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National report Norway

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Glossary

Integration Reception Centres: Centres where asylum seekers who are likely to be granted asylum, are offered a full-time programme with activities such as Norwegian language training, social science and work-based learning.

Reception Centres: Centres for all asylum seekers who arrive in Norway. They stay there while their status is being decided.

Kompass: A self-registration tool used in the Norwegian VISKA trials.

Abbreviations

VPL: Validation of Prior Learning, including identification, documentation, assessment and certification

NAG: National Advisory Group

NAV: The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, working through municipal welfare/PES offices

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

TOEFL: Test Of English as a Foreign Language

Executive Summary

Introduction

The VISKA project is an Erasmus + Key Action 3 project with six partners from four countries;

IDAN Fraedslusetur - Vocational Education and Training Centre, Iceland

Fradslumidstod atvinnulifsins - Education and Training Service Centre, ETSC, Iceland

Cork Institute of Technology – CIT, Ireland

Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI, Ireland

Departement Onderwijs en Vorming, Vlaanderen – Department of Education and Training, Flanders, Belgium

Skills Norway, Norway. Project coordinator

VISKA has worked with Validation of Prior Learning, VPL, concentrating on five interventions, reflected in this report. Data from local trials have been collected via surveys, focus groups and interviews.

This report describes the Norwegian trials.

Methodology

A detailed mapping of existing practices was conducted in an early phase of the project, to establish an 'as is' baseline.

Quantitative data have been collected through Questback surveys sent to professional staff involved in the VISKA trials. 40 persons received the first Questback survey in January 2019, 21 responded. 54 persons received the second Questback survey in September 2019, 29 responded.

Quantitative data on candidates have been collected via professional staff involved in the local trials and via the Directorate of Integration and Diversity. 612 candidates have been involved in the VISKA trials period.

Qualitative data have been collected through Questback surveys among professional staff mentioned above and interviews of candidates. Input from the National Advisory Group, NAG, was collected through a focus group in January 2019 and via email in September 2019.

All data collected are anonymised. All candidates in VISKA signed a participant's agreement in their own language.

Programme Participants and Stakeholders

The target group for Norwegian trials is refugees seeking or in the process of being granted asylum and residence permit in Norway, staying at Integration Reception Centres in five counties.

Skills Norway has cooperated with a wide range of stakeholders nationally, in the National Advisory Group, and locally, in the project network and in a network with Integration Reception Centres.

Validation of prior learning, VPL, comprises four phases; identification, documentation, assessment and certification. During the trial period 612 residents in Integration Reception Centres performed the first two phases in VPL via a self-registration tool (*Kompass*) and career guidance. 74 persons entered the last two phases and were assessed towards curricula in upper secondary education. Most of them were male candidates from Turkey, Eritrea or Syria. Many had experience from non-professional or professional work, and many had more than basic education. About 50 per cent of the candidates had completed higher education.

All candidates and staff involved in VISKA trials have mainly positive experiences from their point of view.

VISKA trials indicate that early VPL may be useful for the right candidates. However, the candidate needs time to prepare for a successful VPL process. It is important to be aware of the possibility that for some candidates, it might be too early in their trajectory.

Involvement of stakeholders at all levels is important, preferably early in the process to make sure that the process around the candidate works without sectoral obstacles.

One should keep in mind that processes like this are resource intensive.

The VISKA Validation process

The validation process in VISKA follows the same process as already implemented in Norway.

However, the VISKA target group will normally not have access to this provision due to the requirement in national regulation that VPL must be performed in Norwegian or Sami language. The counties providing VPL for VISKA have therefore been granted exemption from this requirement.

For assessment staff, working with interpreters was introduced during the VISKA trials. Candidates were assessed using interpreters in Tigrinya, Arabic, Turkish and Russian. In addition, many candidates were assessed using English, with no need of an interpreter.

69 out of 82 assessments resulted in approval of parts of study programs. Many of the approved assessments were in English, a subject required for admission in higher education in Norway. Other assessments were in math, science and vocational subjects like health work, electrical engineering, cookery, industrial production and other.

The report includes two case studies, involving a man from Turkey and a woman from Eritrea. They were assessed in industrial technology and health and care work, respectively.

For the professionals involved in VISKA, the key findings relate to their experiences in working with interpreters and their experiences in comparing and assessing the candidate's background from a foreign country toward national learning outcomes in Norwegian curricula.

The key implication of the VISKA project for the Norwegian validation system is that the trials have shown that the process can be opened to new target groups if there is willingness to work with legislative, administrative and financial obstacles. It is possible to succeed in providing a pathway for refugees that acknowledges their professional and life competences, but it is resource intensive.

In the counties providing VPL for this target group, the roles and responsibilities between the different levels of administration involved, need to be discussed and clarified. A clear division of labour is necessary to avoid confusion and repetition of processes.

Since local priorities may lead to low priority of VPL due to lack of resources, it is crucial that national actors keep up and communicate a high awareness around VPL issues, so as to emphasise its importance and influence actors regionally/locally.

Developing and extending regional/national networks

During the VISKA trials, Skills Norway was involved in three network settings.

The NAG network was crucial for anchoring local practices. The directorates needed to push forward locally to get the VISKA trials running. There are a lot of actors involved around the refugees, and all parties must do their part of the job to get the candidates through identification and documentation of competences, career guidance and assessment/certification.

The network with the involved counties was crucial for the project. All five counties are different when it comes to local priority and resources, and it is useful to have a common arena to shed light on these differences and accept them or find a common basis of practice.

The network around the Integration Reception Centres was useful for VISKA, for making contacts and informing about the progress in the project.

Establishing networks did not represent a challenge in VISKA, as integration of refugees is high on the political agenda and is being implemented at all levels. Experience from this project has shown that cross-sectoral networking is crucial for following up a vulnerable target group such as this, and for system development and change.

Part of the challenge in VISKA has been that the complexity of the work has required cooperation both horizontally and vertically. Without networking it would probably have been impossible to get the project up and running, let alone achieve results, both for the individual as well as in a larger perspective.

Extending and adapting tools used in the validation of prior learning for refugees

The Norwegian self-registration tools for asylum seekers (*Kompass*) was used by 612 residents in Integration Reception Centres during the VISKA trial period.

Kompass works well as an initial registration of competences. It is easily accessible for users, but they need support to be able to fill in the form as many of the words used are contextualised to the Norwegian education system, or culturally loaded.

The tool is rather successful, because the results of this initial identification and documentation of competences is followed by career guidance where the content is discussed and adjusted if necessary. A tool such as this needs to be a part of a follow-up process to secure that the results of the identification and documentation effort are put to good use.

The Norwegian tool has similarities with the EU Skills Profiling Tool. A common suggestion for further development would be to pay heed to user feedback. Large tools like these also run the risk of becoming static because of lack of maintenance over time, since the initial investment is substantial. So regular maintenance and updating would be another suggestion.

Transversal Skills

In Norway, transversal skills are embedded in the learning outcomes in the curricula in upper secondary education. It has therefore not been relevant for the Norwegian trials to try out validation of transversal skills isolated from the validation towards the curricula.

Transversal skills are often discussed and highlighted in labour market policy in Norway like in all other European countries. In our validation system, transversal skills will be validated when they are included in the learning outcomes in the relevant curriculum. This links the different transversal skills closely to each relevant professional context and thus makes it possible to validate the relevant transversal skill towards accepted standards.

Capacity building for Guidance and other front-line staff

For the VISKA trials, validation professionals needed competences in how to work with interpreters since they had no prior experience with this kind of assisted communication.

The effect of the training programme is proven by practice. As the training was not mandatory, some professionals did not use the training programme. Some of those who used it, found it useful.

The NAG supposes that the need for competence development for staff will probably grow, in order to reach the new target group, along with general competence development to assure quality in the practice. There is still some scepticism towards VPL in working life. Therefore, it might be important that professional development for VPL becomes part of a system in which credits are given, in order to increase its status and perceived seriousness.

“Even though VPL has been around for close to twenty years, there are still a lot of people who somehow suspect that this is a kind of easy way to get a qualification. For this reason, one must counter it by showing regularly that quality is looked after.” *NAG member*

Access to and Awareness of Validation services

Since the target group is limited and well defined, we have chosen to focus on networking. To reach the VISKA target group, the stakeholders at directorate level involved in Integration Reception Centres were informed about VISKA and were invited to participate in the VISKA National Advisory Group (NAG).

In the first survey from VISKA staff when looking at the benefit and impact of the VISKA project, they stated they would not have worked with this target group at this early stage without VISKA. It was identified as being useful for the county (regional) education authorities to get to know more about the competences that refugees bring with them and how this can be used as a basis for completing vocational education and training (VET) in Norway. In addition to the education opportunities which

can emerge from competence identification, there is also the opportunity to make the competence of asylum seekers visible to businesses/companies regardless of language differences.

The current political climate is favourable for VPL development. However, in the current policy context, one of the biggest influences on access and awareness is funding. How funding is distributed leads to local differences and priorities influencing resources for guidance and information towards target groups.

Refugee outcomes

Since the candidates in the Norwegian trials had no common language of communication, Skills Norway was not able to send a survey to all candidates. To get data directly from candidates, Skills Norway conducted interviews with seven candidates from three different counties in Norway. Five of the candidates come from Turkey, one from Syria and one from Eritrea. Five of the candidates have a university or college education. Candidates with academic education appear to be over-represented in this sample and do not necessarily reflect the refugee population in Norway.

Staff reported on overall positive feedback from candidates.

Candidates need sufficient time to get the amount of orientation necessary to profit from the VPL process; time to support reflection on options and making informed decisions; time to discuss expectations and understand which goals are realistic in this setting.

Especially guidance counsellors involved in VISKA have emphasised the importance of time in these processes, which for a newly arrived refugee can be quite overwhelming.

This particular target group has specific challenges; meaning they may require much more support and guidance than other groups. The national development towards more flexibility in provision, both for immigrants and for adults in general, signals positive changes for this group also.

The reflections above would be valid at all levels; when developing possible trajectories for refugees, it is advisable to take into account the need for time and support, which may be more extensive for this group.

Conclusion

VPL for asylum seekers at this early stage in their integration trajectory in Norway will only be possible if the national regulations are changed. This amendment is pending at the time of writing.

To establish a successful provision of VPL for asylum seekers in Integration Reception Centres, we recommend that:

- the **national regulation** allows for VPL for adults using other languages than Norwegian or Sami, if necessary with the help of interpreters.
- all refugees are given the opportunity to **identify and document** their competences in the self-registration tool (*Kompass*), followed by career **guidance** and, if relevant, **assessment** of their prior learning toward learning outcomes in the formal education system. The assessment is followed by **certification** if the candidate succeeds.
- the candidate is given enough **time** to understand the Norwegian education system and the labour market requirements, to understand the content and effect of the VPL process so that the output of the procedure is maximised.
- each candidate is enabled to **build on the results** from VPL in future plans for education, work practice or employment.

To succeed in setting up such provision, stakeholders need to network horizontally and vertically.

At system level, changes are needed to make VPL more accessible, more flexible and more evenly implemented across the country.

1. Introduction

The 'Visible Skills of Adults' Project (VISKA) is a collaboration between four partner countries: Belgium (Flanders), Norway, Iceland and Ireland. Project VISKA addresses the European policy priority of diminishing skills mismatch, fostering employability, economic growth and job creations, and social inclusion – by making knowledge, skills and competences of adults more visible through validation of informal and non-formal learning. It centres on qualitative improvement in current validation policies and practices in the four partner countries. VISKA is a three-year project, running from March 2017 to February 2020 and is co-ordinated by Skills Norway. The research and evaluation partner of the VISKA project is Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland.

This report presents national findings for Norway for the VISKA project as a whole.

1.1 The VISKA project

The Visible Skills of Adults (VISKA) is an Erasmus+ Key Action 3 Project, filed under the call priority theme of "Employment and Skills: validation of informal and non-formal learning in Education and Training." The project partners aim to address the European policy priority of diminishing skills mismatch by making knowledge, skills and competences of adults more visible through consideration of the practice of validation of informal and non-formal learning and implementation of field trials.

In particular, VISKA addresses the need to make the skills of low-qualified adults, migrants¹, asylum seekers² and refugees³ more visible, in order to enhance their employability, improve their access to education and training offers and support active engagement in society. Along with unemployed and low-skilled or low-qualified adults in general, these target groups are currently at a disadvantage in European societies and could benefit from improved access to validation services and from more holistic validation arrangements.

The VISKA project plans to implement and evaluate five interventions, agreed by the partners and applied to the current processes (in the respective national contexts) for the validation of prior

¹ The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a migrant worker as a "person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national". It is generally considered that the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned.

² Asylum seekers are people seeking protection as refugees, who are waiting for the authorities to decide on their applications. They are legally entitled to stay in the state until their application for protection is decided.

³ According to the Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees (1951) 'A refugee ... is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.' (UNHCR, 2010)

learning. The interventions have been developed and agreed with a view to making the knowledge, skills and competence of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and adults with low skills⁴ levels, more visible. While there will be differences across the participating countries in relation to validation policies, practices and infrastructures; the focus of the project team will be to learn how the chosen interventions, when enacted, can bring about real change, for individuals and systems and to collate the learning from the project to contribute to a broader policy agenda.

The five planned interventions are as follows:

Intervention 1:

Developing and extending regional/national networks and partnerships to include policy makers, social partners and practitioners working on the validation of NFIL

Intervention 2:

Extending / adapting tools used in the validation of NFIL – includes digitisation as well as customisation for use with specific beneficiary groups and enhanced quality assurance of validation processes

Intervention 3:

Creating a common set of criteria for the documentation and assessment of transversal skills, able to be used with one or more adult learner groups

Intervention 4:

Training and / or Capacity building for guidance counsellors and other frontline staff working on the validation of NFIL, including with specific adult beneficiary groups

Intervention 5:

Improving access to and awareness of validation services and support among specific adult beneficiary groups

The aim of the VISKA project is that, through developing, trialling and evaluating these interventions:

1. The **processes** to implement effective validation services, supporting networks and staff development will be mapped.

⁴ Throughout the project proposal reference is made to low-skilled adults. The project team and indeed the nature of the project clearly recognises that this target group is likely to have many valuable skills and that it would be more appropriate to consider this group as those having low, or no, formal qualifications. This recognition is at the core of the project

2. The **criteria, success factors and conditions** of processes that contribute to outcomes of validation are identified.
3. Case studies will be made available to be analysed by policy makers and other key policy influencers to understand key challenges and success factors in developing robust systems and processes in complex policy areas such as validation.
4. The policy processes that play a role in influencing validation development will be identified and described.

1.2 The VISKA research and evaluation

The VISKA evaluation has two main aims. The first is to understand, evaluate and enhance validation across the four participating countries. The evaluation also aims to provide country specific insights and case studies that can be analysed by policy makers seeking to understand the inherent challenges and opportunities within validation for low-skilled, migrants and refugees.

The evaluation focuses on systems, processes and outcomes, enabling the identification of the varying success factors across the different national contexts. This will help to inform the structural supports necessary to empower stakeholders and policy makers/ influencers in other partner countries with regard to validation of prior learning.

Four research questions underpinned the VISKA research and evaluation.

1. **To what degree did partners achieve the implementation aim across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at local, regional and national and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?**
2. **What outcomes were achieved for what groups, and to what degree?**
3. **What factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**
4. **What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**

The evaluation consisted of a number of stages:

1. A pre-implementation stage with activities centred on establishing the existing baseline practices, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the four partner countries.
2. Ongoing data collection from the various stakeholders engaged in the VISKA project
3. Data collection and subsequent report on interim results
4. Data collection, data analysis and final reporting

In the case of Norway data collection and evaluation was conducted by Pernille Birkeland, Section for Analysis, Skills Norway.

1.3 VISKA project in Norway

Skills Norway, the lead partner of the VISKA project, is the Directorate for Lifelong Learning under the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. In addition to national responsibility for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, Skills Norway promotes access to and participation in formal, non-formal and informal adult education and supports quality development of validation processes.

The aim of the VISKA project in Norway is to develop more efficient integration processes where immigrants with prior learning relevant for the Norwegian labour market can get their skills validated by the formal education system and use this recognition as a starting point for further professional development.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible at all levels of education and training in Norway and can be used to acquire modules and/or full qualifications. There are laws and regulations in place relating to each level of education and training, providing a general framework for validation of prior learning (see the 2010 update of the European Inventory for a comprehensive overview of the laws and strategies which have been introduced over time).

From a national point of view, validation of prior learning is considered as one of several useful tools in the effort of supporting competence development among adults in need of a more secure standing in the labour market. In the recently developed Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy (2017-2021), validation is mentioned as one of the important tools in competence development, as it provides an opportunity for employees to have their work-based learning validated towards national curricula. However, the focus in the Strategy is not on newly arrived refugees specifically, but more widely on adults in need of up- or re-skilling.

The VISKA trials in Norway have tried out validation at upper secondary level for adult refugees from Integration Reception Centres in Bodø, Steinkjer, Oslo, Larvik and Kristiansand. The potential candidates got information about VISKA in the five Integration Reception Centres, which are managed at municipal level. The trials have included the two first stages of VPL for all candidates, i.e. they have been supported in the process of **identifying and documenting** their competences and have been given **guidance and counselling** based on this prior documentation. For those who had competences relevant for recognition at upper secondary level and wished to go through the full validation process, stages 3 and 4, **assessment and certification**, were organised and conducted by regional providers at upper secondary level.

In order to validate the VISKA candidates at upper secondary level, the participating counties offering the validation, Nordland, Trøndelag, Oslo, Vestfold and Vest-Agder, were exempted from the Education Act in which it is stated that validation must be carried out in Norwegian or Sami language. The VISKA candidates have used English or their native language, with the help of an interpreter, and have therefore been able to get their competences recognised at an earlier stage than normally possible today, outside VISKA. This early recognition of competences may lead to a better and more efficient integration process, in which the recognised competences serve as a starting point for further education and training and introduction to working life.

Trials were planned in consultation with local actors. The tool for self-registration in the VPL process was introduced in cooperation with the Directorate of Integration and Diversity. A training module for frontline staff was developed and offered in collaboration with the experienced practitioners in this space. Interpreters were called in where needed. The validation process was conducted by regional Adult Education Centres.

The project participants in Norway are refugees who are seeking asylum or are in the process of being granted asylum and residence in Norway. They have signed up to be accommodated and to take part in activities in special Integration Reception Centres, which provide housing and full-day programmes of various integration activities. The participants have been mostly Turkish, Syrian or Eritrean, and the processes were carried out in English, Turkish, Arabic and Tigrinya. Participants' level of education varied from no education at all to education at higher level. People with a completed HE diploma have not been part of the trials, as they go to another recognition system. However, for those with HE qualifications who wanted to enter further higher education, validation in English language was relevant for some, since it is part of the access requirements in HE in Norway. Most VISKA candidates have had some schooling and possess some skills and workplace experience relevant for validation towards learning outcomes in the curricula in Vocational education and training or in the General study programme, both at upper secondary level.

The benefits to the participants include guidance and counselling which build their confidence and self-esteem through helping to identify competencies. Candidates who went through the full VPL procedure have, if approved, attained a certificate of competence at upper secondary level. These certificates are awarded to recognise that an individual has achieved certain sets of learning outcomes, either full or partial subjects, within an upper secondary curriculum. Additional gaps in knowledge / competences must be addressed before a full certificate can be obtained. Candidates can also go straight to work with the certificate of competence as proof of the competences that have been validated, although it is not a full qualification. As these certificates are issued after VPL in the

formal system, they can be used either to bridge the candidate to further education and training or to certify their competencies which can then be used to gain employment.

1.4 About this report

This report was compiled in October 2019 by the Skills Norway team. The data have been collected by Pernille Birkeland from the Section for Analysis in Skills Norway. Trials have been conducted in five regions and have been reported on by relevant staff in the regions. Throughout the report, perspectives and mutual learning from the VISKA partnership have informed the discussion.

2. Methodology

This section summarises the research and evaluation methodology and how the evaluation protocol is being supported and implemented in each participating country. The methodology is influenced by the complexity of the project aspirations and by the variation in the contexts for the project in practice. In summary the research and evaluation activities of the VISKA project had a number of objectives. It was intended to support the field trials or interventions by guiding the development of an evaluative framework, through both formative measures and a summative assessment of impacts. Another objective was to extract evidence and analysis that would contribute to future policy and practice progression in validation processes.

2.1 Evaluation design and methods

In developing the methodological framework for VISKA the realities within which the project would be undertaken were influential.

- The project context in each of the project partner countries including variations in:
 - Target cohort for the project intervention – influenced by the policy aim and environment
 - Target cohort size
 - Economic and social imperatives for the project
 - Legislative and regulatory framework for VPL
- The project partners in each country have varying roles and responsibilities in relation to VPL
- Partners have selected the interventions in which they will take part and which are relevant for their organisations and their setting
- The project resources are finite and are rightly focused on the implementation of the interventions and the identification of transferable policy implications rather than the research and evaluation.

In addition, the make-up of the project partnership and therefore the practical ability to undertake the implementation of the field trials changed during the course of the project which added to the complexity of the task.

As indicated in the proposal document it was not anticipated that an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation could be achieved, nor indeed might it be desirable in the circumstances.

It was clear at the proposal stage that the identified target cohorts for the interventions would not be a representative sample of the available population subgroup within the country but would be chosen with reference to economic imperatives, skills gaps, accessibility, willingness and coherence. Indeed, it was also clear that these imperatives might change during the course of the project.

A (modified) **Realist Evaluation** approach has been adopted which allows the contexts for the interventions enacted under the project to form a real background to the interpretation of the findings and the project focuses on the collection of rich information around the practice setting which contributes to the later extraction of value in the policy domain. This interplay between the contexts and the actions comes to the fore throughout the project. As propounded by Pawson and Tilley ⁵– the question in Realist Evaluations is: *What works, for whom and in what circumstances?* Generally, a realist programme theory specifies which mechanisms (changes or interventions in our case) will generate the outcomes and what features of the context will affect whether or not those mechanisms work to achieve a desired or anticipated result. Ideally, these elements (mechanisms, outcome, context) are reflected on at the evaluation design stage, as it enables to design the data collection to focus on testing the different elements of the programme theory.

In adopting the Realist Evaluation approach, the VISKA project team considered the relevant aspects of the context such as the legislative and regulatory setting, the views of the stakeholders of the Viska project as well as conducting a pre-trial SWOT analysis across the five interventions. The interventions had been agreed by the project team at the proposal stage with a view to the desired outcomes and the research methods include collection of both qualitative and quantitative data sets. Realist evaluation provides a structure to explore change brought about by an intervention by referring to the actors who act and change (or not) a situation under specific conditions and under the influence of external events (including the intervention itself). In the VISKA project, the project partners are embedded in the social reality of their particular context and that influences how the intervention is implemented and how actors respond to it (or not). The project partnership adopts an open and collaborative approach which recognises the project partners as experts within their own context and practice setting. To ensure the work is completed in an efficient and cost effective manner CIT has leveraged the experience of JD Carpentieri - through a subcontracting arrangement - whose expertise in the design of interventions, deployment of field trials and research and evaluation frameworks for the ongoing

⁵ Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). Realistic Evaluation. Sage.

Guidance and Orientation Pilots for Adult Learners (GOAL) project has been of considerable value in reviewing materials and providing guidance on process steps and the research and evaluation methodology. Two of the partners of the VISKA project were partners of the GOAL project so their expertise in policy experimentation projects has also been leveraged to ensure efficient transfer of knowledge and practice.

2.2 Collection of Data for the Project

The interventions in the project proposal are phrased in very general terms and the project team has worked to find common activities that can be the basis for the collection of comparable data arising from the varied field trials that are planned. However, the project team and the research and evaluation partners have been sensitive to the different contexts and differing challenges experienced by the partners in relation to VPL, while keeping to the fore the requirement to make a policy contribution at a local, national and European level. This has resulted in a very collaborative approach to developing the framework for research and data collection throughout the project. It also has informed the evaluation focus of the project in line with the Realistic Evaluation ethos.

The research protocol document and research instruments were developed collaboratively by the project partners, following from data collection workshops to enable consistent and comparable data gathering during the development and trial of the various tools and the field trials of the VISKA project. It also supports the collection of rich and valuable information from all project participants based on their experiences of the project.

In addition to the defined common and comparable data to be gathered by each of the field trial partners it was recognised that there may well be local and national nuances which impact the implementation of validation within partner countries providing the rich context for the Realistic Evaluation Process. Data related to these specifics will also be decided upon and gathered locally and interpreted in the context of the local situation as well as extrapolating potential impact for Europe as a whole, where appropriate.

The target groups for the field trials are not generally numerous enough at each location to allow statistically significant conclusions to be drawn. It is also recognised that the field trial participants are not likely to be fully representative of the migrant, refugee or low skilled population across Europe or, indeed within the partner countries. These populations tend to change from time to time in response to local and international pressures and the target cohort for the project will be generally in

line with the aims of the participant country at the time of the project proposal. However, the findings and conclusions of the project will be based on the empirical data gathered from the field trial participants, frontline and guidance staff, the National Advisory Groups (NAG), and importantly from the project partners themselves in the partner countries. In all cases the project partners will be working with adult learners who for one reason or another will benefit from opportunities to have their learning recognised and validated and this will provide valuable transferable learning for others.

Together the project partners have considered what information can be collected, from whom and at which stage in the project. The project partnership considered at the proposal stages the potential sources of information and the mechanisms by which information could be collected and shared. As detailed in the Proposal the project essentially has three main stages:

1. Detailed mapping process to establish existing practices and contexts.
2. Field trials consisting of implementation of selected interventions.
3. Analysis and evaluation – collective consideration of policy impacts.

There are also a number of important sources of data and information which will be significant before, during and after the project activities. These sources include:

- Members of the National Advisory Groups and other key stakeholders and policy actors
- Frontline and Guidance staff involved in validation of prior learning
- Clients and learners accessing or seeking to access validation services
- Members of the project team in each partner organisation

2.2.1 Detailed mapping process to establish existing practices and contexts

The detailed mapping to establish existing practices and to set the baseline 'as is' for the project was conducted by each of the project partners within their particular context. The research and evaluation partners provided the research protocol document and research framework for the submissions by each partner. The detailed mapping report included the perspectives of the different stakeholders included in the Viska project which include the support worker and the policy maker. A pre-trial SWOT analysis across the five interventions were also conducted in the four partner countries. The purpose of this was to ascertain areas in need of development which may be addressed through Viska. Field Trials consisting of implementation of selected interventions

Depending on the source of the data, the size of the target group and the stage in the project consideration was given to a number of different tools and methods by which data could be collected and shared. Both quantitative and qualitative data sets were anticipated and to ensure mutual

understanding and consistency a data collection methodology workshop was held with the various partners. A handbook was developed to support the processes and to address issues related to ethics, data protection and other common items of concern. The data collection methodologies of most interest for the project team include: interviews, focus groups and surveys or questionnaires.

Again working collaboratively, a complete question set was developed in October 2018. This document provided clear templates which had been agreed by the partners would form the basis of the Interim and Final reports (D5.1 and D5.2). The guideline provided detailed questions to be asked of stakeholders, staff and learners and the appropriate time throughout the project duration. Recognising that the partners would be working in various languages survey questions were provided but a survey instrument was not mandated, question guides were provided for focus groups and interviews; but it was recognised that the context and setting would require some flexibility for each of the partners.

This report is a summary of the information collected to date and it recognises that the partners are at various stages of completion with the field trials and the data collection exercises. Where appropriate information has been presented in quantitative or tabular form using mainly descriptive statistics and in other cases quotations are provided at this point.

Due to different implementation frameworks, different interventions of interest and different target cohorts the timeframe for the collection of data as well as the data collected varied across the consortium. There were also issues in relation to the deadlines which had been agreed for the collection of information for this interim report and in relation to the consistency of the data to be collected across the partnership.

2.2.2 Analysis and Evaluation- collective consideration of policy impacts

The main analysis of the data emerging from the project will form the basis of deliverable D5.2 which is the synthesis report of the VISKA project. Qualitative data from the various focus groups and interviews will be analysed through a thematic framework. The topics for that analysis will be informed by the guides which had been developed and will have particular relevance to policy implications. The project partners will be key to ensuring that the information has been appropriately interpreted, that the context for the intervention and the resulting data is well-described and that any conclusions are appropriately drawn. This will ensure a robust and reliable output.

2.2.3 Interim reporting

A cross country synthesis interim report was published in May 2019. Interim key findings are available on <https://viskaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/D5.1-Final-document.pdf>. A key aim of the

interim report which contained data collected through early 2019 was to analyse and share early key reflections in order to inform future validation development.

The findings of the interim report are integrated into the final report.

2.3 Research methodology by Norway

2.3.1 Participant Sample

The target group for the Norwegian trials was asylum seekers likely to have their application for asylum granted, staying at Integration Reception Centres in five counties in Norway. In these Integration Reception Centres asylum seekers start their process of integration while their application for asylum is being processed.

All residents in the Integration Reception Centres registered their prior education and work experiences by use of an electronic tool (*Kompass*). After this registration, each adult was given career guidance provided by career centres in each county. Candidates to proceed to the next stages in the process of validation were selected by career counsellors in these centres, based on whether the potential candidate had prior competences relevant for assessment towards requirements in the curricula for upper secondary education, either for academic study programmes or for vocational training programmes. Additionally, the candidate's own wish to proceed with the process was considered. Throughout the trial period, 612 candidates took part in the two initial stages of the validation process as outlined above (identification/ documentation and guidance). 74 candidates moved on to stage 3 and 4 (assessment and certification).

During the VISKA trial period, asylum seekers from Turkey, Syria and Eritrea were dominant. At the start of the VISKA project, most asylum seekers were Syrians, due to the ongoing conflict in Syria. However, after a very short while, Turkish asylum seekers were the most dominant group. This influenced the chosen subjects for validation since the Turkish refugees proved to be educated at a higher level than the Syrians, as the results below will reflect.

2.4 Data collection

All data collection in VISKA has been conducted by Pernille Birkeland, Section for Analysis, Skills Norway.

2.4.1 Quantitative data

Quantitative data have been collected through Questback surveys sent to professional staff involved in the VISKA trials. 40 persons received the first Questback survey in January 2019, 21 responded. 54 persons received the second Questback survey in September 2019, 29 responded.

Quantitative data on candidates have been collected via professional staff involved in the local trials and via the Directorate of Integration and Diversity. 612 candidates have been involved in the VISKA trial period, see details below.

2.4.2 Qualitative data

Qualitative data have been collected through Questback surveys among professional staff mentioned above and interviews of candidates. In addition, some professional staff have submitted learning diaries from their daily practice. Input from the National Advisory Group, NAG, was collected through a focus group in January 2019 and via email in September 2019.

2.4.3 Evaluation manual

Data collection in the Norwegian part of VISKA was conducted in accordance with principles discussed at the evaluator workshop in Cork in March 2018 and following the common Data Collection Handbook issued by the research partner.

2.5 Data analysis

Pernille Birkeland has analysed the data and produced the graphs / figures / tables presented in this report.

Her work was conducted according to the principles governing the work of the Analysis Section in Skills Norway.

2.6 Methodological challenges

There were two main groups of respondents/informants in the VISKA trials; the staff involved directly or indirectly in career guidance and/or VPL procedures, and the candidates who went through the VPL process. The candidates for the assessment phase in the VPL process were recruited via the guidance counsellors involved in the career guidance following the competence registration. Data from their VPL processes were reported by the staff involved in the VPL procedure and summed up by Skills

Norway. Some VPL candidates were interviewed to get more specific qualitative data about their experience with their VPL procedure.

It was challenging to recruit candidates for the VISKA trials, since the cohort of asylum seekers were both strongly reduced and changed during the planning and initial phase of the project. Due to the reduction in influx of asylum seekers, the main Integration Reception Centre – supposed to constitute the major part of the VISKA target group – was shut down before the actual trials had started. In another Integration Reception Centre, the resident group changed completely, from Syrians with mainly vocational background to Turks with mainly higher education. The planned VPL procedures had to change accordingly, from VET focus to more theoretical subjects, such as English and Science.

Due to the overarching integration process candidates may move out of the Integration Reception Centre at very short notice to be settled in the municipalities. In this way the target group was difficult to predict, and plans for the VPL process needed to be flexible.

The fact that many candidates had to be interviewed in a second language could be a source of inaccuracies in the data collection.

2.6.1 Challenges for mentors/ frontline staff and guidance

All candidates considered for validation in VISKA signed a declaration of consent in their own language; Turkish, Tigrinya, Arabic or English. These declarations, along with reports on individual results of validation, were collected in the file-sharing system Jottacloud in folders for each county. Skills Norway had access to all folders as the national coordinator.

Data protection posed a considerable challenge, as the personal data of each individual needed to be treated with utmost care, and at the same time be accessible when necessary. Information at individual level is protected by legislation, in line with the GDPR, and it was a challenge when working across levels and sectors of administration that candidate data could not always be transferred smoothly to where it was needed.

For the frontline staff setting up the VPL process, it was challenging to work across different systems and authorities involved around the asylum seekers. This involved the Integration Reception Centre as a municipal organisation with staff from PES, integration offices and municipal adult teaching providers, as well as the career centres with staff from education administration at county level, and upper secondary education providers, also at county level.

It was also challenging to introduce the Norwegian system of education and the concept of VPL to the asylum seeker. The concept of VPL is probably difficult to understand for some immigrants. The Norwegian system is more based on formal documentation than many immigrants are accustomed

to. Specially in vocational professions, many immigrants are used to work experience being a sufficient basis for employment, in contrast to the four-year VET being widely required for employment in Norway.

2.6.2 Quantitative data challenges

All data collected are anonymised. All candidates in VISKA signed a participant's agreement in their own language to make sure they were well informed about how their data would be handled. Many asylum seekers are sceptical to disclosing data to public officials due to experience from countries where officials cannot be trusted. However, this was not a significant problem in VISKA. On the contrary, some candidates in the VISKA target group expressed that they wanted to give something back to the Norwegian system as a sign of gratitude for all the help they have received. Only on one occasion a candidate involved in VISKA was concerned about personal safety. This was solved satisfactorily for all involved.

Collecting quantitative data directly from participants has been a challenge due to language problems. Quantitative data referred to in this report have been collected via VPL staff or generated from the electronic tool.

For some newly arrived candidates, it was a challenge to register the candidate's validation results in formal registers because they had no Norwegian personal registration number. It was solved by using the temporary registration number which each asylum seeker is given during their first stay in Norway. This will be replaced by the permanent personal registration number as soon as it is ready.

2.6.3 Qualitative data challenges

Qualitative data are collected either through commenting / open questions via Questback surveys or via interviews or focus groups. Some qualitative data from professional staff working with VPL were also collected through learning diaries; this input is embedded in this report.

The regional education administration in the five participating counties have provided Skills Norway with candidates for individual interviews. Some of the interviews were challenging due to language problems.

2.6.4 Key methodological limitations

It was not possible to send out any Questback surveys to candidates due to lack of a common language of communication. We sent a Questback survey in English to candidates who were validated using English but got only one reply (included in the 'Refugee outcomes' chapter).

This means that there are no quantitative data from candidates directly. However, data about this group was collected via staff and from the electronic tool. For qualitative information, seven interviews were conducted.

3. Programme Participants and Stakeholders

Skills Norway, the lead partner of the VISKA project, is the Directorate for Lifelong Learning under the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. In addition to national responsibility for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, Skills Norway promotes access and participation in formal, non-formal and informal adult education and supports quality development of validation processes. Skills Norway is also responsible for curricular and pedagogical issues relating to the teaching of Norwegian and socio-cultural orientation to adult immigrants and coordinates the career guidance field in Norway.

In Norway, potential candidates got information about VISKA in the five participating **Integration Reception Centres**. The centres are managed at municipal level. The trials have included the two first stages of VPL for all candidates, they have got guidance and counselling and have been supported in the process of identifying and documenting their competences. For those who were able to and wished to go through the full validation process, stages 3 and 4 (assessment and certification) were conducted by regional providers at upper secondary level.

Trials were planned in consultation with local actors, and the tools for self-registration in the VPL process were introduced in cooperation with the **Directorate of Integration and Diversity**. A training module for frontline staff was developed and offered in collaboration with experienced practitioners in this space. **Interpreters** were used where needed. The Validation Process was conducted by **regional Adult Education Centres**.

The project participants in Norway have been **refugees seeking or in the process of being granted asylum and residence permits in Norway**. They have signed up to be accommodated and to take part in activities in special Integration Reception Centres, which provide housing and full-day programmes of various integration activities.

3.1 Learners, an overview of the target population of Norway

The target population in Norway are asylum seekers in Integration Reception Centres. In these centres the asylum seeker has signed up for a full-day integration programme, with different activities such as Norwegian teaching and training, cultural orientation and workplace training.

In VISKA, all residents have identified and documented their competences in a self-registration tool (*Kompass*), followed by career guidance. These are the two first phases in the VPL procedure. As a

result of these two phases, candidates with relevant competences have been recommended to have their competences assessed towards relevant curricula in upper secondary education, to complete the last two phases of VPL, assessment and certification.

Kompass is an electronic tool for mapping refugee competence. The tool is available in 14 different languages and was developed by Skills Norway. The refugees can register their competence themselves, but will get support if necessary.

The Directorate of Integration and Diversity has the responsibility for *Kompass*. Skills Norway has obtained aggregated data from them to get an overview of the total number of people who have registered their competence and completed career guidance in 2018 and early 2019.

Career guidance was provided using interpreters and was based on information registered in *Kompass*. Career counsellors from public career centres in the county informed about work and education possibilities in Norway as well as systems for approval of formal education and VPL. In addition, they produced a supplementary document describing in more detail the candidate's competences and future goals. Based on this information the guidance counsellor recommended some candidates to participate in the last two phases in the VPL procedure in upper secondary education.

The table below shows an overview of how many people were in the five Integration Reception Centres in 2018 and the first half of 2019. In total, 612 (213 + 399) candidates completed the first two phases in the VPL procedure; identifying and documenting their competences in *Kompass*, and receiving career guidance.

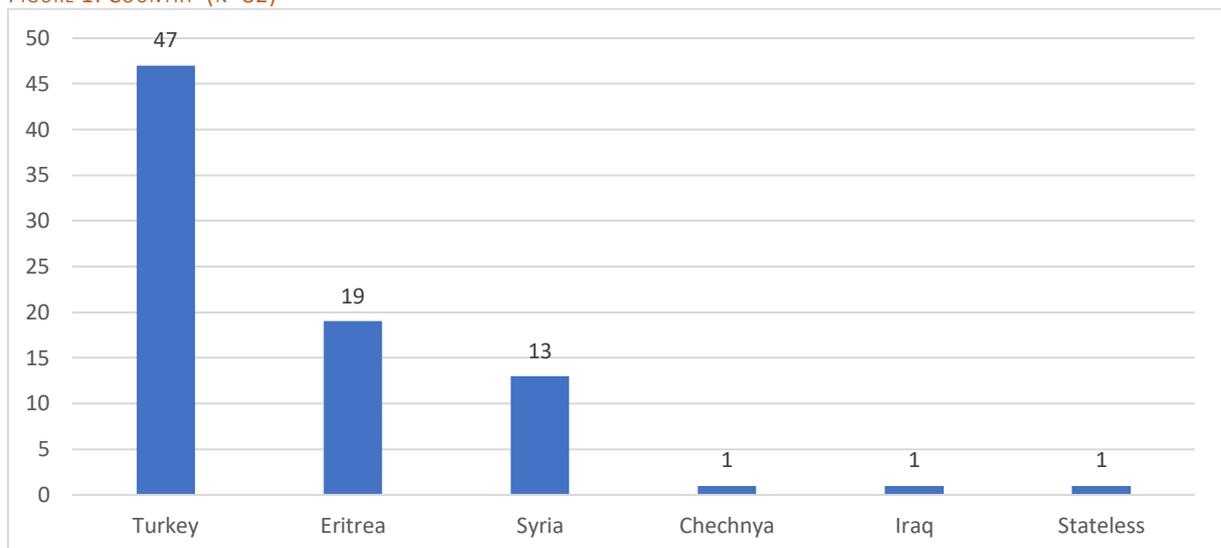
TABLE 1:

	Spring 2019	2018
All residents	304	534
Women	92	160
Men	212	373
Participants active in full-time program	164	195
Residents who have started or completed primary school, so far this year	45	170
Residents who have started or completed high school, so far this year	39	135
Residents with higher education, so far this year	196	183
Unskilled work	92	275
Skilled work based on teaching or training	33	57
Participants with completed competence mapping, so far this year	278	479
Participants with completed career counselling note, so far this year	213	399
Residents with competence information and individual plan transferred to Introductory programme	92	280

74 of these 612 candidates were recommended to have their competence assessed towards curricula in upper secondary education. Skills Norway received reports from the VPL professionals about each of the assessments performed with these candidates. In the following, all data refer to this group. Some of the candidates have been validated in several subjects. A total of 103 reports were delivered, and 82 assessments were completed. Some persons were assessed in more than one subject.

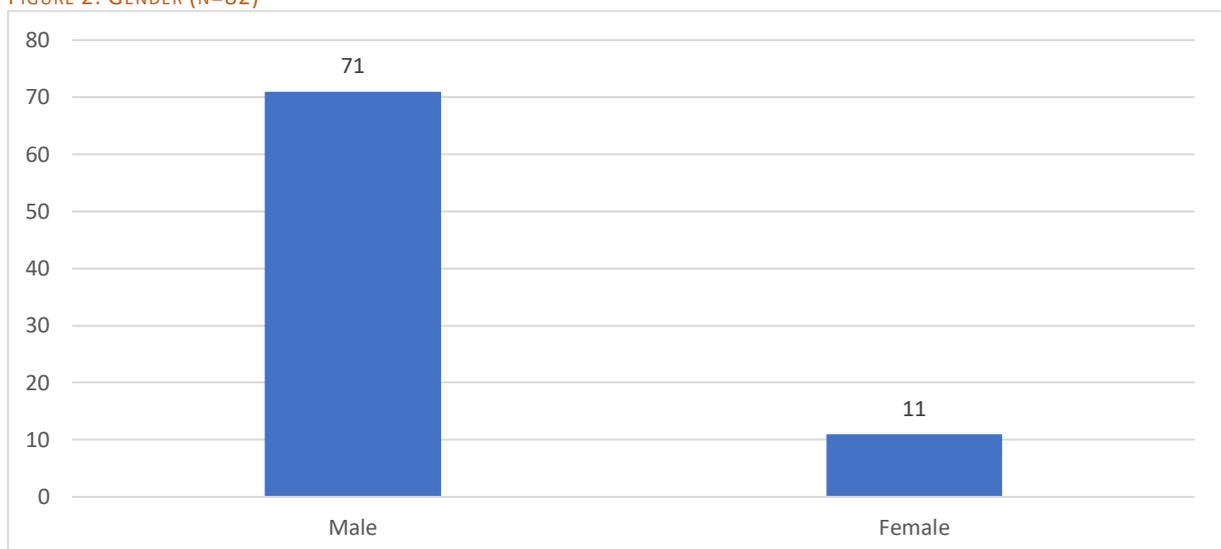
The candidates are between 19 and 54 years old. More than 50 per cent of the candidates are between 25 and 40 years old.

FIGURE 1: COUNTRY (N=82)



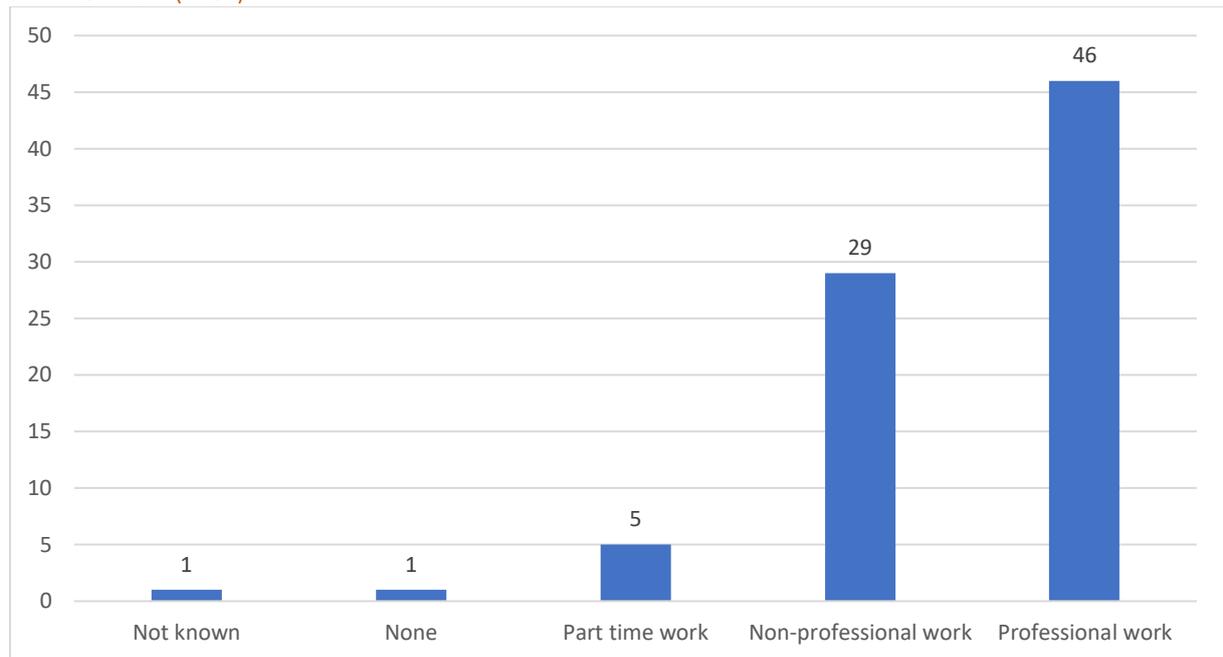
More than 50 per cent of the assessments were of candidates from Turkey.

FIGURE 2: GENDER (N=82)



71 assessments were with male candidates and 11 assessments were with female candidates.

FIGURE 3: WORK (N=82)



Most of the assessments were based on candidates that had a background in professional work, 29 of the assessments were based on candidates that had a background in non-professional work.

TABLE 2: PRIOR EDUCATION (N=82)

Completed HE	41
Upper secondary education	12
Some HE	7
Primary education	6
Some training	3
Completed training	3
Upper secondary education, 6 months add. Training	2
Upper secondary education, plus one year college	2
Upper secondary education, summerschool	1
Completed VET	2
Completed Tertiary Vocational Training	1
some schooling	1
None	1

Most candidates had more than basic education. 50 per cent of the assessments were with candidates that had completed higher education. 12 assessments were based on candidates who had completed upper secondary education.

3.2 Programme staff

A broad group of staff have been involved in Norwegian trials in Viska as they have had different roles in supporting the potential Viska candidates in the five Integration Reception Centres located in five different counties throughout the country. Identification/documentation of competences in the self-registration tool has been supported by staff at each centre. Career guidance following the registration has been conducted by career counsellors from the career centre in the county. Assessment towards learning outcomes in the curricula from upper secondary education has been conducted by assessors from the county upper secondary schools or adult learning centres, supported by administrative staff. The final certification has been the responsibility of administrative staff in the providing school or centre.

During the trial period, there have been some staff changes. In the five participating Viska counties the challenges were different due to the local situation. In one county there was shortage of staff due to increased influx of refugees at the start of the Viska trial. Another county was establishing new administration due to the recent merging of two counties. One county had lost their Integration Reception Centre due to low influx of refugees. This strongly reduced the number of Viska candidates in this county, and they were only able to validate three candidates. In yet another county one key person in the administration left for another job. This reduced the number of candidates from an estimation of 30 candidates to only 11 candidates in this county.

3.3 Key findings

All stakeholders involved in Viska trials have positive experiences from their point of view. One of the assessors reported that

“I was sceptical about assessment at this early stage but was positively convinced after having assessed one candidate with the help of an interpreter.”

The NAG supports the action as a feasible way of recognising prior learning, seen from the national perspective.

By and large, professionals in the VPL process give positive feedback. Very few comment that the interpreter has problems with professional vocabulary. One commented that the candidate seems not to be prepared sufficiently for the actual assessment procedure.

In the survey from staff, when asked what worked well in the process, the assessors had been successful in revealing the candidate's skills and competences and making the candidate feel valuable and appreciated. Many assessors had chosen the workshop as an opportunity to consider VPL towards curricula in Vocational Education and Training, making it possible to reveal both the candidate's practical and theoretical competences. Another positive outcome of the collaboration of the different stakeholders in VISKA was that it made cooperation between local actors in the county involved in VISKA work well. It had been easy to transfer case files of refugees between them.

Another reflection from the same survey was that it had been demanding to create efficient processes for the project work with the number of actors involved. Collecting information across different systems and organisations had been time-consuming and resource demanding. The timing between decision making, signing of contracts and operative work was challenging for those involved in the Norwegian field trials. There appeared to have been challenges in communication with other actors involved in the candidate's programme, and some reported a lack of openness in cooperation between the professional communities involved in VISKA. It was also commented that in terms of informing potential opportunities for the target learners, some of the initial mapping of competences from the Integration Reception Centres could have been more thorough.

3.4 Key Implications

Recent development in national skills policy is aimed at making adult learning more flexible. The existing programmes are revised, and new programmes are piloted to create faster and more flexible pathways for immigrants and adults with little education.

VISKA trials have contributed to policy development by showing that validation at an early stage in the integration process, by using English or other foreign languages, is beneficial for the adult immigrant. Some clearly state that validation has given them motivation to continue further training.

Professional staff involved in VISKA trials have been introduced to working with interpreters. They have experienced that this works well as a means to understand the competences of the candidates and thus make better plans for their further competence development. They have also experienced that it is challenging for interpreters to work with professional vocabulary from the various curricula involved in the assessment procedure. However, giving the interpreter some extra time to study the curricula has proved to be effective.

Better effect of training in the integration programme, shorter time span in the programme and more motivated participants are possible benefits for the integration process.

3.4.1 Implications for future validation development

VISKA trials indicate that early VPL may be useful for the right candidates. However, the candidate needs time to prepare for a successful VPL process. It is important to be aware of the possibility that for some candidates, it might be too early in their trajectory.

Involvement of stakeholders at all levels is important, preferably early in the process to make sure that the process around the candidate works without sectoral obstacles.

One should keep in mind that processes like this are resource intensive.

4. The VISKA Validation process

This chapter provides an overview of the VISKA validation process. The development of validation across Europe is varied and more so amongst the low skilled, migrant and refugee cohorts. The national developments in validation and the diversity amongst these populations make validation a greater challenge to embed in national systems and processes within education or employment.

In Norway, a validation system based on the agreed common principles has been under development for many years, as part of overarching lifelong learning policies. Validation is a long-standing topic of discussion also in tripartite cooperation, which is reflected in the Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017–2021.

VPL in Norway is only available in the formal education system, since the only standards for VPL today are the learning outcomes described in formal curricula and study programmes. There are laws and regulations in place relating to each level of education and training, providing a general framework for VPL. Initial vocational education and training (VET) is included in the formal education system at upper secondary level, and as such makes VPL available for all vocational education and training at this level.

In Norway today validation toward learning outcomes in the curricula must be conducted using Norwegian or Sami languages. In the VISKA trials, validation was conducted towards learning outcomes in Upper Secondary Education, including VET, using the candidate's own language or English. The five participating countries were given exemption from the language requirements during the VISKA trial period.

During the VISKA trials, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training issued a proposal in which they propose amending the regulations to the Education Act governing validation of prior learning. If the proposal is approved, it will be possible for all candidates to go through the validation process in other languages than Norwegian and Sami (the national languages). The proposal has been circulated for public consultation, with a deadline on 10.10.2019. The actual amendment is intended to take effect in 2020 if approved.

The Norwegian trials in VISKA have worked with refugees who have arrived quite recently and do not yet have sufficient command of Norwegian or Sami. They have gone through validation in their mother tongue, with the help of interpreters, or in English. The proposed amendment would shift this possibility from a pilot/project stage to more general availability, thus extending access to validation to new groups of people.

A government whitepaper (Meld. St. 16, 2015-16) emphasises that it is important to make sure immigrants' competence can be put quickly to use in working life, and that good qualification pathways are crucial to successful integration. Validation is an important factor in achieving this and can contribute to faster integration in working life and society.

4.1 Validation activities and processes: Quantitative findings

As can be seen in table 1 above, 612 have completed the first two phases of the validation process; identification and documentation of competences and career guidance.

74 candidates from the total cohort have completed the two last phases of the validation process as well. See figure 1, 2, 3 and table 2 above for details about their background. These candidates had relevant prior learning and were advised to continue the process, in order to get formal documentation of approved learning outcomes from the curricula in upper secondary education.

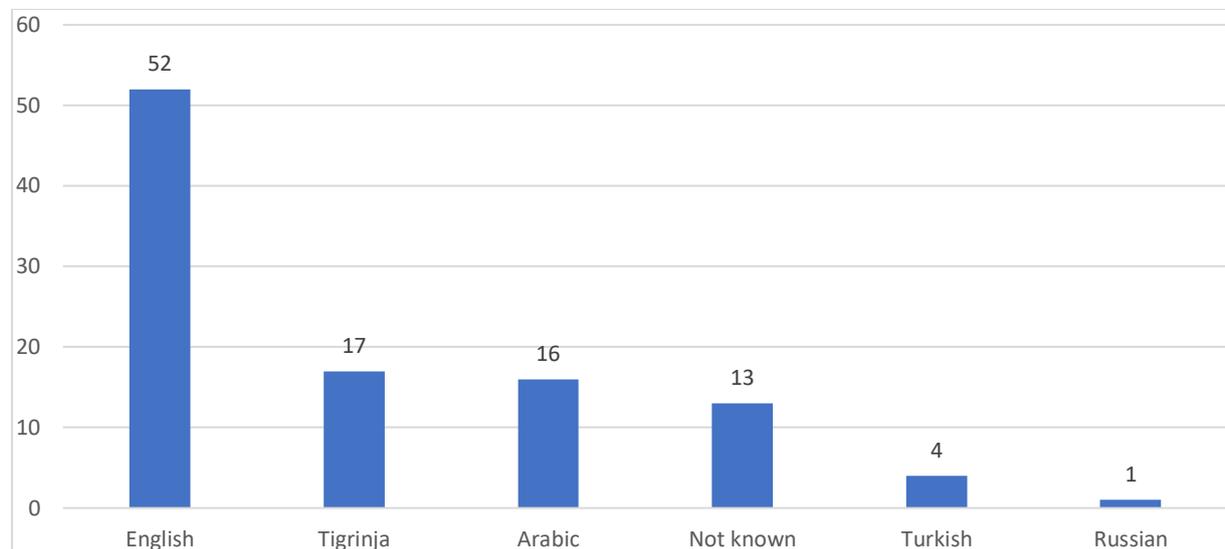
TABLE 3: SUBJECT (N=82)

English	44
Maths	5
Health Worker	5
Electrical Engineering	4
Science	5
Cookery	3
Industrial Production	3
Building and Construction	2
Child care	1
Sales	2
Design and Crafts	2
Pharmacy Technician	1
Hairdressing	1
Tiling/bricklaying	1
Automotive, light vehicles	1
Carpentring	1
House painting	1

As the table shows, more than 50 per cent of the total assessments of 82 were toward the curriculum in English. The rest were assessments in math, science and in different vocational subjects as health work, electrical engineering, cookery, industrial production, building and construction, sales, design

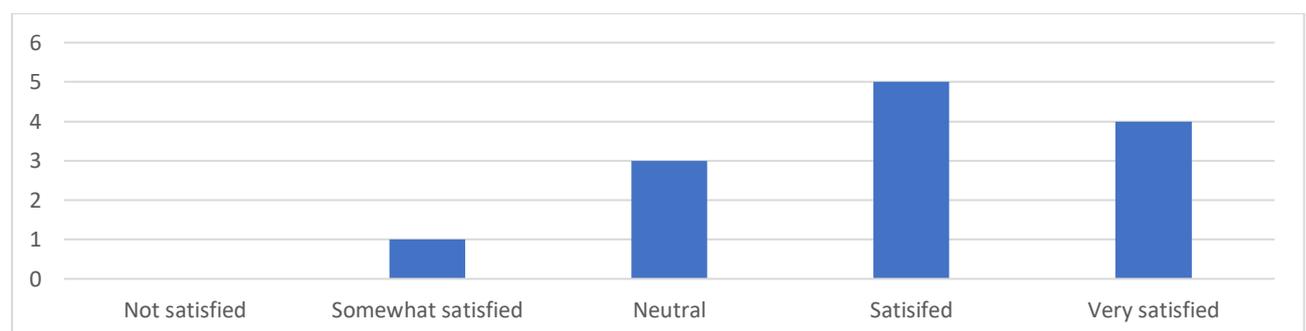
and crafts, childcare, pharmacy technician, hairdressing, tiling/bricklaying, automotive/light vehicles, carpentering and house painting.

FIGURE 4: ASSESSMENT LANGUAGE (N=103; 82 COMPLETED AND 21 NOT COMPLETED)



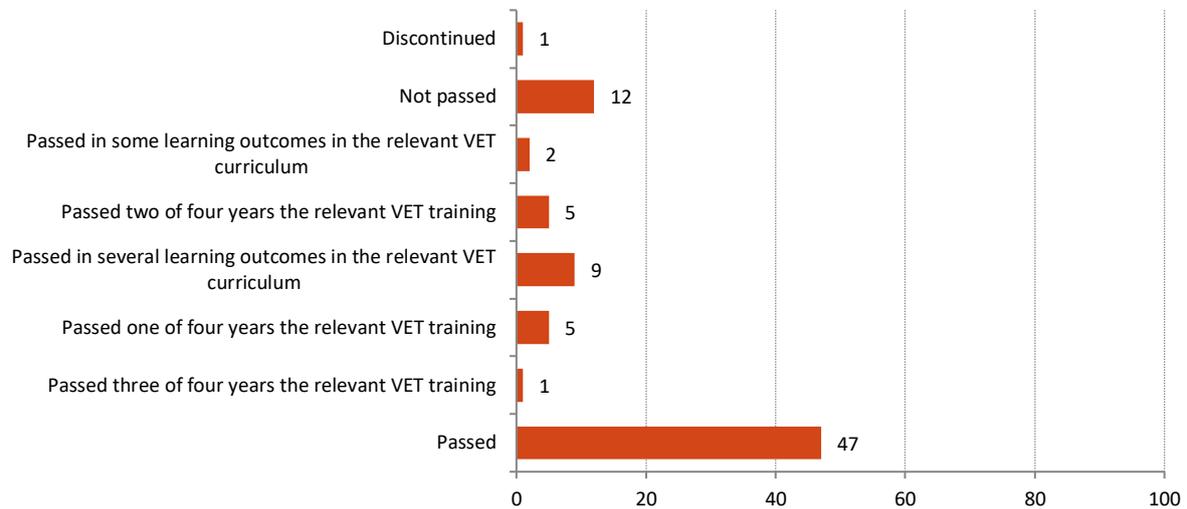
52 of 103 assessments (82 completed and 21 not completed) were performed using English, 17 assessed using Tigrinya, 16 using Arabic, 4 using Turkish and 1 using Russian. The 13 assessments marked as performed in unknown language represent assessments that were not completed, for several reasons.

FIGURE 5 LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH INTERPRETER (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=13)



In the first survey to VISKA staff 13 out of 18 had worked with an interpreter. The figure shows to what extent they were satisfied with using interpreters during trials.

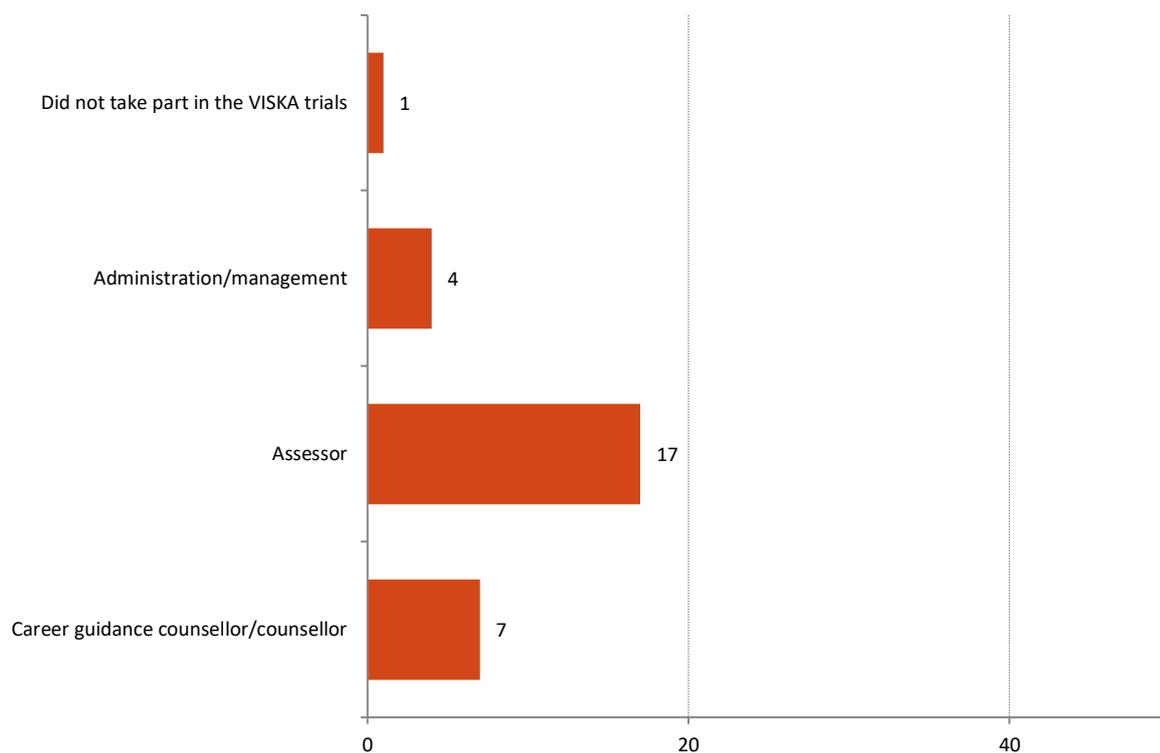
FIGURE 6: RESULTS (N=82)



Norwegian vocational training is normally four years. In the VISKA trials the candidates assessed in vocational subjects passed several learning outcomes. As the table above shows, five assessments resulted in approval of two years of the four-year training period. The 47 assessments marked as 'passed' represents the assessments in theoretical subjects as English, math and science, where all learning outcomes in these subjects were approved.

Two VISKA surveys have been distributed to 40 and 54 recipients respectively. The recipients have been staff involved in career guidance, validation procedures and administration. 21 and 29 have responded.

FIGURE 7: ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS IN VISKA TRIALS (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=29)



The figure shows an overview of professions of the respondents from the second survey. Most of the respondents are assessors, 7 are career guidance counsellors or counsellors. 4 work in administration and/or management.

4.2 Validation activities and processes: Qualitative findings

All candidates in VISKA trials have been staying in Integration Reception Centres with a full day programme of integration activities. They have **identified and documented their competences**, using a self-registration tool supported by local staff. Following this initial identification and documentation,

they have been given **career guidance** by career counsellors from the county career centre. Those who have had education and work life experiences relevant for **assessment** towards learning outcomes in the curricula in upper secondary education, have been introduced to further steps in the validation procedure by professionals from the upper secondary education providers in the county, responsible for validation at this educational level. The actual assessment has been carried out by assessors engaged by the county administration. **Interpreters** have been used for all candidates who could not communicate sufficiently in English, giving them the opportunity to use their own language, Turkish, Arabic, Tigrinya or Russian. Successful candidates have received formal documentation of their competences. The results of the assessment have resulted in **certification** of approved learning outcomes from the relevant curriculum.

In considering what had been innovative as part of VISKA, the views of the staff respondents in the first survey centred on a number of factors. The first of these was the importance of considering VPL in the early stages of the integration process for migrants and refugees. This was to give the candidate a realistic picture of the future possibilities, to set up concrete plans and motivate for a specific profession. The role of career guidance in this process was highlighted by the participants in the NAG.

In considering the personal development of the validation candidates during the field trials of the VISKA project in Norway, the same respondents found it interesting to see how candidates gradually develop the ability to talk about their own background and show what they are able to do. Frontline staff and guidance counsellors involved in VISKA found that it was useful that practitioners working with VPL are challenged in their way of thinking and performing VPL, especially in vocational education and training.

4.2.1 Learner case no 1

Candidate 1 is a man in his late forties who came from Turkey a year ago and has many years' experience from mechanical industry in his home country. During the identification of competences in the self-registration tool and the following career guidance session provided by the county career centre, it was agreed that he would be a good candidate for assessment towards the curriculum in industrial technology. The candidate himself decided to go through with the process.

The assessment took place in a workshop in an upper secondary school, assisted by an interpreter, in Turkish. The candidate and the assessor had a dialogue in the workshop using the machinery as objects for discussions of how, why, and for what they were used. The assessor got a clear view of the candidate's competences, and he was approved as regards many of the learning outcomes in the curriculum.

«Many of those who come here to Norway have a vocational profession, but it is not easy to get recognition for these competences in a new country. I am good at my profession. The validation procedure was very successful as my experience from home was relevant for the curriculum in Norway. I had good assistance from an interpreter in the assessment. » *Turkish VISKA candidate*

4.2.2 Learner case no 2

Candidate 2 is a woman in her late forties who has been working in health care in her local municipality after staying at the Integration Reception Centre. She wants to get a diploma as a health care worker, a four-year programme in VET at upper secondary level. She has had many different jobs and has worked for 7 years in the Norwegian Embassy in Asmara. She speaks both English and a little Norwegian.

After the identification/documentation and guidance phase, she agreed to continue the process. She was assessed towards the curriculum as a health care worker at the career centre with the assistance of an interpreter, in Tigrinya. During the assessment, she presented her professional experiences through a dialogue between herself and the assessor, by discussing and reflecting around her practice. Many of the learning outcomes in the curriculum were approved, and she will be able to enter the VET programme in the second year of the four-year programme. She is exempted from the first year.

«The assessment was carried out in my own language, with the help of an interpreter. Being able to present my experiences in the profession using my own language made the process easier for me. » *Eritrean VISKA candidate*

4.3 Key findings

Validation for VISKA candidates have followed the same procedures as for all other VPL candidates in Norway. The experimental elements in VISKA are conducting the procedure in foreign languages, using either English or (with an interpreter) Turkish, Arabic, Tigrinya or Russian, and with people who have little experience of Norwegian society.

For the professionals involved in VISKA the key findings relate to their experiences in working with interpreters and their experiences in comparing and assessing the candidate's background from a foreign country toward national learning outcomes in Norwegian curricula.

4.4 Key implications

The key implication of the VISKA project for the Norwegian validation system is that the trials have shown that the process can be opened to new target groups if there is willingness to work with legislative, administrative and financial obstacles. It is possible to succeed in providing a pathway for refugees that acknowledges their professional and life competences, but it is resource intensive.

4.4.1 Implications for future validation process development

To get full effect of validation of prior learning for this target group it is important to give the potential candidate enough time to understand how the Norwegian education system and the labour market work. In Norway, it is important to have documented competences from the formal education system to get employment. For instance, VET is normally four years of full training with a final, practical exam. VPL may shorten the VET training if learning outcomes in the relevant curricula are approved.

In addition to the necessary understanding of the Norwegian system of education and VPL, some candidates might need some time to work on other pressing matters, such as health problems and possible traumas caused by their often dramatic back story.

Each candidate ready to complete the full VPL process needs support, especially through the two first phases. In the first two phases it is important to support the identification and documentation of competences relevant for the specific curriculum which is to be assessed in the assessment phase.

To get full effect of VPL, it is important to follow up the candidate after the VPL process and motivate and support the candidate for further training or establish contact with employers, based on the certified competences from VPL.

For the providers of VPL it is important to be aware of competences from abroad in order to make better use of immigrants' competences. To recognise these competences early in the integration process and take them into account when setting up individual plans for further competence development or work practice may lead to faster and more efficient integration.

4.4.2 Policy implications

Today, VPL in upper secondary education must be conducted in Norwegian or Sami language. To make VPL available for the VISKA target group, the five participating counties had to get an exemption from national regulations. To make VPL available for this target group after the VISKA project, the national regulation needs to be amended.

It must be noted that this amendment may be effective in 2020 after a national consultation this autumn. The experience from VISKA has been one of the sources for this proposed amendment.

Implications of policy

All counties in Norway have provisions for VPL at upper secondary level. VPL is funded through a block education grant from the national government, so local provision depends on local priorities. In the five VISKA counties the overall VPL procedures are the same, but differences in organisation of the Integration Reception Centre, the career guidance centre and the assessment staff available have influenced the VISKA trials in some detail.

Implications for policy

In the counties providing VPL for this target group, the roles and responsibilities between the different levels of administration involved, need to be discussed and clarified. A clear division of labour is necessary to avoid confusion and repetition of processes.

Since local priorities may lead to low priority of VPL due to lack of resources, it is crucial that national actors keep up and communicate a high awareness around VPL issues, so as to emphasise its importance and influence actors regionally/locally.

5. Developing and extending regional/ national networks

This chapter provides description and analysis of the partnerships and networks which have existed and have developed to support the work of VISKA. The analysis includes an assessment of the strengths, achievements and challenges in developing and maintaining these partnerships and networks.

5.1 Building and sustaining networks

In Norway, there is no established national network for validation professionals in upper secondary education, including VET. However, there is a national conference on adult education in upper secondary education held each year by one of the counties for a selected number of professionals from each county. In these conferences, validation is usually included in the agenda.

Following the VISKA trials, Skills Norway intends to establish a network with validation professionals to support local practise and enhance agreement nationally on how to support validation development locally. It has been an ongoing challenge that the different counties in Norway conduct validation differently due to local priorities. If this leads to significant differences in how the legal rights for citizens are implemented across the country, it needs to be addressed, for instance through national networking.

During the VISKA trials, Skills Norway was involved in several networking settings.

The Integration Reception Centres were in a network comprising all involved actors, such as municipalities hosting the centres and providing primary education and language training, career centres providing career guidance and directorates responsible for granting asylum and providing housing for refugees. PES was also involved. Skills Norway attended these network meetings to present VISKA and establish contacts. Taking part in the meetings proved to be very useful for building motivation to participate in VISKA. We were able to present the project for all involved actors at the same time and got fruitful discussions about obstacles and challenges, such as how to recruit candidates, how to inform correctly about the benefits of validation at this early stage and how to make sure that the candidate had the relevant background of education and/or work experience.

The five counties responsible for providing validation towards learning outcomes in upper secondary education were involved in a VISKA network during the trial period. Two representatives from each county were regularly exchanging experience and challenges through meetings or via Skype. These

meetings were useful for keeping up the pace in the trials, discuss common challenges in recruiting candidates and set up validation arrangements and inform about coming actions in the VISKA project.

A National Advisory Group, NAG, was set up during the VISKA trials in Norway comprising the Ministry of Education and Research, the Directorate of Work and Welfare, the Directorate of Immigration, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Skills Norway. This formed a network with national stakeholders responsible for all public services involved in the Integration Reception Centres including the directorate responsible for education at upper secondary level, provision that was not included in the Integration Reception Centres at that point. This network proved to be very useful in anchoring VISKA activities locally that involved the Integration Reception Centres, the career centres and the county administration providing the validation process.

5.2 Existence and scope of partnerships and networks

5.2.1 National policy partners

Selection of members for the NAG reflects the sectors working with integration issues in a wide sense.

These stakeholders were necessary to setting up the VISKA trials.

The following national stakeholders were members of the **National Advisory Group**:

- The Ministry of Education and Research, responsible for the national provision of VPL and for integration
- The Directorate of Immigration, responsible for handling the asylum seekers and decision on status
- The Directorate of Integration and Diversity, responsible for provision of integration activities after status is established
- The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, responsible for formal education at primary, secondary and upper secondary education and VPL at those levels
- The Directorate of Work and Welfare, responsible for social and employment services, including PES
- Skills Norway, chairing the group

The NAG had 6 meeting during the project period, in addition to e-mail contact ad hoc whenever questions arose.

5.2.2 Educational partners

In the **VISKA project network** representatives from the adult education units and the career centres from the five counties Nordland, Trøndelag, Oslo, Vestfold and Vest-Agder were members.

To establish this project network the VISKA team had meetings with representatives from county administration, career centres and Integration Reception Centres in all five counties during January and February 2018 to introduce the VISKA project and trials and to clarify expectations on both sides, from Skills Norway and from each county. Following this round of meetings, each five counties signed a contract with Skills Norway, describing the project cooperation and expected outcomes of the trials.

This project network has had five meetings during the trial period, mostly via Skype due to long distances between the five counties.

5.2.3 Other partners

The **network of Integration Reception Centres** comprised representatives from all five Integration Reception Centres, county career centres and local PES. In addition, representatives from the Directorate of Work and Welfare, Directorate of Immigration and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity were present, the latter being the coordinator of the network. VISKA participated in three of these network meetings, informing about VISKA, establishing contacts and reporting on progress.

5.2.4 Employment partners

PES was not directly involved in the project network but the national authority, the Directorate of Work and Welfare, was a member of the NAG and supported the project actively. In the Integration Reception Centres, PES is an active contributor for instance by providing work-placements for residents.

5.3 Developing and sustaining networks: challenges and barriers

The networks described above were active during the VISKA project and as such not difficult to engage or set up because they were directly involved in the project activities.

None of these networks will continue as such after the trial period is over. However, the VISKA trials have prepared some ground for developing a network with professionals working with validation in the counties, both at administrative and at hands-on level.

5.4 Strengths and achievements

The network around the Integration Reception Centres was useful for Viska, for making contacts and informing about the progress in the project. Since this was not a unique Viska network, it had no direct effect on the project itself, but it was an important arena for us to get to know the context around the Viska candidates and to spread general knowledge about the project to actors not directly involved, but who may contribute positively from their side.

The network with the involved counties was crucial for the project. Through this network we were able to keep up the good work and solve upcoming problems. All five counties are different when it comes to local priority and resources, and it is useful to have a common arena to shed light on these differences and accept them or find a common basis of practice.

The NAG network was crucial for anchoring local practices. The directorates needed to push forward locally to get the Viska trials running. As described above, there are a lot of actors involved around the refugees, and all parties must do their part of the job to get the candidates through identification and documentation of competences, career guidance and assessment/certification.

5.5 Key findings

Networks are useful when they are needed. As a consequence of this, networks are often dynamic; they are active or passive according to the need. The NAG for Viska will be dissolved when Viska trials are over, but has been most useful for mutual learning about different but related policy areas. Other projects may need to activate something similar in the future.

In the focus group session in the NAG at the start of the Norwegian trials, several of the NAG participants thought they had little basis for saying whether the Viska project influenced cooperation and/or networking in the VPL field at that stage. This group does not see directly what happens in the field in practice. They suggested that expert staff at a lower level, closer to practice, would know more about a possible effect that the project would have on cooperation and networking.

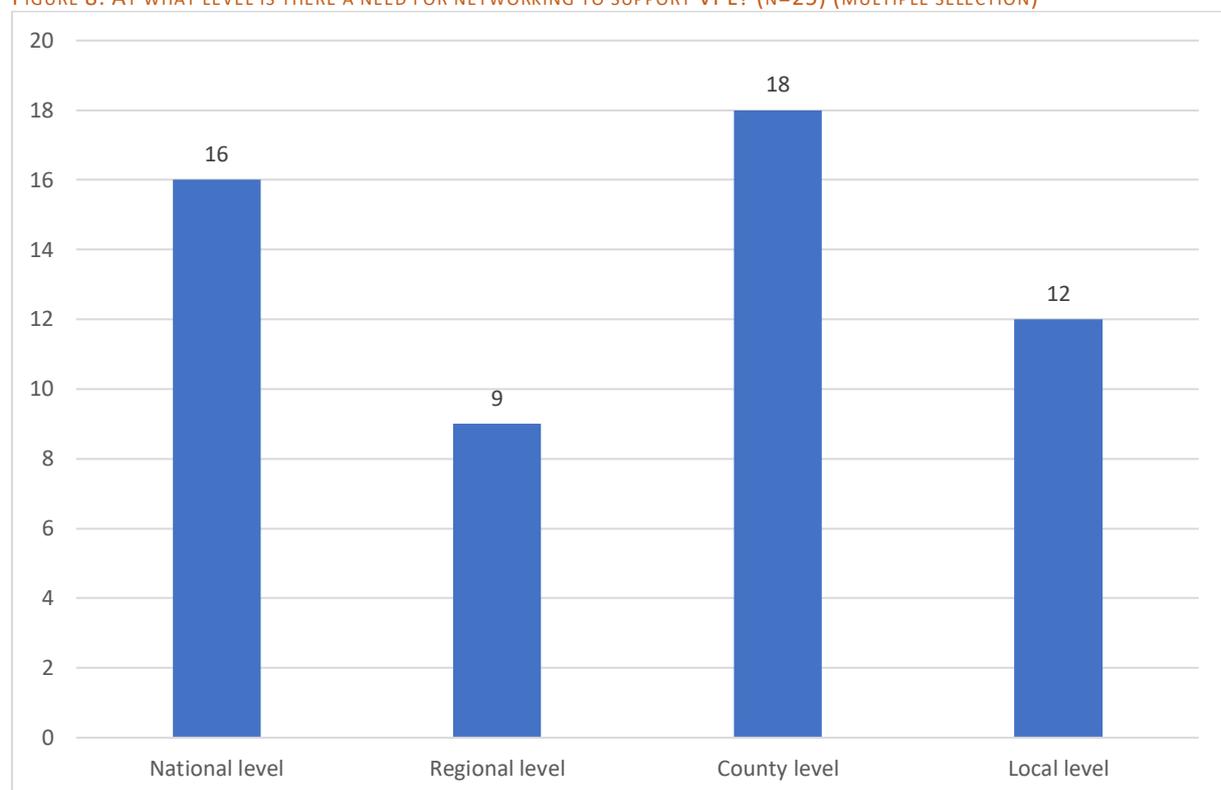
The NAG suggests that following on from the project it may be relevant to set up local networks, closer to the practice field, and in that case, funding would be required. As an advisory group for a project, the NAG has a defined starting point and a defined end. The NAG suggests that it would probably be more relevant for a possible future network to involve more local actors and to support their cooperation.

In the final stage of the Norwegian trials, all members in the NAG responded positively on the question if there was any need for establishing any form of networks to support further development of VPL for this target group. They suggested networks, local and national, with professionals to facilitate exchange of experiences and good advice on practice. The networks could operate via email and meet when needed, and include people working with all target groups for VPL at upper secondary level, not just the VISKA target group.

The networks could play an active role in implementing possible policy changes following VISKA, if the necessary amendments in the national regulations are launched.

In the second survey for VISKA staff, 28 out of 28 say there is a need for networking to support VPL.

FIGURE 8: AT WHAT LEVEL IS THERE A NEED FOR NETWORKING TO SUPPORT VPL? (N=25) (MULTIPLE SELECTION)



The figure shows at what level VISKA staff suggest the use of network.

When asked to describe existing networks, the respondents give the following answers:

- With county career centre
- A regional network on educational matters in south-vest of Norway
- A national network related to a project working with digitalisation
- A county network with career centres

- A local network with upper secondary education, including VET
- Have contact with others working with VPL.
- I handle applications for VPL and cooperate with PES, Integration Reception Centres and other actors.
- In the career centre where I am employed, we have long experience with VPL and we have a lot of discussions, exchange of experiences and training among us.
- It is an unformal network locally among colleagues where common challenges are discussed. My competences in VPL are mostly based on my own experiences and exchange of experiences with colleagues.
- National network meetings for adult education where sometimes VPL is on the agenda.
- Network for guidance counsellors in adult education, network for leaders in adult education.
- A network linked to Integration Reception Centres
- A local network with local stakeholders working with provision of VET for immigrants.

When asked to describe how the networking was useful for VPL, respondents said:

- Discussions and reflections about practice and how to improve it
- To enhance equitable practice in assessment, administration, financing, methods and such things.
- It is difficult to stand alone as VPL demands development of new methods.
- Useful to have someone to ask when I need to.
- It is easier to get an overview over relevant options and ways forward in each case.
- To be more competent.
- It is useful to discuss difficult cases and get professional input that increases quality of the process around each candidate.
- Change of experience and regulatory interpretation.
- Because we learn from each other.
- Be more competent and acknowledge possibilities linked to VPL, exchange experiences.
- Makes it easier to coordinate provisions and discuss challenges. Through cooperation the provisions are more coordinated and will lead to better results as all stakeholders move in the same direction.
- When VPL is on the agenda, everyone is more aware of its use.

Other comments about networks:

- It should be established, and I want to join.

- Should have different frequencies at different levels; Nationally once a year, locally four times each year
- It would have been useful to cooperate with someone who works with VPL towards the same subjects in upper secondary education.
- Important!
- Should be established network between municipalities and county.
- It should have been a regular network at national level as there are many different interpretations of national regulations.
- Necessary for quality assurance to enhance the use of results of VPL in the companies.

5.6 Key implications

Establishing networks did not represent a challenge in VISKA, as integration of refugees is high on the political agenda and is being implemented at all levels. Experience from this project has shown that cross-sectoral networking is crucial for following up a vulnerable target group such as this, and for system development and change.

Part of the challenge in VISKA has been that the complexity of the work has required cooperation both horizontally and vertically. Without networking it would probably have been impossible to get the project up and running, let alone achieve results, both for the individual as well as in a larger perspective.

5.6.1 Implications for future validation development

It would be useful to develop networks to exchange best practice and common challenges in validation arrangements for this target group. Further development of VPL provision in upper secondary education at this early stage of the integration process is dependent on an expected amendment of national regulations allowing for validation performed by use of foreign languages. When this amendment is made, networking between practitioners will be needed to support implementation of provisions for this new target group and enhance common practise.

5.6.2 Policy implications

Implications of policy

Many stakeholders at local level were involved in the integration of the VISKA target group. Integration Reception Centres, municipalities responsible for residency and education; adult education centres (offering language training and primary education), and PES responsible for work placement for work training. These stakeholders met in the network built around the Integration Reception Centres. The

counties responsible for upper secondary education and training, including VET, were not counted among these stakeholders as upper secondary education and training was initially regarded as not relevant at this early stage in the integration process. We see that working with this target group requires interacting with a complex, cross-sectoral web of stakeholders because of the way the necessary services are set up.

Implications for policy

The VISKA trials introduced the VPL provision at upper secondary education and training, and hence the county, to the network mentioned above. Being able to validate towards learning outcomes in upper secondary level made it relevant for the counties to network with stakeholders involved with this target group. In this networking, the career guidance counsellors were central as they are both close to the target group through their career guidance provisions, and work closely with the county in providing further training for other adults at the career guidance centres. The career guidance centres have recently been obliged to offer career guidance for this target group. The career centre becomes a vital link and may need to be strengthened and cooperate in networks with relevant partner stakeholders in the future to perform and develop this role.

6. Extending and adapting tools used in the validation of prior learning for refugees

This chapter discusses the tools used by validation personnel in the VISKA trials, offering analysis on the strengths and weaknesses of these tools in terms of impact and quality, as well as the challenges associated with tool development and adaptation.

The range of tools that can be used to support staff and learners in validation is broad and can include:

- Paper based templates and resources with more up to date online solutions
- Tools to identify basic skills levels and competences
- Tools that support the process of the validation of prior learning
- Tools for self-evaluation and gap identification.
- Tools to assist those involved in the validation process including reflection
- Registration and monitoring systems which assist in tracking the development of the individual as they engage in validation.
- Tools that assist in structuring the validation mentoring session.

In Norway, refugees in Integration Reception Centres use an online tool for self-registration of competences (*Kompass*). This tool was used by all VISKA candidates.

6.1 Context and aims

The online self-registration tools for VISKA candidates in Norway, *Kompass*, was developed by Skills Norway and later transferred to the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, the directorate responsible for the Integration Reception Centres. The tool intends to ease the integration process as the immigrant registers his/her prior education and work experiences at an early stage so that the following individual plan for further integration is as relevant and targeted for future training and work as possible. See description below.

6.2 Validation tools for refugees

6.2.1 Tool selection, development and use

The Norwegian self-registration tool for asylum seekers (*Kompass*)

Background of the tool: The tool has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and has been customised for asylum seekers by Skills Norway, in cooperation with the Directorate of Integration and Diversity. The objective of the tool is to provide the municipality with a basis for individually adjusted activities targeted towards social inclusion and professional qualifications.

Languages: The tool is available in 14 languages: Albanian, Arabic, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Kurmanji, Kurdish-Sorani, Norwegian, Oromo, Pashto, Russian, Somali, Tigrinya.

Used Independently by learner: The tool is intended to be used independently by the learner. However, many learners need support from a staff member.

Number of Sections / Elements: There are seven elements: Personal data, Education, Language, Digital skills, Driving licence, Work experience, other. The tool focuses on competence identification, transversal skills and job-related competences as a basis for career guidance and making plans for ensuing activities, such as VPL, work life training and further education. There are 39 questions in total. Not all learners answer all 39 questions. Some of the questions are routed, so that the previous answers decide the questions that follow. It is estimated that it would take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

Costs: The tool is publicly funded and is available free of charge for the user, however a specific login is required as well as access to an internet browser.

Number of users for the trial: 612 refugees / adult learners have used the tool in the VISKA trial period, supporting and informing the first two phases of the VPL process.

6.2.2 Strengths and achievements

Using the self-registration tool has provided the career guidance process with useful information and has given guidance a head start as the career counsellor was already introduced to the candidate's background before the guidance started. It also served to support the candidates in reflecting on their own experience and background and identifying their competences.

6.3 Challenges and barriers

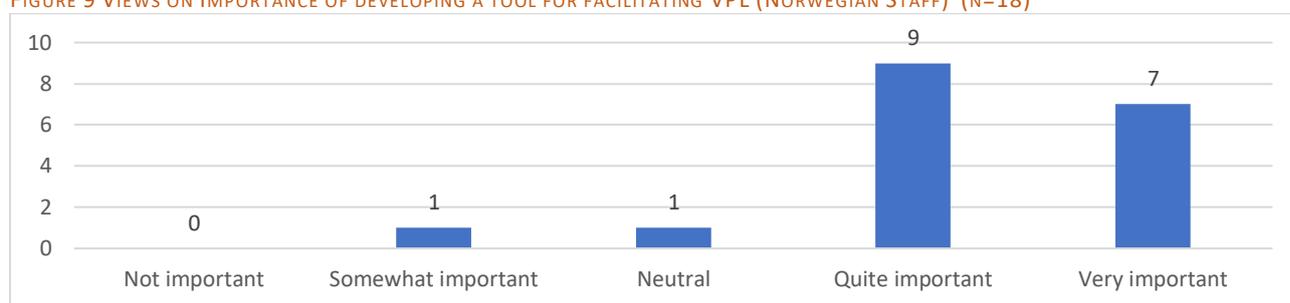
The tool was developed as a self-registration tool meant to be used without assistance. This proved not to be the case, and most of the users needed assistance from staff to be able to fill in the online form. Even though the language was familiar, the meaning of the content was difficult to grasp due to

differences in education systems and work requirements across countries, and sometimes due to huge cultural differences.

In some cases, there were barriers linked to the candidate's general scepticism towards public services / authorities and fear of being controlled by them. This may have led to false input into the tool from the candidate.

6.4 Key findings

FIGURE 9 VIEWS ON IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING A TOOL FOR FACILITATING VPL (NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)



In the first survey to VISKA staff the availability of a tool to support validation was seen as being quite or very important by the majority of those questioned in the first survey.

In the second survey only 3 of 28 reported to have supported learners in using the skills registration tool, *Kompass*, for validation under the VISKA project. This low number does not indicate that the learners did not need support, which they did, but rather that other staff, advisers at the Integration Reception Centre, were normally those who supported the learners at that stage.

All 3 of those who have supported learners in using the skills registration tool for validation under the VISKA project said it helped to make the process simpler for the learner, 2 said it helped to make the process more consistent, 1 said it contributed to speed up the process and to make sure all skills were addressed.

20 of 28 would recommend a broader introduction of the tool they used for skills registration. The 8 respondents who did not recommend it, said it was because it was not relevant and because it is more important with face-to-face sessions. One respondent wrote the following:

“.. We have not had much use of the results from the self-registration tool used in the Integration Reception Centre because it is very general. The career guidance counsellor performed an extended mapping with the candidate as part of the career guidance session.

This session was used as a basis for considering if the candidate should proceed to assessment of their prior learning towards the curriculum in upper secondary education.”

When the 20 were asked why they would recommend a broader introduction of the tool you used for skills registration, we received several answers:

- Because this was a lot of trial and error, but it went well in the end.
- It is crucial as an approach to validation of prior learning, gives the candidate accountability
- It is educational.
- As a teacher in upper secondary education I meet many adult students with relevant prior learning, but who nevertheless have to follow the formal training. These are adults with higher education who have not been able to get their education approved in Norway and enter VET to access Norwegian working life.
- I think it is useful for this target group.
- To visualise that we appreciate adults’ competences and that competences achieved through experiences are useful in future occupations/professions.
- Too many have competences they cannot document and that can be used in for instance job applications.
- It is important to register all competences a candidate has. Especially in situations where understanding each other’s language is a barrier.
- Because it can be difficult to understand what kind of competences adults actually have. They often have more competences than we expect.
- I would recommend it because it can contribute more targeted future plans for the candidates, and this may increase their chances to succeed in the Norwegian society.
- This trial and its results may increase motivation for learning Norwegian and possibly give earlier access to higher education, in addition to increased possibilities for earlier contact with employers.
- It is important to map candidates’ competence to find the right way forward.
- Because more adults should get this opportunity as many often have competences that are not documented. This especially applies to work practice, but also education.
- It is important with early mapping of competences, also as a reality check on possible ways to reach future goals.
- I think it is important to recognise more of foreign competences and only provide additional training when needed.

- It will earlier be revealed if VPL is necessary and the candidate will be informed about VPL early in the integration process. This may motivate the candidate.
- If the career guidance counsellor initiates the validation process instead of leaving it to the candidate, it probably will be more often used and will probably contribute to more targeted future plans for the candidate.
- Because I as a career guidance counsellor often meet candidates with a lot of competences which they cannot use.
- I also wish for more flexibility in our approval of foreign prior learning so that more prior competences can be approved.
- It is positive that we can use interpreters.
- It is a challenge that candidates who get approval of parts of the curriculum are not allowed to enter education at the right level yet due to other formal requirements.

6.5 Key implications

The Norwegian self-registration tool has been developed for a special target group and is meant to provide an early overview of the candidate's background as a basis for planning further integration activities. The tool seems to work well in cooperation with the following career guidance where the information given in the self-registration is adjusted and elaborated. However, most candidates need support in filling in the tool due to challenges understanding some of the contextual concepts.

6.5.1 Implications for future validation development

The self-registration tool will be implemented in all reception centres in Norway and the tool will be adjusted when needed. The VISKA trials have experienced some of the same challenges as mentioned above and have contributed to introduce this tool as a useful basis for validation of prior learning towards upper secondary education and training.

6.5.2 Policy Implications

Implications of policy

The self-registration tool is the responsibility of the Directorate of Integration and Diversity and is available for the candidates in the Integration Reception Centres. Most candidates need to be supported by local professionals during registration. The registered input is made available for the career guidance counsellors that provide the following career guidance for each candidate based on this registration. This procedure was also used during the VISKA trials. Although the candidates need support during the process and this requires extra resourcing, the resulting registration of background and competence, and the transferability of this information once registered, makes it time well spent.

Implications for policy

An electronic tool such as the self-registration tool used in the Norwegian VISKA trials works well as an initial registration of competences. It is easily accessible for users, but they need support to be able to fill in the form as many of the words used are contextualised to the Norwegian education system, or culturally loaded.

The tool is rather successful, because the results of this initial identification and documentation of competences is followed by career guidance where the content is discussed and adjusted if necessary. A tool such as this needs to be a part of a follow-up process to secure that the results of the identification and documentation effort are put to good use.

The Norwegian tool has similarities with the EU Skills Profiling Tool. A common suggestion for further development would be to pay heed to user feedback. Large tools like these also run the risk of becoming static because of lack of maintenance over time, since the initial investment is substantial. So regular maintenance and updating would be another suggestion.

7. Transversal Skills

This chapter provides analysis of the transversal skill activities under VISKA in Norway, including a description of the challenges involved and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of developing a framework.

7.1 Context and aims

In Norway, transversal skills are embedded in the learning outcomes in the curricula in upper secondary education. It has therefore not been relevant for the Norwegian trials to try out validation of transversal skills isolated from the validation towards the curricula. Skills Norway has participated in the development of the criteria in D 3.2, but we have not tried out these criteria specifically in our trials.

The curriculum of upper secondary is outside the remit of Skills Norway, as it is the responsibility of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. As long as validation is conducted against this curriculum, it is impossible for Skills Norway to introduce a new content element into the process.

7.2 Transversal Skills overview

Transversal skills are often discussed and highlighted in labour market policy in Norway like in all other European countries. In our validation system, transversal skills will be validated when they are included in the learning outcomes in the relevant curriculum. This links the different transversal skills closely to each relevant professional context and thus makes it possible to validate the relevant transversal skill towards accepted standards.

8. Capacity building for Guidance and other front-line staff

This chapter focuses on guidance counsellors and other front-line staff, providing an overview of their activities and the roles they assume under the validation of prior learning.

8.1 The role of the guidance and other front-line staff

8.1.1 Background

Career guidance has been in focus in adult education in Norway since 2011. In all counties there are career centres serving the adult population, and competence development for career counsellors is developing rapidly. Today, all career counsellors have some level of specialised training, ranging from shorter courses to a full master's degree.

Professionals who validate towards learning outcomes in upper secondary education (assessors) are normally experienced teachers from the relevant study programme in each case. They may also be professionals working in the relevant trade or business with full knowledge of the relevant curriculum.

8.1.2 Programme staff experience, education and training prior to VISKA

To prepare assessors for the validation procedure they have been trained by the county administration in how to work with validation; how to communicate with the candidate, the use of different methods of assessment (documentation/portfolio, interview, practical testing), discussions on similar/equal versus identical competences and use of tools in the process. This training is provided locally in each county, based on national guidelines provided by the Directorate for Education and Training.

8.2 Guidance activities

In Integration Reception Centres, where the VISKA candidates are recruited, all residents are provided career guidance by career counsellors from the career centre in the county. The career guidance session is based on the prior self-registration of competences using the tool described above. These sessions may be a dialogue face to face or in a group. The objectives of these sessions are to set up an individual plan for future activities towards further education and training and work. If needed, the session is supported by interpreters.

8.3 Defining competence

For the VISKA trials, validation professionals needed competences in how to work with interpreters since they had no prior experience with this kind of assisted communication. Validation is normally only available for those who can use Norwegian or Sami language in the process. For VISKA candidates this would not be the case, and for those who were not sufficiently fluent in English, the use of interpreters would be necessary.

8.4 Aims

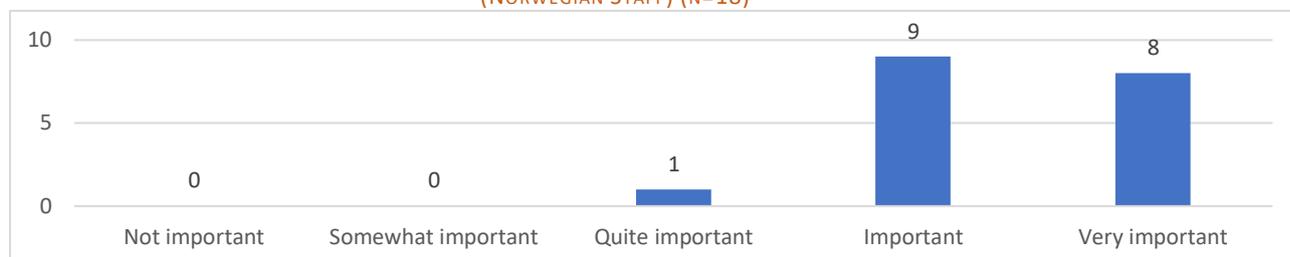
The key aim of the training programme was to prepare the validation professionals for working with interpreters in the validation procedures. The programme consists of a self-learning presentation of central elements such as what kind of qualification the different categories of interpreters have, how to prepare for a successful validation session with interpreters, what to expect from an interpreter and what not to expect. The programme also has links to useful websites and other material relevant for working with interpreters.

8.5 Achieving high standards of guidance and front-line staff competence

The effect of the training programme is proven by practice. The VPL professional will make use of relevant input. As the training was not mandatory, some professionals did not use the training programme. Some of those who used it, found it useful.

8.6 Staff Perspectives (Guidance and FLS)

FIGURE 10 VIEWS ON IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR FRONTLINE STAFF IN THE VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING?
(NORWEGIAN STAFF) (N=18)



Not surprisingly, in the first survey professional development for practitioners is viewed as important by all respondents. To the question 'If CPD is important can you identify three areas for development?' the respondents suggested the following main areas for continued professional development:

- Basic understanding of what VPL is and update on recent developments in this field
- Acknowledgment of prior learning and how to assess competences as equal and not identical to learning outcomes from the education sector
- Methods for assessment, including working with interpreters
- How to provide sufficient and relevant information to potential candidates

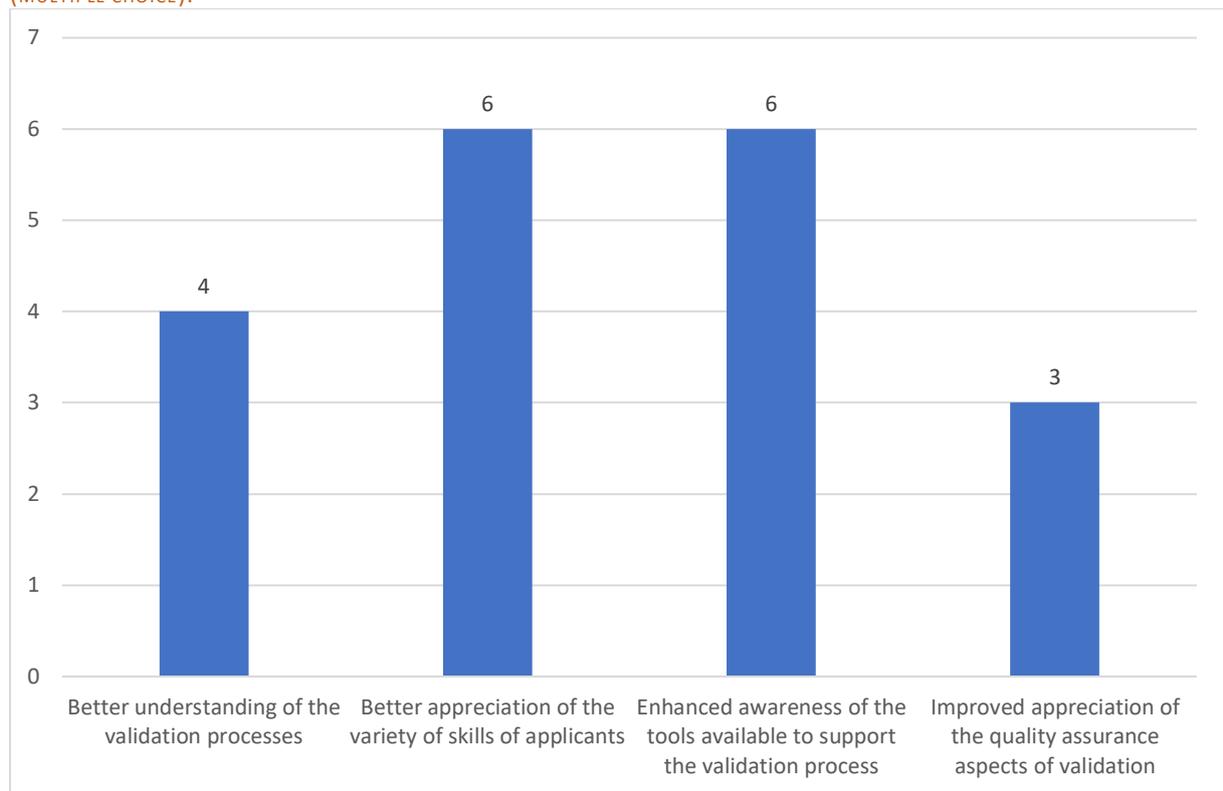
In the second survey 20 of 28 had undertaken training or/and professional activities during the VISKA-project.

When they were asked about what kind of training/professional development activities they have participated in the following was stated:

- Course in the use of an interpreter
- Validation of prior learning
- Internet studies on the subject
- Participated in meetings where the subject was thoroughly presented.
- Some theory and guidance linked to validation of prior learning
- I have attended meetings with the project leaders of VISKA. I have also participated in a course in VPL provided by Oslo Metropolitan University

15 of 28 have previously had training related to validation.

FIGURE 11: IN WHAT WAY DID THE TRAINING (BOTH IN VISKA AND BEFORE) SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY? (N=9) (MULTIPLE CHOICE).



Those who had participated in training before and in the VISKA-project commented on how the training supports them in their professional capacity, as figure 11 shows.

When they were asked why they would recommend the training to others we received the following answers:

- Enhanced understanding for the training
- It is useful and relevant candidates will enter work-life at an earlier stage and be integrated sooner in society than today.
- Increase awareness and understanding of validation of prior learning
- To work with quality assurance, to be able to assess equal competencies (not only identical), to use different methods
- It might be difficult to participate in the trials without any knowledge about this
- It is important in some situations to consider if alternative methods for assessing a person's competences should be used
- Through this training it was strongly focused that we should approve equals competences, not necessarily identical, when comparing with learning outcomes in the curricula. It is a good thing to have training focusing on this as professionals from the school system tend to focus too much on curricula

- To enter faster into education or work. To get important guidance about possible routes to completed education or work possibilities.

When asked if they had any other comments of the training they received, one said it was useful to get to know the curricula better. Another wished for more training and knowledge.

8.6.1 Key strengths and achievements

The key achievements of the training programme were to provide the VPL professional with knowledge on how to work with interpreters. Since the training was optional, not everybody gave feedback on how the training worked.

The training programme was easily accessible as it was delivered as a digital module to the professionals to use freely in their own time. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage; it is easy to use and at the same time easy to skip or forget to use. To use it by yourself in your own time is also practical, but you lose the added value of socialising and discussing with other learners.

One of the participating counties invited all VPL assessors participating in VISKA to a common training in working with interpreters in VPL. In this gathering, a constructive exchange of experiences about how to best reveal the candidate's competences occurred. This activity was very well received by the assessors, so this is something this county will continue to do for assessors outside of the VISKA project.

8.7 Challenges and Barriers

The formal competence of staff is outside Skills Norway's remit. However, it does not appear to be a major challenge as most staff are experienced and well trained.

8.8 Key Findings

In the VISKA trials the training programme made available for front-line staff provided a basis for working with interpreters. The training programme was not mandatory and was used either in a group setting or in personal studies if needed. The training programme got mostly positive feedback from those who used it.

8.9 Key Implications

The training programme will still be made available after the VISKA trials. The use of interpreters will probably increase in the VPL processes if the necessary amendment in the national regulations is approved. A module on working with interpreters would have a natural place in a possible future development of staff training.

8.9.1 Implications for future validation process development

The NAG supposes that the need for competence development for staff will probably grow, in order to reach the new target group, along with general competence development to assure quality in the practice. They point out that continuous professional development for VPL staff is important. The NAG mentions that VPL might be included as a regular element in professional development for teachers. There is still some scepticism towards VPL in working life. Therefore, it might be important that professional development for VPL becomes part of a system in which credits are given, in order to increase its status and perceived seriousness.

“Even though VPL has been around for close to twenty years, there are still a lot of people who somehow suspect that this is a kind of easy way to get a qualification. For this reason, one must counter it by showing regularly that quality is looked after. This could for example be an existing education which in fact should be obligatory for all those involved in VPL, but we do not have any legal authority to require this now. So, we can only recommend, but it is very important.” *NAG member*

8.9.2 Policy implications

Relevant training programmes for professional staff in VPL will always be needed. The module from VISKA will contribute to the pool of such relevant programmes.

Implications of policy

The training of VPL professionals in upper secondary education and training is the responsibility of the providing county. Each county has their own routines for this training. The VISKA training module was made available for each candidate to use as suited in their local context, since there are no centralised requirements as to training.

Implications for policy

The training module provided by VISKA has introduced the use of interpreters in the VPL process. Given the approval of the amendment in national regulations regarding languages, it is foreseeable

that this or similar training will be included in the training provided by the county for their VPL professionals.

9. Access to and Awareness of Validation services

This chapter provides an analysis of the strategies adopted to increase awareness of and potentially access to validation services in Norway, including a description of the challenges involved and analysis of the strategy's strengths and achievements.

This chapter focuses on the dissemination activities to increase awareness of validation services by the target audience as well as those directly engaged with the target audiences and other support staff. It reflects the strategies of informing the target groups about the opportunity of validation, such as interacting with the target groups directly or with the organisations that have existing contact with the target audience. Access to and awareness of validation services in VISKA have been focused on engaging with learners who would not normally be engaged with on validation or on further education or employment opportunities.

9.1 Context and aim

In Norway validation of prior learning has been on the political agenda since 1999 and since 2001 VPL has been a statutory right in formal education for adults, with some limitations in the different education levels. At upper secondary level, which is relevant for the VISKA project, adults older than 25 without prior completed upper secondary education, have a statutory right to VPL toward learning outcomes in the national curricula in upper secondary education, including VET.

It is required that the VPL process is conducted in Norwegian or Sami language. This means that the target group of VISKA will access VPL only after some years in the country, when they are able to function at a relevant level in Norwegian (or Sami).

In VISKA the participating counties needed to get exemption from the language regulation. All the five VISKA counties got this exemption from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training in due time before the VISKA trials started. In this way, access to VPL was extended to a new group for the trial period. With the upcoming proposed amendment as mentioned above, this may become a permanent arrangement.

The VPL arrangements in upper secondary education in Norway are well founded in national legislation and are established in all counties as provision for adults, often linked to adult education centres or career guidance centres. However, local practices may differ across county borders and there may be a need for networking on VPL practice to enhance more similarity between counties.

From 1.1.2020 Skills Norway will take over responsibility for follow-up of VPL in upper secondary education from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. One of the planned actions Skills Norway will consider is to establish a practitioners' network to follow up and support local practice.

The national seminar in VISKA in Oslo 10.01.2020 is intended to work as a starting point for a VPL practitioner's network.

Skills Norway intends to disseminate VPL news via networking with national stakeholders, as a follow-up of the NAG.

9.2 Information and dissemination strategies

9.2.1. Overview

Since the target group is limited and well defined, Skills Norway have chosen to focus on networking. To reach the VISKA target group, the stakeholders at directorate level involved in Integration Reception Centres were informed about VISKA and were invited to participate in the VISKA National Advisory Group (NAG).

VISKA project managers have participated in the Integration Reception Centres' internal network with professional staff during the VISKA trials. In these network meetings, contacts have been made and a basis for further cooperation has been established. The career guidance staff participating in this network have been crucial in recruiting candidates for VISKA, as they provide the career guidance for the target group in the Integration Reception Centres, and through these sessions reveal who would be potential candidates to proceed further in the VPL process in VISKA.

To conduct VPL, the five counties hosting Integration Reception Centres have been strongly involved in VISKA. They are responsible for VPL provision at upper secondary level, including VET. Each of the five counties were visited in the starting phase of the trials to introduce the project and plan for further cooperation. During VISKA trials there has been a project network with local project leaders meeting regularly during the VISKA trials, mostly via Skype.

9.2.2 Strengths and achievements

In the first survey from VISKA staff when looking at the benefit and impact of the VISKA project, they stated they would not have worked with this target group at this early stage without VISKA. It was identified as being useful for the county (regional) education authorities to get to know more about the competences that refugees bring with them and how this can be used as a basis for completing

vocational education and training (VET) in Norway. In addition to the education opportunities which can emerge from competence identification, there is also the opportunity to make the competence of asylum seekers visible to businesses/companies regardless of language differences.

According to the opinion of the NAG members, VPL has probably become more visible for staff working directly with the target group. They think it is likely that the project has also contributed to making the VPL field more visible generally. The NAG also functions as a network and has contributed to increased competence and knowledge about VPL among group members.

“It is highly likely that something happens, since when entering a project, one naturally becomes more engaged in the specific topic of the project. The VPL field has perhaps become more visible which it absolutely had not without the project. The NAG is also a kind of network after all. The existence of this group has at least contributed to increased knowledge about VPL for the members. And maybe also in situations where the topic is discussed at one’s workplace, then maybe one can have some influence.” *NAG member*

The NAG points out that if VPL meets the needs of the target group, that is; offers possibilities to gain from relevant competence at an early stage, it is very useful for society, employers and individuals.

“Obviously, it is very useful if one manages to reach this target group. One knows that not all of those who live in reception centres, either in Integration Reception Centres or other reception centres, are in the target group for the VISKA project. But if one manages to reach those who are in a position to benefit from a validation process and transition into the labour market, it is invaluable.” *NAG member*

The NAG acknowledges that initial assessment and support takes place at an early stage and thereby provides realistic information about the possibilities and opportunities in the short and in the long term. The NAG points out that experience from the VISKA project may contribute both to policy development and to further development of the national VPL system. Through the VISKA project VPL was tried out with a target group which had not had access to VPL previously (because of the required use of Norwegian in the VPL process). The NAG comments that some regions place more value on VPL than others and this project could provide a really exciting impetus for developments in this space. It aligns well with the new strategy for integration that is underway.

The NAG suggests that possible policy development should be considered when the project is over. Early intervention with VPL could be an important result as to policy development. The set-up of VPL has to be more transparent and possibly improved. One obstacle to developing VPL for this target group in Norway is the supply of qualified interpreters as well as the need for more awareness of VPL

among those who can benefit from it. There are also considerations of the costs and resources required to ensure that it is effective and quality assured. To enhance the VPL system, some changes are necessary at policy level. VPL must be made more visible at policy level. Funding and resourcing are challenges. The NAG points out that the regulation of the Education Act must be amended if it is to be possible to conduct VPL in another language than Norwegian or Sami. The five regions participating in the trials have been exempted from the regulation for the duration of the project.

The NAG finds that experience from the project in Norway could be relevant at European level. An established system, like they have in Norway, is of great importance to successful VPL. Experience from providing VPL early in an integration pathway could be very useful elsewhere in Europe also. Making the results and the experience from the project visible will be important.

“The fact that we are in different countries and have different ways of conducting VPL, and different legal or organisational requirements and so on calls for specialised national solutions. But the general ideas of early intervention, using interpreters and other things would be transferable.” *NAG member*

9.3 Challenge and barriers

Language barriers and conceptual barriers of the candidates have been a challenge. Information and guidance will be crucial to reach this target group so that they can understand and utilise the VPL process and results.

9.4 Key Findings

According to the national regulations to date, people in the VISKA target group have no access to VPL due to language requirements. During the VISKA trials, the counties providing VPL were exempted from these requirements and were able to use interpreters supporting the process. Professional staff involved in VISKA report on positive experiences and recommend this early use of VPL as a way of creating more targeted learning trajectories for this target group.

9.5 Key implications

As the NAG pointed out the set-up of VPL has to be more transparent and possibly improved.

To make VPL accessible for this target group, national regulations have to be amended.

9.5.1 Implications for future validation process development

If national regulations are amended to give access to VPL for this target group, increased awareness of this provision among the target group and among surrounding stakeholders is necessary.

9.5.2 Policy implications

Implications of policy

In the current policy context, one of the biggest influences on access and awareness is funding. How funding is distributed leads to local differences and priorities influencing resources for guidance and information towards target groups.

The current political climate is favourable for VPL development.

Implications for policy

Different initiatives could support access to VPL for this target group, such as legal obligations or specific targeted actions. As mentioned above, the career guidance centres in the counties are now obliged to offer career guidance for refugees. This might lead to more demand for VPL for those in this target group who have relevant competences from their prior learning.

Access to VPL for this particular target groups will require extra funding for the use of interpreters. VPL is publicly funded through block grants provided by the state. Today, counties providing VPL do not consider this target group as relevant for their provision at this early stage of their integration process. However, if the national regulations open for the use of interpreters, the VPL procedure might be performed earlier than before. As a follow-up of VPL, the county provision of upper secondary education and training will be available for this target group as well, in coordination with language training and, if needed, primary education. This would mean increased pressure on the existing provision and with it, an increased need for resourcing.

10. Refugee outcomes

Over the course of the project, data has been collected from the learners, who are refugees, about several outcome measures. These include educational, attitudinal regarding validation or guidance as well as motivations for seeking validation. This chapter summarises the perspectives of the learner group as to the benefit of validation and also suggested amendments to ensure further success in implementing validation arrangements.

10.1 Quantitative findings by data source

Since the candidates in the Norwegian trials had no common language of communication, Skills Norway was not able to send a survey to all candidates. However, the candidates in English received a survey in English. As mentioned above, only one responded.

When asked about the experience of the guidance and support provided during the VISKA trial, the response was:

“It was a great experience for me. I could get enough and helpful information with guidance. Self-registration of competences helps to get right guidance and to reach your goals earlier. English is an international language and spoken by millions of people from different parts of the world, so it makes it easier to be integrated because learning a new language is a hard challenge and it takes time to be competent.”

When questioned about more awareness of his own skills, the response was:

“I was already aware of my skills. I can say that I become more aware of how I can use my skills here in Norway.”

To get data directly from candidates, Skills Norway conducted interviews with seven candidates from three different counties in Norway. Five of the candidates come from Turkey, one from Syria and one from Eritrea. Five of the candidates have university or college education. Candidates with academic education appear to be over-represented in this sample and do not necessarily reflect the refugee population in Norway.

Interpreters assisted in two of the interviews. In three of the other interviews, an interpreter should have been used, but was not available, in other words the quality of these interviews is not so good. Several of the candidates we interviewed did not quite understand what they have been taking part

in. Most of the candidates found it challenging to reflect more deeply about what they have been taken part in and mainly gave feedback that they were satisfied.

All candidates reported to have received help in filling in the self-registration tool (*Kompass*). Participating in the VISKA trials created an expectation that something more would happen afterwards, and several of them asked about what will happen next.

Male, 28 years from Turkey. Has university education. Assessed in English (as a subject):

He says that the follow-up he received afterwards was not sufficient. The advice he received was generic and did not fit his qualifications and needs:

“We never discussed anything. We never sent mails to each other. I checked, other job possibilities from NAV. I learned some Norwegian at A2 level. Then I tried, but I decided it is better for me to get B2 level, after that I will try. But with career centre, it was not useful, it didn't continue. I started university, some of my friends, we had a lot of Turkish (friends), they didn't start because they didn't know English. I had IELTS certificate. I showed them and I registered this university with IELTS, not English certificate from career centre. “

But he finds that the process has been useful as for becoming more aware of his own skills:

“Yeah, of course. I saw what skills I have. I remember them in this meeting. It was useful, I mean, it helped in some way, to remember what I know. What I had till that time, after twenty-seven years. I just got to see it on paper.”

He also feels like others have become more aware of his skills:

“I think they know, career centre knows, but the Municipality also knows. What I am used to, what skills I have, what languages I speak. They know me, I mean, in general, they can understand I mean. “

47 year old male from Turkey with degree in industrial mechanics (mechanics subject). Assessed in mechanics.

He is pleased with the help he has received. He got validated in steel construction as well as mechanics which was not originally part of his education. He envisions that it will be easier to get to work as a result of these trials.

“First and foremost, it was good, but because of the lack of language I couldn't use the guidance very well because I don't know the language.”

27 year old male from Syria. No prior education. Assessed in tailoring and tiling (subject).

He has no prior education and can't read or write. He is very grateful for this opportunity and hopes this will contribute to his getting a relevant job after he learns more Norwegian.

35 year old male from Turkey. University degree in social science. Partly PhD. Work experience as police deputy. Assessed in English (as a subject).

He works as a volunteer at the municipality and studies some subjects at University. He is grateful for the validation of English, but wishes for closer follow-up:

"I sometimes talked to the reception staff about what to do in Norway, but this is not enough. I think, because what we were talking about was just what to do this year. But I did not get enough support if yes, you have this level, education, so this is your dream, these are your qualifications, therefore you should do this, for example. I do not feel like I have received career guidance."

He says that it was very helpful for him to get his English proficiency approved before the admission date to the local university, because it's difficult for him to attain the TOEFL exam both because its costly and he would have to go to Oslo.

"I don't know Norway's education system for example. I expected help getting an overview of opportunities and challenges. (...) It is very difficult for me to decide what to do in the future, even though I was not a student last year, I have education, because I cannot realise my experience here in Norway. I cannot become a police officer, because I need citizenship. My dream is to become a teacher at the university after I get a doctorate here in Norway. But this is very difficult, because there is a lot of competition. "

Male, in his late 20s, Eritrea. High School. worked as a carpenter. Assessed in math and science.

Because of the approval of math and science he was able to skip a year of education in Norway. He is very grateful for that. He is also very pleased with the service from the career center:

"I could contact them on mail and then sms and stuff, so I got very good follow-up from the career center. This has helped me to approach my working life and to manage myself and support myself. I have been given lots of opportunities, also it has opened that opportunity to get to work. So instead of relying on help from NAV or the state I have the opportunity to get to work and support myself."

He is concerned about other refugees who have to attend elementary school for four to five years. He wishes for them to get their knowledge and experience assessed like he did. It is a huge burden for many to go back to elementary school as an adult, because they want to get to work. He worries about them, that staying in elementary school for all these years will make them lose the motivation.

Female, 40 years, from Turkey. University degree in entrepreneurship (unfinished PhD). Worked as a teacher and principal. Assessed in child and youth work

She wants to work as a high school teacher but needs to learn Norwegian and study pedagogy first. She is not sure if the validation will contribute to anything for her when it comes to work or education.

Male, 39 years. Turkey. with university education. Incomplete PhD. Assessed in English:

He has a degree in electronics (master engineer). Incomplete PhD in information technology. Worked in the information technology field.

it's unclear to him what he has been taking part in:

“Maybe there are different meetings, maybe I'll talk again, but I don't know. some people talked to me about what to do in Norway, but I got a residence permit just three days ago, so maybe afterwards we will talk again. But we spoke only once first, it was general information. She registered my competence background in computer but afterwards we did not talk again.”

During this process he has been given an internship in an IT department at the university which he is grateful for, but he wishes to work and also believe he could be able to work to support himself since his English is sufficient and a lot of companies in this field use English as a working language.

He needs help to navigate the system, to get information about whom to contact to get answers to his questions about education and qualifications and how the system works in Norway. He is also concerned about keeping his skills up to date and wants to keep studying to finish his PHD.

“if I can get some courses or lessons on what I can do, such as for internships or for university or it might be very nice for me, for example, or for other people. I have to go, continue two years in university to finish and complete my skills. “

10.1.1 Satisfaction of validation process/service

As mentioned above, satisfaction was generally high.

10.2 Qualitative findings: benefits of validation

10.2.1 Learner perspectives

In the second survey from staff, 15 of 28 have received feedback from VPL candidates during the VISKA trials:

- Good feedback
- Very positive feedback.
- They appreciate at last to get their competences shown and recognised.
- They want to contribute to something useful; maybe a change in national regulations? Participants have been invited as contributors in the project.
- They are content.
- Only positive feedback. It has worked fine to use an interpreter.
- They have been grateful for the opportunity.
- Positive feedback on possibilities to show their prior learning.
- Only positive feedback from all participants. Some have already used documentation received in English to apply for higher education.
- Positive, even though someone expected more outcome.
- They were very happy. Some have entered university thanks to documentation in theoretical subjects.
- Positive. But some were frustrated due to lack of use of results. To get the first year approved in a four-year formal education program does not necessarily mean that you may enter the second year at this time in the integration process. Other formal requirements may be an obstacle.

10.2.2 Validation staff perspectives

In the first survey the feedback received by those who worked with the VISKA candidates was that most candidates felt they got to show and express their competences, and some candidates had hoped for better results from their validation. In relation to the readiness of the participants, some VPL professionals commented that the candidate should have been given more time to prepare and should have been given necessary information and the opportunity to study the curriculum before the VPL procedure.

To get a formal diploma from completed VET, the candidate has to take the final, practical exam. Some VPL professionals commented that it should be possible to give full approval of competences through vocational testing alone for candidates with extensive competences in their profession.

10.3 Key findings

The benefits to the participants include guidance and counselling which build their confidence and self-esteem through helping to identify competencies. Many of the candidates and staff involved in VISKA underline this effect. Being a refugee in a completely foreign country with a different culture may lead to estrangement and loss of confidence since one's previous position in life is no longer valid. Many have said that 'being seen' boosts motivation and confidence to take on the challenge of re-entering education in a new environment.

10.3.1 Strengths and achievements

Key achievements of the VISKA programme include:

- increased attention to the candidates' needs and wishes
- visibility and approval of candidates' competences and personal back stories
- increased understanding of the Norwegian education system and its possibilities
- personal follow-up and support in manoeuvring in the system
- opportunities for faster transitions through shortened learning pathways

Behind these achievements lie the collaborative efforts of local staff, supported by high-level policy institutions.

10.3.2 Challenges and barriers

One of the most important challenges is time. This means sufficient time for the candidate to get the amount of orientation necessary to profit from the VPL process; time to support reflection on options and making informed decisions; time to discuss expectations and understand which goals are realistic in this setting.

Especially guidance counsellors involved in VISKA have emphasised the importance of time in these processes, which for a newly arrived refugee can be quite overwhelming.

10.4 Key Implications

This particular target group has specific challenges; meaning they may require much more support and guidance than other groups. An option to lengthen the processes if need be is necessary. The national development towards more flexibility in provision, both for immigrants and for adults in general, signals positive changes for this group also.

10.4.1 Implication for future validation process development

It takes time for refugees to understand the system in their new country. Provisions such as VPL may be quite complicated to understand as this is a process closely connected to our education system. Also, time is required to understand the competence requirements for stable employment in working life, and how these requirements are mostly based on formal documentation.

10.4.2 Policy Implications

The reflections above would be valid at all levels; when developing possible trajectories for refugees, it is advisable to take into account the need for time and support, which may be more extensive for this group.

Implications of policy

During the integration process several stakeholders provide information about the Norwegian system, how it works and what duties and possibilities are involved. It is a lot of information to take in and given the situation of each person, it may take some time to be able to make use of relevant provisions. This emphasises the need for individualised support for each candidate.

Implications for policy

As the input from candidates above indicates, reaching a full understanding of a VPL procedure may take time and normally also support from front-line staff. Future VPL provisions for this target group need to include sufficient support to make sure the candidate gets maximum output from their validation process and consequently more targeted future plans for further education and work.

11. Conclusions: answering the evaluation questions

Four research questions underpinned the VISKA evaluation.

- 1. To what degree did partners achieve the implementation aim across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at local, regional and national and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?**
- 2. What outcomes were achieved for what groups, and to what degree?**
- 3. What factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**
- 4. What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?**

In this section we address each of the evaluation questions. Key messages for future validation process/ system development are also outlined.

11.1 To what degree did partners achieve the implementation aim across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at local, regional and national and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?

Developing and extending regional/national networks and partnerships to include policy makers, social partners and practitioners working on VPL.

In Norway we have been active in three networks during the VISKA project; the NAG, the network with the five participating counties and the network with Integration Reception Centres. The first two networks will not be continued after VISKA is ended, since they are both set up to support the Norwegian VISKA trial. However, the participants in these networks have reported that they consider it useful to establish networks to support VPL for further development, quality assurance and support of local practices.

Extending and/or adapting tools used in the Validation of NFIL - includes digitisation as well as customisation for use with specific beneficiary groups and enhanced quality assurance of validation processes

In Norway all candidates in the VISKA trials have used a self-registration tool available at the Integration Reception Centres. It has proved to be useful as a basis for career guidance and assessment of prior learning. This tool is now made available in all Reception Centres in Norway. If using interpreters in the assessment phase of VPL can be considered a tool, the VISKA trials have introduced

this in the Norwegian VPL provision. However, this is not yet established as an option outside VISKA, as this would require a legal amendment.

Creating a common set of criteria for the documentation and assessment of transversal skills, able to be used with one or more adult learner groups

In Norway we have not assessed transversal skills as such. However, transversal skills are embedded in the national curricula and are assessed when relevant for the subject in question.

Training and/or capacity-building for guidance counsellors and other frontline staff working on the Validation of NFIL, including with specific adult beneficiary groups

In the Norwegian trials a learning module on working with interpreters has been available for free use by validation professionals. Dependent on a possible future amendment in national regulations allowing for interpreters in the assessment phase, this learning module will be made available for a larger audience.

All validation professionals engaged in the VISKA trials have reported to have learned a lot from working with this target group. They have considered it very useful to be able to recognise prior learning at an early stage, both for making more targeted plans for education, and for facilitating earlier entry into further education and working life.

Improving access to and awareness of validation services and support, including among specific adult beneficiary groups.

In Norway, there has been a national consultation on amendment in the national regulation opening for VPL in other languages than Norwegian or Sami. One possible outcome of this consultation is that it will be possible to conduct VPL with the assistance of interpreters. This will grant access to new target groups; both newly arrived immigrants and other people with foreign mother tongues.

11.2 What outcomes were achieved for what groups, and to what degree?

The assessors in the Norwegian trials have experienced working with interpreters in the assessment phase of the validation process. They have reported mainly positive experiences, as they found it very useful to be able to discover a broad picture of the candidate's competences at an early stage of their integration process. A few assessors reported that some interpreters had difficulties in interpreting professional vocabulary. Some of these interpreters were given some extra time before the session to get to know the relevant curriculum.

For the asylum seekers in the Integration Reception Centres, the VISKA trials resulted in 69 actual approvals of learning outcomes. This will give them a flying start.

At system level the main outcome is the effort of organising the setup for these assessments, including the necessary cooperation between the different stakeholders involved in provisions for this target group, meaning the Integration Reception Centres, the career guidance centres, PES and the providers of VPL in upper secondary education.

The coming amendments of the national regulation, opening for VPL in other languages than Norwegian or Sami, is the ultimate outcome of VISKA, since the VISKA trials informed the preparatory phase of this amendment.

11.3 What factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?

The self-registration tool for identifying competences is an important starting point for the asylum seeker in their integration process. This identification and documentation is used as a basis for the following career guidance.

The training module for assessment professionals on working with interpreters provided the assessors with an introduction to how to work with an interpreter and how to secure quality in the actual assessment session.

Using Jottacloud as a closed area for collecting data from candidates contributed to quality assurance during the trials and secured that learner data was stored and processed properly.

The certificates granted to successful candidates are identical with ordinary certificates from ordinary VPL processes.

11.4 What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive learner outcomes?

The Ministry of Education and Research initiated the VISKA project and has followed it closely from the start, being especially supportive in setting up the NAG. In the NAG, all the national stakeholders, namely the Ministry of Education and Research, The Directorate of Immigration, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, the Directorate of

Work and Welfare, and Skills Norway, have contributed to the VISKA trials by using their influence and position to make things happen on the ground, in the Integration Reception Centres and the participating county administrations.

11.5 Implications and Recommendations for future validation process development

The VISKA trials in Norway have put forward asylum seekers in Integration Reception Centres as a **new target group for VPL**. It has proved to be a target group with a lot of potential when it comes to enhancing early integration through VPL at an early stage using English or other languages with the assistance of interpreters. The VISKA trials were of short duration, and the full effect of the trials is not possible to prove, but it is probable that the candidates from VISKA will benefit from their achieved formal documentation, either by shortening their VET pathway or by entering higher education earlier.

The VISKA trials have resulted in **cooperation** between the Integration Reception Centre and the providers of upper secondary education in the counties. The introduction of upper secondary education in these integration facilities have been positively received and will probably continue after VISKA, since this level of formal education and training has been put forward as something that will lead to sustainable relations to the labour market. In that respect, VPL will be an integrated element in this provision, given that it is possible to conduct VPL in other languages than Norwegian or Sami. A higher level of ambition, rather than just learning Norwegian and taking basic education is becoming more focused for this target group than before.

Setting up new provisions **takes time**. As mentioned above, the VISKA trials introduced cooperation between new partners who had to find out how to cooperate and how to divide roles and tasks among them. In the five participating counties, the challenges were different due to different local arrangements and priorities.

The provided training module in VISKA has **introduced working with interpreters** in the assessment phase of VPL. Using interpreters makes it easier for this target group to show their competences and act as professionals despite their lack of Norwegian language.

One critical factor in the VISKA trials was the **short duration of the trial period**. Asylum seekers in Integration Reception Centres are in a new situation in a completely strange country, and some of them need a lot of time to understand how things work. Like any other adult target group, this target group was very diverse. The interviews of the VISKA candidates prove that some of them do not fully

understand what they have been through, something that would be avoided given more time in an established provision, without the predefined timeframe in a project like VISKA.

11.6 Policy implications and recommendations

At **local level** the set-up of VPL provisions for asylum seekers in Integration Reception Centres requires an amendment of national regulations to open for VPL conducted in another language than Norwegian and Sami. Without this amendment, this local provision cannot be established. This amendment is in the process of a national consultation (autumn 2019). Given a positive outcome, the amendment will probably be launched in 2020.

At **regional level** there is a need for networking to strengthen local practice and motivate for action locally. The networks could be for administrative professionals who are responsible for setting up and supporting local provision. The networks could also be for professionals working directly with the candidates in the assessment phase, discussing challenges and developments to the benefit of their own practice. Guidance counsellors could also be included.

At **national level** VPL should be on the agenda in established networks dealing with work-based learning, adult education and training and other provisions for adult target groups. The national stakeholders are in the position to provide financial resources and initiate actions regionally. The tripartite cooperation; social partners and government, should cooperate to combine development of VPL for this target group and work-based training.

At **European level** VPL for migrants should be discussed in relevant fora and be recommended as a method for faster integration in the member states. Peer learning activities might be an effective method for spreading good practices across national borders.

11.6.1 Implications of policy

As mentioned earlier, the necessary cooperation between different actors around each refugee requires time, in order to establish contact and agree on different roles. The remit and restrictions of each sector and/or administration level may prove an obstacle for this cooperation.

11.6.2 Implications and recommendations of policy

As mentioned before, VPL for asylum seekers will only be possible if the national regulations are changed. This amendment is pending at the time of writing.

To establish a successful provision of VPL for asylum seekers in Integration Reception Centres, we recommend that:

- the **national regulation** allows for VPL for adults using other languages than Norwegian or Sami, if necessary with the help of interpreters.
- all refugees are given the opportunity to **identify and document** their competences in the self-registration tool (*Kompass*), followed by career **guidance** and, if relevant, **assessment** of their prior learning toward learning outcomes in the formal education system. The assessment is followed by **certification** if the candidate succeeds.
- the candidate is given enough **time** to understand the Norwegian education system and the labour market requirements, to understand the content and effect of the VPL process so that the output of the procedure is maximised.
- each candidate is enabled to **build on the results** from VPL in future plans for education, work practice or employment.

To succeed in setting up such provision, stakeholders need to network horizontally and vertically.

At system level, changes are needed to make VPL more accessible, more flexible and more evenly implemented across the country.