well as in other interested parties. The User's Guide elaborates on the version of the ECTS User's Guide published by the European Commission in 2009. It was designed to assist the growing importance of lifelong Learning (LLL), the formulation of qualifications frameworks and the increasing use of learning outcomes.

The process of credit system development was based on the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) and European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as role models, model also developed at the European project Be-twin .

The use of CTS, in conjunction with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, makes programmes

and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the recognition of qualifications. A CTS can be applied to all types of programmes, whatever their mode of delivery (school-based, work-based), the learners' status (full-time, part-time) and to all kinds of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) (European Commission, 2015a).

To aid partner country universities to implement the credit system, a guidance note template for development of LLL programmes was crafted. The main topics subjected to assessment were:

- Total duration of the programme: whether it is present or not and if it is, whether it accounts for total student workload.
- Course description: whether it is present or not.
- Student learning outcomes at programme level: whether they are present or not and if they are how precise and concise they are.
- Educational components: student workload, learning activities and learning outcomes.
- Credit system: whether it is present or not and if it is, the justification for the number of credits.

According to the European Commission's ECT user's guide (2009, 2015a), for implementing a credit system in Higher Education Institutions several aspects have to be considered:

Credit allocation

Credit allocation is the process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications/programmes or to educational components. ECTS credits are allocated on the basis of the typical workload necessary to achieve the required learning outcomes (organized in learning activities).

The main element determining the number of credits is the estimated workload needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes. The number of contact hours alone must not be used as a basis to allocate credits since contact hours are only one element of students' workload. Proper credit allocation should be part of the internal and external quality assurance for higher education institutions.

Monitoring credit allocation

The credit allocation to a new programme or component should be validated according to national and/or institutional rules. During the programme delivery, the credit allocation should be regularly monitored to establish whether the estimated workload is realistic. Both validation and monitoring of credit allocation, like other aspects of a credit system, should be part of institutions' internal quality assurance procedures.

Awarding credits

Learners are awarded credits only when appropriate assessment has shown that they have achieved the required learning outcomes for a component of a programme or for the qualification. Credits are awarded by authorised awarding institutions. If the required learning outcomes are achieved in non-formal or informal contexts, the same number of credits as foreseen in the formal programme is awarded following the appropriate assessment. To validate non-formal or informal learning, higher education institutions can put in place different forms of assessment than those used for learners enrolled in the formal programme.

It is a fact that not all learners are full-time students enrolled in regular learning programmes. A growing number of adult learners follow 'stand-alone' training, without necessarily pursuing a specific qualification. Higher education institutions face increasing demands to satisfy the needs of adult learners and/or employers to provide individual learning pathways. When using ECTS for continuing education, the same principles are applied for credit allocation, award, transfer and accumulation. Like for credits allocated to components, which are part of programmes, credits allocated to continuing education are based on the workload typically needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

The Credits awarded for continuing education may be recognized and accumulated towards a qualification or not, depending on the desire of the learner and/or the requirements for the award of the qualification. Some learners may only be interested in following a particular educational component without wishing to obtain the qualification.

People often possess valuable competences acquired outside higher education institutions, through other types of learning activities, work or life experience. There is no reason why non-traditional learners should not benefit from the transparency and recognition which institutions can provide by using ECTS.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning opens up the possibility to achieve a higher education qualification to those who did not have the possibility or desire to do so in the traditional way.

Higher education institutions should have the competence to award credits for learning outcomes acquired outside the formal learning context through work experience, hobbies or independent study, provided that these learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of their qualifications or components. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be automatically followed by the award of the number of ECTS credits attached to the corresponding part of the formal programme. The number of credits awarded should be the same as the credits allocated to formal educational components with comparable learning outcomes.

As with formal education, the award of credit is preceded by an assessment to verify the achievement of learning outcomes. The assessment criteria and associated methods should be constructed so as to measure the achievement of the required learning outcomes at the appropriate level, without reference to specific learning activities. For example, classroom discussion of the subject matter would no longer be considered in assessment, whereas the corresponding learning outcome of constructing arguments while interacting with a group would become relevant.

It is vital not to lose the human factor, the case-to-case approach, the capacity of adaptation when approaching LLL assessment. Authors like Postlethwaite (1992) express his concern about the possibility of statistics and other formalized systems replacing the human element and about an excessively formalized credit for competence conception replacing the necessary credit for knowledge; the author fears about certification becoming more important than the human factor.

Institutions are encouraged to publish prominently their recognition policy and practices for non-formal or informal learning on their website. These policies should include elements such as feedback to learners on the results of the assessment or the possibility for learners to appeal. Institutions are also encouraged to create 'assessment facilities' for advice, counseling and recognition of non-

formal and informal learning. These may take different forms depending on national and institutional practices (e.g. they may exist within single higher education institutions or as joint centers for several institutions). By implementing procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the social dimension of higher education institutions is strengthened. Institutions fulfill the objective of facilitating access to learners from professional life and a range of non-traditional learning environments and, thus, contribute to making lifelong learning a reality.

In any case, the assessment methods should be publicly available.

The award of credits certifies that a learner has complied with the requirements of the component. The number of credits awarded to the learner is the same as the number of credits allocated to the component. The full number of credits is always awarded if the student achieves a passing grade; it is never adjusted according to the learner's level of performance. ECTS credits do not express how well the learner performed in satisfying the requirements for the award of credit. The quality of the learner's performance is expressed by the institutional or national grading system.

Individual learners may be awarded more or fewer than 60 ECTS credits per academic year if they successfully undertake more or fewer educational components than those scheduled in the learning programme.

Credit accumulation, progress and transfer

At national or institutional level, progression rules or programme requirements enable learners to progress within a given cycle in order to obtain a specific qualification. These elements stipulate the credits to achieve for learning outcomes, at what level can be accumulated and how. Progression rules may be expressed in terms of the numbers of credits or credit ranges required at different stages within a programme of study (e.g. a minimum number of credits required to pass from one academic year/semester to another). They may also be formulated in terms of detailed rules on what components must and/or can be taken at what stage and of what level (e.g. compulsory courses, optional courses and prerequisites). The rules may be formulated as a combination of the above.

Progression rules also relate to the number of credits to be obtained at different levels within the National Qualifications Framework. Some qualifications frameworks are also credit frameworks,

meaning that they define the number of credits per type of qualification (e.g. master). Such as credit frameworks, which set the number of credits to be awarded after the achievement of the required learning outcomes. Progression rules define how learners progress within the learning pathway to achieve this number of credits in a progressive manner.

Accumulation of credits is documented in an official institutional Transcript of Record, so that learners can have a record, proof or confirmation of what they have achieved at each stage of their educational pathway.

Successful credit transfer requires academic recognition of credits. Recognition of credits is the process through which an institution certifies that certain learning outcomes, achieved and assessed in another institution, satisfy the requirements of one of the programmes they offer. Given the diversity of programmes and higher education institutions, it is unlikely that the credits and learning outcomes of a single educational component in different programmes will be identical. Therefore, a flexible approach to recognition of credits obtained in another context is recommended. 'Fair recognition' rather than perfect equivalence is to be sought. Such 'fair recognition' should be based on the learning outcomes – i.e. what a person knows and is able to do - rather than on the formal procedures that have led to the completion of a qualification or its component. The recognition process should be transparent.

The recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to not allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant.

Recognition means that the number of credits gained for suitable learning outcomes achieved, at the appropriate level, in another context will replace the number of credits that are allocated for these learning outcomes at the awarding institution. For example in practice a 4 ECTS credit component in one institution can replace a 5 ECTS credit component in another institution if learning outcomes are equivalent. The student will be then awarded 5 ECTS credits.

Decisions on credit recognition and transfer are taken by the qualification-awarding institution on the basis of reliable information on the learning outcomes achieved, as well as on the means of assessment and their validation. Institutions should make their recognition policies known and easily accessible.

In ECTS, credit recognition for the purpose of accumulation and transfer are facilitated by ECTS key documents.

In the case of agreed student mobility, the three parties involved – the home institution, the host institution and the student – should sign the Learning Agreement for mobility prior to the mobility period. In such cases, recognition of the credits by the home institution is automatic if the conditions stipulated in the learning agreement have been fulfilled.

All learning components to be followed abroad should be listed in the Learning Agreement. In case a student is awarded credits for learning components other than those specified in the Learning Agreement, it is up to the home institution to decide whether or not to recognise these. In case of changes to the programme of study agreed with the learner, the Learning Agreement may be amended, but the amended version must be signed again by the same three parties concerned within an agreed period of time.
The recognition of credits in the framework of joint programmes is stipulated in the regulations of the programme. There may be no need for Learning Agreement in the case of joint programmes, as the credits achieved in the partner institution are automatically recognised if the rules of the joint programme are followed and the conditions are satisfied.

To valorize the work of the partner country universities, four different criteria were set up to select some pilot courses which can be named as "best practices" in their design and subsequent development. The four criteria are:

a) Adherence to the project's over-all goals and objectives.
b) Adherence to the project's methodological framework, including the implementation of credit system.
c) Close following of the Guidelines articulated by the WP 5 leading partner (NDU).
d) Innovative approaches to targeting adult trainees over a distance-learning model.

4.3. Quality Assurance System

Nowadays, in every field, it is common to hear about quality and quality assessment. In education, at all levels, including Lifelong Learning, quality control must be supported by a Quality Assessment System in order to guarantee the excellence of the training as well as its capacity to fulfill the users' needs and expectances.

According to Van Kemenade et al. (2008), for many academics, quality is a difficult concept to translate to education, due to the difficulty of finding out what is the product, the customer, the manufacturing process in a university?. Also Harvey and Green (1993) considered this concept as slippery, stating that quality can be viewed as exceptional, as perfection (or consistency), as fitness for purpose, as value for money and as transformative. Especially the last definition does more justice to education as a process wherein learners are the centre of the action: they get the added value, are the added value, transform.

Thus, it is important to develop processes to analyze and revise the quality of the training programs. It should be taken into consideration relevant elements such as the connection of the contents to the job market demands or the students' profile: mainly professional adults, frequently with dependents. The commitment of the educational institution with the quality of the training programs requires a systematic approach, based on tools and procedures. It is essential to assert that quality is not the final issue, but an element that must be present throughout the whole decision-making process.

The consortium has developed a common quality assurance system specific for LLL programmes, comprising the definition of mechanisms, tools and indicators for quality assessment of those programmes. It is a multidimensional system covering all phases of the program:

1. Training design (target population, objectives, training model, contents, learning strategies, teaching resources)
2. Training production (characteristics and virtual environment)
3. Start-up of the training Program (information and orientation on the course program, enrollment, recruitment process and certification)

4. Implementation of the training Program (trainers, learning processes)
5. Program and Students' assessment
6. Evaluation results and follow-up of the trainee.

The system aims to be precise, using the valuable indicators to obtain relevant information in order to improve the quality of the training activities.

Following , you will find a summary of the main elements of the QA system.

CODE P01: Measurement and analysis of academic performance

Objective: The purpose of this procedure is to analyze the expected results on the training course regarding their graduation and dropout rate, as well as other supplementary indicators to contextualize the results of the programme.

Scope: This is a common procedure for all training courses implemented in the HEI.

Definitions

- Graduation rate: The percentage of students who complete the course on schedule related to the number of students enrolled.
- Dropout rate: The percentage of students who, should have obtained their certificate the former year and didn't succeed and decided not to enroll in the current year.

Development: The Quality Assurance Committee will gather the relevant information concerning the results obtained in every course. The committee will then proceed to analyze the results including a comparison with historical data from the LLL Center in previous years.
The report shall recommend an improvement plan intending to solve the identified problems, highlighting to those responsible for its implementation, the mechanisms to carry out the action, the monitoring indicators and established benchmarks, as well as the level of priority to be given (low, medium, high).

Proposed tools to be used:

- T01 -P01: Historical data of the training course (academic results of the course in the recent three editions (if any).
- T02- P01: Improvement Plan for the training course.

Measuring and monitoring: For the measurement and analysis of the results the following indicators, amongst others, must be taken into consideration:

- I01 -P01: Graduation rate for the training course.

Responsible bodies:

- Committee on Quality Assurance
- Centre of Unit responsible of Lifelong Learning

Results management: The Lifelong Learning Centre's management will be responsible for the annual preparation and online publication of an Annual Quality Report on the conclusions of the analysis.

The report has to be accessible to the students, academic and administrative staff, and the general society, thus ensuring transparency of information regarding the training course.

CODE P02: Evaluation and improvement of the quality of teaching and teachers

Objective: The purpose of this procedure is to obtain information on the different aspects regarding the teaching activity, allowing its evaluation and providing indicators to continuously improve the quality of teaching.

Scope: This is a common procedure for all training courses implemented in the HEI.

Definitions: Not applicable.

Development: Data collection system: The following data will be collected:

- Results of student surveys on teaching activity

Quality Commission will analyze all the information detailed in the previous section, and prepare the final evaluation report which will include as much details as possible on the current situation and, where appropriate, suggestions and recommendations on the appropriate training course, which must be accompanied by measures aiming to address identified deficiencies.

Tools: T01-P02 Student´s surveys on teaching activity

Measuring and monitoring: For the measurement and analysis of the results the following indicators, amongst others, must be taken into consideration:

- I01 -P02: Level of student satisfaction with teaching quality.

Responsible bodies:

- Quality Assurance Committee.

Results management: The Centre's management will publish on the web site an improvement Plan for the training courses and must report the annual monitoring of this improvement Plan.

CODE P03: Evaluation of external internships

Objective: The purpose of this procedure is to ensure the quality of external internships.

Scope:This is a common procedure for all training courses implemented in the HEI.

Definitions: Not applicable.

Development

Data collection system: The Quality Assurance Committee, or the commission unit, must monitor and evaluate students´ internships and employment.

Tools:

- T01 -P03: Final Student Survey
- T02 -P03: Report from the enterprise/institution where the internship was carried out.

Measuring and monitoring: For the measurement and analysis of the results, the following indicators, amongst others, must be taken into consideration:

- I01 -P03: Satisfaction level of external tutors who have participated in internship programs.
- I02 -P03: Level of satisfaction of graduate students who have participated in internships programs.
- I03 -P03: Number of companies with an agreement for internship development.

Responsible bodies: Quality Assurance Committee for training course

Results management: The Lifelong Learning Centre's management must be responsible for the annual preparation and online publication of an annual quality report on the center's website.

CODE P04: Evaluation and analysis of overall training course satisfaction of the various groups involved

Objective: This procedure is intended to analyze the overall level of satisfaction of the various groups actively involved in the training courses (academic and administrative staff and students) concerning to the orientation and reception, planning, development, and results of the programme.

Scope: This is a common procedure for all training courses implemented in the HEI.

Definitions: Not applicable.

Development: Data collection system: Information must be gathered concerning the various groups actively involved in a training programme (academic and administrative staff and students).

Although particular surveys will be conducted for each group involved, many of their items are similar, which will allow for an adequate contrast of different opinions.

The surveys for academic and administrative staff and students will use a scale of 0-10.
With these tools, information on the following items will be collected:

1) Socio-demographic variables (age, gender, degree, year, sector).

2) Satisfaction with guidance systems and advertising to facilitate their incorporation into the training course.

3) Overall satisfaction with training course planning and development of teaching:
- Timing and coordination of modules or subjects.
- Adapting schedules, shifts, balance of theory-practice, group size.
- Satisfaction with the methodology used (variety, innovation, etc.).
- Satisfaction with external internships.
- Availability, accessibility, and usefulness of information on training course (level of satisfaction with the training course website and other media, as the Web Portal).
- Satisfaction with Human Resources: Academic and Administrative Staff, Director of the training course, and the person managing the training course.
- Satisfaction with material resources and infrastructure of the training course.
- Satisfaction with the University's virtual platform.

4) Degree of satisfaction with the results:
- Satisfaction with assessment systems.
- Satisfaction with attention given to suggestions and complaints.
- Satisfaction with training received (overall score).
- Fulfilment of expectations concerning the training course.

The Quality Assurance Committee will analyze the data on the various groups' satisfaction with the training course considering all variables included in the survey.

The data analysis will be divided by the group involved, presenting both descriptive data and comparative analyses based on different grouping variables (group, course, age, gender).

With this information, the committee will prepare a final evaluation report including proposals for improvement, suggestions, and recommendations for the training course.

Tools:

- T01- P04: Opinion survey on overall student satisfaction with the training course.
- T02 -P04: Opinion survey on overall academic staff satisfaction with the training course
- T03 -P04: Opinion survey on overall administrative staff satisfaction with the training course.
- T02- P01: Improvement Plan for the training course.

Monitoring and measurement: For the measurement and analysis of the results, the following indicators will be taken into consideration:

- I01-P04: Level of student satisfaction with the training course.
- I02-P04: Level of academic staff satisfaction with the training course.
- I03 -P04: Level of administrative staff satisfaction with the training course.

Responsible bodies: Quality Assurance Committee for training course

Results management: The Lifelong Learning Centre's management must publish the training course improvement Plan on its website and will report on the monitoring , conducted on an annual basis, of the improvement Plan. Both elements will take part of the annual Report on Quality.

CODE P05 Management and support for complaints, suggestions & troubleshooting

Objective: The purpose of this procedure is to establish a flexible system that can address the suggestions, incidents and complaints from various stakeholders involved in the training course.

Scope: This is a common procedure for all training courses implemented in the HEI. This procedure is related with a general procedure of the HEI on the management of suggestions, incidents, complaints and compliments.

Definitions: Not applicable.

Development

Data collection system: The Lifelong Learning Centre, as well as having a physical mailbox for complaints and suggestions, must also design an electronic mailbox through which complaints,

suggestions and incidents related must be forwarded to each training course that are conducted at the Lifelong Learning Centre.

A link to this mailbox must be available on the Lifelong Learning Centre's website and in the factsheet of every training course.

System for analysis of information: The method for studying the complaint, suggestion or incident must be subject to the principles of transparency, speed and efficiency, and must be promoted in its procedures as well as must respect the general rules on complaints and suggestions established by the University.

Tools: T02- P01: Improvement Plan for the training course.

Measuring and monitoring: For the measurement and analysis of the results the following indicators, amongst others, must be taken into consideration:

- I01 -P05: Number of suggestions received.
- I02 -P05: Number of complaints received.
- I03 -P05: Number of incidents received.

Responsible bodies: Department in charge for complaints and suggestions of the Lifelong Learning Centre and the Commission for Quality Assurance of the training course.

Results management: The Lifelong Learning Centre's management must be responsible for the annual preparation and publication of an annual quality report which will be published on the center's website.

4.4. Towards Regional and National Qualification Frameworks

The development of Qualification Frameworks constitutes a key element in the establishment of a strategy for LLL. NQFs have been found to establish a basis for educational program quality improvement, accessibility and linkages. According the International Labor Organization guide on NQF (Tuck, 2007), NQFs help facilitate the labor market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally. Moreover, the NQF establishes a single system of levels for all qualifications,

based on standards and outcomes, assessment based on explicit criteria, national system of accumulation and transfer, a common approach to describing qualifications and a common classification system for occupational sectors (Tuck, 2007).

The aim of WP6 was to encourage the SNA partner countries into the building of NQFs and working towards a future regional one (RQF), taking into consideration and having in mind the achievements of EQF that a RQF will be a proper framework for improved recognition and transfer learning outcomes for easing learners mobility.

The NQF proposes qualifications based on learning outcomes with assessment based on explicit criteria in a common approach to describing qualifications. The importance of a NQF resonates in its relevance for the creation of career pathways that would facilitate learner's progression such as the recognition of prior learning and fast-tracking. By including the knowledge and skills that are a pre-requisite for the next level qualification, we are in fact creating incentives for participation in education, improving a learner's career mobility and improving access to education. In that context, the validation of qualifications provides quality assurance of assessment that would lead to the award of the qualification. As such, NQFs are a practical way to manage the country's qualifications. Concerning the linkage between NQF and Lifelong Learning, OECD (2006) asserts that the establishment of NQFs has a positive effect on the volume, distribution and quality of Lifelong Learning. The outcomes are intended to be practical and inform decision-makers about possible policy actions based on the national qualification system that can promote Lifelong Learning for all.

In keeping with Tuck (2007) a NQF may include:

Validation of qualifications

- Ensuring that the qualification is designed so as to meet certain agreed criteria

Accreditation and audit of education and training providers

- Ensuring that education and training providers have the resources and arrangements to deliver programs leading to NQF quality and standard

Quality assurance and assessment

- Including direct approaches such as testing and examinations, indirect approaches such as monitoring and moderation of providers

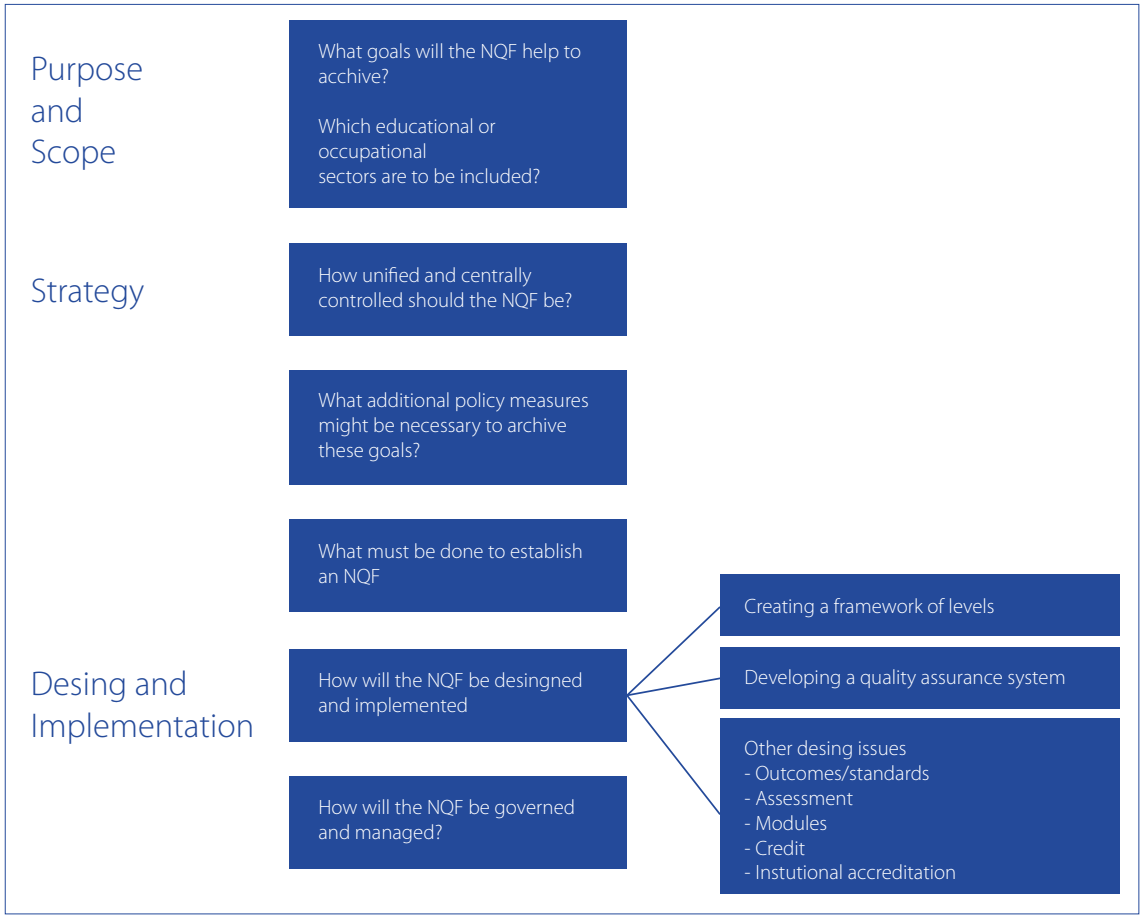
Securing international recognition for national qualifications

- Education and training standards are defined by learning outcomes and applied consistently
- Education and training providers meet certain quality standards

In general, NQFs are used to increase the influence of stakeholders in the development of qualifications so that the system is more responsive to the needs of the labor market. This means employers and workers organizations have an important role in developing agreed learning outcomes for qualifications.

On Figure 2, you can see the working proposal on NQF developed by the WP6 leader (LAU) and developed throughout the project.

Figure 2. Pathway to NQF



Source: Tuck, 2007.

National Qualification Framework (NQF) and European Qualification Framework (EQF): Logically the EQF is a reference framework for the development of such a policy. The EQF entered into force in 2008 with the aim of making the national qualifications comparable throughout the European Union, allowing and promoting the mobility for workers and learners among countries. This fact has facilitated the freedom of movement of working forces and the free development of Lifelong Learning transnational paths. In 2012 all qualifications carried a reference on the EQF.

One of the virtues of EQF is that it can be applicable to all types of learning, including vocational and Lifelong Learning, thanks to a shift in the focus towards the learning outcomes.

By linking the NQF to the EQF, the EQF acts as a reference to different national qualifications systems as it takes into account the diversity of national systems. EQF acts as a facilitator for the translation and comparison of qualifications between various educational institutions in several countries, therefore establishing zones of mutual trust across countries. The EQF uses generic descriptors than most national, regional and sectorial frameworks. The meaning of learning outcomes includes then the knowledge, skills and competence collectively acquired. This parity of esteem between academic, vocational or higher education routes help identify differences in the process of assigning qualifications. The 8 levels of the EQF climb from level 1 to 8 as the learning outcomes become more complex (Table 6). However, countries are not required to develop NQFs and can directly relate their qualifications levels to the EQF by shifting to assessment based learning outcome. An explicit listing of qualifications levels could be seen as a de-facto NQF.

Table 6. Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

EQF Level	Knowledge **In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.**	Skills **In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)**	Competence **In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.**
Level 1	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems

Level 4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups

Level 7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Source: European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture (2010)

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle (European Commission, 2008a, 2008b, 2013, 2015b).

- The descriptor for the Higher Education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.
- The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.
- The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.
- The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

As a result, it was recognized by all partners the European qualification framework (EQF) as a model to consider in the development of QF in the region and in the formation of an RQF. Specifically, some of the major outcomes to consider from EQF were the following:

- Capacity for strengthening mutual trust and cooperation between the different stakeholders in LLL
- Reduce barriers to recognition of learning and enable learners to make better use of available knowledge, skills and competences
- Enable and promote mobility of learners and labor across borders
- The relevance given to sectoral framework for improved recognition, and the transferability of learning outcome for ease of learners mobility

However, the reference of the EQF it doesn't have to be an absolute objective to be pursued, but a valuable reference. In keeping with the International Labor Organization NQF guide (Tuck, 2007), the value of an NQF is closely related with its possibilities to achieve their policy goals, such as developing Lifelong Learning or improving the quality of education. Therefore, its design should be conceived in coherence with the expected goals and taking into consideration the context in which

it will operate. Thus, it is unhelpful to think of the NQF as an entity with fixed or universal characteristics. The characteristics of the NQF should be selected because they are deemed to be the most effective way of achieving objectives and therefore deeply adapted to the context. This point, concerning to the need of adapting the model to be effective to the political and economic context, is also remarked by Young (2003, 2005) who considers the issue as a vital element for its future success.

Several examples from around the world on QF have been examined and facilitated the dialogue among participants on the promise and potential of NQF and RQF. After this analysis, the consortium has agreed some common objectives for advancing towards the RQF, that will be explained in detail in the following pages:

Objective 1: To bring together key players in the VET and Higher Education sectors in the Southern Partner Countries and EU members of the consortium to exchange ideas on the promises and potentialities of National Qualification Frameworks and a Regional Qualification Framework as well as about how to apply them in the Southern Neighboring context.

From the first conference on the WP6, the presentation focused on the objectives of designing a qualification framework, starting with the basic definition of a NQF, the value of an NQF, its goals and objectives, the needs for quality assurance and the stages in developing the system of levels. The "Design of a Qualification Framework" presentation was submitted during the Kick off conference on "Euro-Mediterranean integration though LLL" in Rabat between January 17 and 20, 2013. It was met with great interest and enthusiasm by all participants as it was witnessed by the lively discussions that followed the presentation.

The seminar focused on the complexity involved in the design stages of a NQF and a RQF. It showed examples from around the world on QF. The presentation highlighted steps to be taken in the design of a NQF and stressed on other considerations such as the creation of zones of trust. As such, it was agreed that EQF is a means to make comparisons, not an agent of harmonization. We also introduced the European Qualification Framework's impact on quality assurances and institutional accreditation.

After much deliberations and exchange of ideas on the promises of NQFs and a RQF among all key players in the VET and Higher Education sectors in SN PC and EU members of the consortium, we concluded on the need to have a consensus building mechanism for the development of NQFs in the regions, the stages for such development and about how to apply them in the Southern Neighboring context.

Objective 2: To contribute to building internal government consensus in the Southern area on Qualification Framework.

This objective was achieved through the presentation and subsequent deliberations at the University of Nova Lisbon in October 2013, where we built on learning lessons from the Morocco and Finland case studies. We then demystified the European Qualification Framework as we looked into the benefits and versatilities of referencing programs to the EQF through the National Qualification Framework on the respective countries, or if the case arises and under certain criteria and considerations, to reference programs to the EQF directly. A full case study was presented on the Lebanese National Qualifications Framework. After several discussions and deliberations among group members, it was concluded on the emerging needs for building consensus on Qualifications Framework in the SNA and the urgency to contribute to building internal government consensus on Qualification Framework through the creation of a Regional Qualification Framework community.

Objective 3: To start creating a Regional Qualification Framework community

A regional qualification framework or RQF based on the EQF framework introduces a common language at the regional level (of levels, outcomes, credits, award types, etc) among employers and the education world. This would indeed lead to a shared understanding of concepts and the better implementation of regional policies and strategies.

This objective was met through the virtual Regional Qualification Board (the RQ Board) that was established with a SN representation of one selected member from each of the participating universities in the consortium and two selected members from the team leaders, namely the University of Seville and LAU. The aim of the RQ Board is to evaluate industry specific program qualifications emanating from the SN region against the respective NQF of the country, and to review the linking

of that program to the EQF through the existing mapping between the country NQF and the EQF. If no NQF is available in that particular country, then the program qualification would be directly mapped and linked to the EQF and submitted to the RQ Board for review and assessment.

For the establishment of the RQ Board, every university was required to submit the name of its representative to the RQ Board. The University Project leaders would submit 2 names. The aim of the RQ Board is to evaluate the proposed program qualifications once submitted by each university to the RQ Board.

To initiate a project on a regional qualifications framework: a guide.

At the university level, each university selected one industry from the tertiary economy (specifically the banking sector, the health sector or the hospitality sector) in order to come up with an industry specific qualification program.

The project entailed the following guidelines:

- Run an industry specific survey to include employees, business owners, syndicates, and associations. The objective of the survey is to determine key parameters from the selected qualification with an emphasis on market needs. The CEP@LAU provided a sample of survey based on a 2015 study that was done by themselves and the Syndicate of Hospitals in Lebanon.
- Analysis of the qualification including institutional environment analysis, pedagogical and administrative of the qualification, analysis of the qualification content and analysis of the type of information provided. Level of knowledge, skills and competencies needed to obtain that specific qualification –i.e., the learning outcomes in order to align with the NQF or EQF topology and the quality of program qualification management.
- Compare and match of qualification contents to the NQF. Analyze the content indicators with respect to the taxonomy of the three descriptors of the NQF (Knowledge, skills and abilities). Comparative reading of the contents and of the NQF descriptors to check the level defined a priori by the institution delivering the qualification or the level usually associated to that specific qualification in your country. Then cross compare your NQF

program selection against the EQF. Evaluate each of the qualification programs directly against the EQF by selecting the proper EQF level according to each program parameters as described above.

- Final submission of the program file, including the industry survey results, the quality control parameters and the program evaluation to the RQF Board for proper comments, valuation and final review and approval.

Meeting Excellence in LLL delivery: Challenges along the way

The RQF Board had to naturally overcome real challenges along the way of sharing learned lessons with related observations. We list some of them:

- Cultural barrier in communicating between RQF members
- Proper budget allocation considerations of the project
- Meeting the challenges of an objective multi-layer industry analysis in third world countries where relevant information may not be available at your disposal
- Access to promoting and developing partnerships with enterprises
- The difficult choices of making decisions that would sustain quality assurances of the program all throughout
- Finding training faculty with the right mix between academic and relevant industry experience for the proper LLL curricula design

In conclusion, we believe that while the objective of initiating a project on regional qualifications framework has been achieved, it is more than just mapping the relevant program to the EQF through the RQF community. Rather, it is a serious, thorough and time consuming process that, with proper guidance and detailed analysis will result in finding the right common denominators among the RQF community members, as relevant quality assurance concerns are properly addressed. This has proven to be a full project with its own merit.