

## AUTHOR

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## DESCRIPTION

### 1. The VNIL/VPL practice in your country/institution

- a) Briefly, how does it work? How long has it been operational?
- b) Which are the **strengths and the areas for improvement** of this practice?

CAP, Center for Life Long Learning for migrants and refugees of University of Bari is an academic experience to promote lifelong learning processes and to carry out certification and accreditation of competences acquired in formal, informal and non-formal contexts for refugees students and migrants. Its mission is to enhance the "cultural capital" as a fundamental and strategic resource for humanity.

The activities of the CAP concern the preliminary work and advice for the request for the final recognition of formal qualifications, previously acquired, or partial recognition of individual training credits of EU and non-EU citizens; the transparency of professional and extra-professional experiences and the recognition of learning acquired "on the job", in informal and non-formal contexts, to start the procedure for the recognition of professional qualifications recognised by the Apulia Region; the recognition of the experience as a CFU that can be spent in the degree courses provided in the training offer of the University of Bari to continue or begin a university education; the evaluation and certification of soft skills of the users of the service. The CAP stands out in his work for having carried out activities of certification of previous qualifications of migrants aimed at their integration into the academic context and the recognition of professional qualifications that can be spent in the workplace. In the course of his experiences, the CAP has implemented models and practices that have obtained the recognition of the IOM, the EUA and the OECD (He Innovate) and that recently, having developed mechanisms of participation, civic and public engagement, have also motivated the entry into the National Board of Directors of RUIAP, the Italian University Network for Lifelong Learning that brings together 31 Italian universities.

The CAP's commitment is to continue to ensure the design and implementation of activities to include refugees within the education, training and employment systems.



## 2. The candidate

- a) Key details of the **candidate** of this case study (if applicable): age, gender, country of origin...
- b) What **qualifications and/or experience** did the candidate bring to the VNIL/VPL process?

Over the last few years, many inclusion projects of the European Union have fostered the spread of national good practices for integration in order to valorise local experiences with a view to promoting actions deployed rather than programmatic expectations and intentions. This is the case of inHERE: a European Union project which was founded to facilitate the integration and access of refugees to European institutions of higher education, strengthening the sharing of knowledge, reciprocal support and academic partnerships. InHERE does not dictate operative schemes but implements the acknowledgement of good practices among the initiatives deployed in the world of higher education in order to respond to a variety of emergency situations of refugee students, so as to identify integration models that, having proven themselves successful, have the potential to be extended.

The Good Practice Catalogue of inHERE is designed to offer a source of information, inspiration, exchange of experiences and collaboration for academic communities, identifying a series of good practices and skills concerning the integration of refugees. The cases featured in the Catalogue were selected on the basis of criteria considering the real or potential impact of the initiatives, with particular regard for the integration of refugees in the education system and in social life. While on one hand, universities were asked to state the number of students and researchers reached, more importance was given to the potential of transferability of the way of working to other systems of higher education and university contexts. Among the over 300 initiatives monitored in 32 countries, there is the work of the CAP at the University of Bari. Its good practices were ascertained and highlighted for three of the 11 parameters taken into consideration, in particular for the aspects concerning the recognition of the qualifications of refugees on the basis of the normative guidelines of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, as well as for collaboration with other universities, local bodies, associations and non-governmental organizations, etc., and lastly for the financial support conceded to refugee students through study grants, exemption from the payment of enrolment fees, and a contribution to meet the living expenses during the period of study.

Another European project for the valorisation of good practices in the inclusion of refugees is Skills 2 Work: Valuing Skills of Beneficiaries of International Protection, a project coordinated by OIM and designed for the promotion and dissemination of good practices for the validation of the qualifications of asylum seekers and refugees through the establishment of a platform that represents a tool aimed both at beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers as well as representatives of the world of work for the gathering of information and services useful for social inclusion, the identification of available bodies, access to information on the norms concerning the recognition of qualifications and the itineraries of administrative integration for access to services. Through the creation of sustainable employment opportunities, Skills 2 Work promoted the socioeconomic integration of foreign workers through a better management of the system of ascertainment of the skills of beneficiaries of international protection and refugees, on the basis of the good practices found in the nine European partner countries. Also in this project, the practice deployed by the University of Bari appears on the Skills 2 Work – OIM digital platform.

Every day, the CAP researchers come across life stories, new biographies, interrupted paths and trajectories with regard to which the attempt is made to give a (formal and substantial) response which takes the shape of a document/certificate of academic equivalence or comparability; before providing the service of the certification of skills and recognition of qualifications for refugees, the CAP researchers (sociologists and psychologists of work) had worked in the field of two projects financed by the European Integration Fund (EIF, now AMIF) of the Home Office, in which they dealt largely with the valorisation of human capital of numerous migrants and citizens of third countries. Since June 2014 up to the present day (July 2018), the CAP has welcomed 306 migrants (asylum seekers, bearers of permits to stay and residents in the provinces of Bari, Lecce and Foggia). In particular, of the 306 users accepted, 74 are women and 232 men (average age 34.6). They largely come from Nigeria, Senegal, Pakistan, Morocco, Georgia, India and Albania.

**3. What was the **outcome** of the process? (e.g. access to or credits within a course, part or whole diploma BA/MA, create a job opportunity and/or a social opportunity...)**

From 2015, among 306 users who have taken advantage of the service offered by the CAP, 122 users have requested the assessment and evaluation and certification of soft skills. Hence, this group of users underwent itineraries of self and hetero-evaluation of the transversal skills useful to enhancing their own employability on the Italian labour market. It is interesting to note that the assessment of soft skills in the sample of CAP users shows on average rather low scores in the dimension of openness to experience, which should be fundamental with regard to the need for inclusion and valorisation shown by them in the various phases of consultancy. This apparent closure, personal predispositions aside, may actually be the result of difficult experiences in which migrants encountered a context which is often distrusting and unwilling to interact. From this datum we decided to set out to make the activity carried out at the CAP even more useful and valorise the forms of academic integration, in the institutionalization phase of the finalized recognition service (starting from 2017), aimed specifically at beneficiaries of international protection status, foreseeing a specific activity of biographical listening, using the techniques of social research of a qualitative and narrative nature, that made it possible right from the start to create a relationship of mutual listening and trust between the researcher and user.

The experience matured by the CAP of the University of Bari is part of the recent guidelines given by the General Directorate for Students, the development and internationalization of higher education of the Ministry for Education, Universities and Research, concerning the procedures for the access of foreign students requiring visas to 2017–18 higher education courses, calling on the need for universities to deploy all the efforts necessary to set up the procedures and internal mechanisms to evaluate the qualifications of refugees and of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, even in the cases in which all or some of the documentation offering proof of their qualifications is missing.

The researchers of the CAP and the Professional Training Section of the Apulia Regional Council collaborated on the definition of an experimental working methodology for the provision of the service for the identification and validation of skills, and the CAP of the University of Bari was acknowledged as 'certifying authority' for the identification and validation of skills. The two users aspired to carry out their professional activity with the formal recognition of the qualification of 'intercultural mediation expert'. The service centre of the university accepted this innovative request, making the commitment to lay down the bases of an ever more structured service, accessible also to those who might need it in the future.

As a result of this experimentation, another result in terms of connection between social research and contextual policies of cultural and academic integration is that obtained in 2017 through an operative protocol adopted by the Regional Council of Apulia and the CAP, later extended to the Universities of Foggia, Salento and the Polytechnic of Bari in June 2018. The protocol concerns the construction and implementation of the Regional System of Validation and Certification of Skills of the Apulia Regional Council (SRVCC), which embraces the experimentation set up by the CAP for the issue of the certification of skills/qualifications acquired in non-formal and informal contexts in terms of heritage acquired by the individual over the course of his/her life, which must be valorised, clarified and recognizable, with particular reference to the target of political refugees or beneficiaries of international protection, the CAP users.

#### **4. Impact and sustainability**

- a) What was the impact of the process for the candidate? (i.e. further study, a job, etc)
- b) How are the processes and impact sustained and how are they integrated into existing structures and processes?

The CAP has also grown considerably in terms of importance and has established relations with several bodies that are important for its activity to date. One of the many consequences, always positive, has been the enrolment of international students, from 2016-2017, and currently there are as many as 17 regularly enrolled at the University of Bari by means of a scholarship promoted by the CRUI and the Ministry of the Interior. In this sense, probably, alongside the effort to bring to light the 'migrant' human capital, the CAP over the coming years will make an ever-greater commitment to constructing a culture of acceptance, capable of looking at people as a resource, whatever language they speak, and of viewing the opening to difference as a crucial skill in all professional profiles.

The two main important partnership of the CAP are with CIMEA and Enic-Naric. The first one, Information Centre on Mobility and Academic Equivalences was born in 1984 on the initiative of the Rui Foundation, it operates on the basis of an agreement with the MIUR (Ministry of University and Research). Its main objectives include: informing citizens about the opportunities and procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications, advising institutions on the comparability of foreign qualifications with a view to their recognition, promoting the free movement of EU citizens and the international mobility of students.

CIMEA is one of the European centres gathered in the NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) network and in the MERIC (Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres) network, founded in June 2005 on the initiative of the Intergovernmental Committee for the application of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications in the Mediterranean countries. The second one, Enic European Network of Information Centres in the European Region, promoted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, is a network of centres active in different European countries for the recognition of qualifications and professional and academic qualifications. It also aims to support organizations and individuals in seeking information on issues of international academic and professional mobility and on procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Enic Naric centres provide information on the procedures to be followed in order to exercise a regulated profession, issue certificates for a period of study or training obtained abroad, and provide information on the recognition of national diplomas abroad.

The University of Bari has also joined the National Coordination on the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications (CNVQR), an informal network of experts in the administrative sector working within higher education institutions that deal with the recognition of qualifications, to share evaluation practices, problem cases, information sources and methodological practices in cases of evaluation of qualifications held by refugees, even in the absence or with poor documentation. CAP UniBa is also a member of the Refugees Welcome Map with which the Association of European Universities (EUA) intends to support a greater commitment of higher education institutions and organizations in supporting refugees.

#### **5. Relevance and Transferability to VINCE:**

- a) Are there any aspects of your practice that are adapted to the needs of refugees or people with a migrant background - what makes these aspects special?
- b) Are there any aspects of your practice that could be adapted to these groups of learners? What adaptations would be needed?

The vocation of the CAP, as a university service for the valorisation of lifelong learning among adults, is expressed in the service offered to the users of the self and hetero-assessment of soft skills, rendered through a profile of skills useful for new employment and the paths of ongoing training, and made possible thanks to the interdisciplinary work carried out by researchers in the areas of sociology, the psychology of work and didactics/formative assessment.

The young refugees who make use of the CAP services constitute a unique opportunity for us as researchers in the field (not by chance an interdisciplinary team made up of academic researchers of sociology of education, psychology of work and didactics) to reflect discursively on the quality of our work and above all, on the potential of these tools to respond not only to criteria of internal and external validity, but to also be able to provide useful and applicable answers. This is a local perspective on integration processes which valorises experimentation and concrete, contextual inclusion practices, capable of creating virtuous circles that may also indirectly counter the emergence of new forms of populism and racism, as community-based responses to the widespread sense of fear and disorientation among autochthonous citizens.

The methodology implemented by CAP UniBa is an example of academic integration of young people migrants, which can create intense synergies between the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning, and informal. This opens the way to innovative possibilities of personalisation of university courses, on the basis of the recognition of skills already possessed and the identification of those to be acquired. It is a horizon still largely to be explored, but very promising in terms of democratization of opportunities and enhancement of human capital, in a perspective of Life-long Learning.

The innovative action proposed by Cap UniBa, in the context of the certification and assessment of the skills of young migrants, in particular, takes the form of the release of a folder of soft skills, a resource that can be used in the search for employment in line with their skills, which determines for the migrant an important action of transferability in the workplace. Through a feedback interview, it is possible to give back to the user the results of the training undertaken, concretely summarized in the skills folder, or a final summary dossier on the strengths and weaknesses possessed, useful to support the user in the definition of a training and/or professional life project, its phases and operational strategies. At the end of the work, therefore, the CAP UniBa delivers a summary document that certifies the participation in the assessment course and the relative output achieved. This phase is in fact very important for the purposes of raising awareness of the resources possessed by the users, as a function of the active search for the job.