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Skills profiling, qualifications recognition and recognition of prior learning

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The development and recognition of market-relevant skills enhance workers' employability, while also supplying employers with skilled workers. When grounded in labour market information, skills recognition processes can smooth the transition into employment. Skills profiling is one mechanism to identify and document the skills in supply, whereas skills recognition helps workers validate the skills and competencies they have gained formally, non-formally and informally. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is defined by the ILO as a "process, undertaken by qualified personnel, of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying a person's competencies ... based on established qualification standards".¹³ RPL usually leads to a formal qualification. It helps workers make their skills visible to prospective employers and access new employment opportunities, further education and training. This is particularly relevant for refugees and other forcibly displaced people, many of whom fled their homes without their academic certificates or proof of qualifications, which may, in any case, not be recognized in the host country.

Most countries have systems in place to recognize foreign qualifications – often called credential evaluation, or qualifications recognition. However, these processes are often bureaucratic, lengthy and difficult to access for those who possess qualifications from abroad. Often, qualifications recognition is available for higher secondary, post-secondary or tertiary degrees, but less so for vocational degrees.

Skills recognition processes emphasize that learning happens in a wide variety of contexts and situations. These include formal learning, often in a recognized institution and which is designed to produce specific learning outcomes and lead to a nationally recognized certification. They also include non-formal learning, which is intentional learning but often not certified, such as short training courses undertaken in the workplace, apprenticeships in the informal economy, or short courses offered by civil society organizations and other actors. They can also encompass informal or experiential learning, which occurs through work experience. RPL assessment and certification are conducted according to occupational, qualification, or industry standards that reflect the competencies required for a given profession at a certain level.

RPL has emerged as a particular area of focus for PROSPECTS, as it is a way of nationally certifying refugee and host community members' skills and thus supporting their employability. This falls within PROSPECTS' objective to include refugees in national systems and support their economic empowerment and social inclusion. This chapter focuses on approaches to skills profiling, qualifications recognition and RPL that have been used in some PROSPECTS countries to identify and certify the skills of refugees and members of host communities.

► 1.1 Description of key approaches

Interventions in PROSPECTS countries in the area of qualifications recognition and RPL were analysed and found to have taken place at the macro, meso and micro levels. Interventions included work upstream – to develop and strengthen RPL frameworks and policies, complemented by institution-strengthening and capacity-building for RPL professionals (assessors) – and work downstream – to pilot qualification recognition and RPL processes. Pilot programmes were conducted in sectors with a high level of participation by refugees and forcibly displaced people, including the construction sector in Jordan, and industrial sectors in Kenya and Uganda. These activities reinforced processes that were both inclusive of and accessible to the PROSPECTS target groups.

¹³ Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208).

1. Skills profiling as a measure to identify and demonstrate skills

Identifying and documenting skills in a résumé or CV is valuable for building job-seekers' confidence and can provide a foundation for future education and training. Skills profiling allows the job-seeker to understand how their skills are transferable to different occupations and sectors. This is particularly relevant for refugees, who may not see how their previous experiences are relevant to the opportunities available to them in the host country. It is equally relevant for members of the host community who have gained work experience and knowledge informally.

In Lebanon and Egypt, which both lacked accessible national skills profiling and recognition processes, PROSPECTS introduced a tool to facilitate more rapid skills profiling for refugee and host community job-seekers. SkillLab is an agile digital mechanism that can quickly capture the competencies of refugee and host community job-seekers for the purpose of career counselling. The mobile-app format allows users to input past learning and work experiences, and this information is then generated into a CV using artificial intelligence (AI). In doing so, SkillLab documented job-seekers' relevant experiences and helped them market their own competencies to potential employers. The skills profiles were used by employment counsellors to guide refugee and host community members into relevant job and training opportunities.

In Egypt, SkillLab was introduced within the Alexandria Business Association's Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC), providing the Centre's staff with a tool for capturing the skills of current and prospective students. In Lebanon, an INGO used the tool to develop targeted employment pathways for young job-seekers who visited UNHCR's Community Development Centres for career guidance. Staff in both organizations were trained by PROSPECTS in how to deploy the tool and use the information for referring job-seekers to relevant training and employment. In Egypt, SkillLab was ultimately institutionalized into the Alexandria Business Association's ongoing employment-centre operations.

While agile skills profiling tools can play a role in targeting career services, they are no substitute for national recognition processes. The fact that SkillLab is a digital tool was also somewhat problematic for the PROSPECTS target group. In Egypt, following the piloting of the tool, a survey among refugee and host community job-seekers revealed that, while the tool was useful in capturing skills, it required investment of time. Users reported taking between three and six hours to complete their profiles independently. They also felt the tool was of limited use in their own job-search process, with less than a third of users reporting that it helped them find a job. More intensive support and follow-up was needed from career counsellors, particularly for people who were less digitally literate.

In other PROSPECTS countries, rapid skills profiling exercises were used in addition to the SkillLab tool to target career guidance. In Uganda, skills mapping and profiling were conducted as part of mobile employment services set up by PROSPECTS in rural, refugee-hosting regions.¹⁴ Because the refugee settlements targeted by these services were at a distance from urban areas, there were no Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) job centres. In addition, the majority of the target group also lacked certification or recognition of skills. Using the rapid profiling exercise, the mobile employment services could more quickly and accurately refer individuals to jobs. Out of 385 refugee and host community job-seekers who were profiled through the mobile services, 205 transitioned into employment following the exercise.

PROSPECTS' experience showed that skills profiling tools can serve as relatively low-cost mechanisms for understanding refugee and host community members' skills and that this understanding can then inform the planning of further training, employment and livelihoods interventions. From the perspective of job-seekers, it gave them greater awareness of their own skills and helped them understand the transferability of their skills to different job and training opportunities. It was mostly useful in the context of career guidance and employment services, enabling them to better match skill supply and demand within a population that lacked formal qualifications. This was particularly useful for refugees who had either no or limited access to public employment services or TVET training institutions that would otherwise help them understand how to orient their skills towards other opportunities.

¹⁴ ILO, "Unlocking potential #3: ILO's apprenticeship programme in Uganda – story of GAD", ILO Rural Employment Services, 2023.

2. Strengthening policies, frameworks and implementation for inclusive recognition of qualifications and RPL systems

In Kenya, Uganda and Jordan, legislation was in place regarding recognition of qualifications and RPL processes but it was not fully in force. In Kenya and Jordan, RPL legislation existed, but in the absence of accompanying frameworks, guidelines and tools, these processes were not implemented. All three countries also had sizeable populations of refugees, many of whom were in a protracted situation and lacked any option to have their skills nationally recognized. Many of these individuals had received education and training and gained work experience in their country of origin, as well as experience through non-formal and informal learning, training and work in the host country. Hence, there was a pool of experience and knowledge that wasn't recognized and therefore was difficult to translate into productive employment. For RPL to be taken up and supported by national policymakers, it was important to make them aware of this barrier faced by both refugee and host community job-seekers and of the challenge this posed to employers in finding qualified workers. Recognition of qualifications and RPL needed to be understood by policymakers as a tool for formalization and enhancing productivity.

RPL frameworks and implementation guides helped give practical effect to otherwise dormant RPL legislation. In Jordan, PROSPECTS supported the Technical Vocational and Skills Development Commission (TVSDC),¹⁵ the main national skills development institution, to review existing RPL policies in light of international best practice and draft a national RPL framework and implementation guide. A series of extensive consultations took place prior to the framework-drafting process, involving the TVSDC, the National Sector Skills Councils (NSSCs), Chambers of Commerce and Industry, TVET providers and accreditation bodies. Alongside the TVSDC, existing NSSCs supported the review and development of a structured and standardized plan. The plan was agreed upon with the TVSDC and the NSSCs, and included a phased pilot of the RPL framework and implementation guide. PROSPECTS influenced the selection of occupations to ensure it included both refugees and members of the host community, so the process was tested among and accessible to both groups.

One of the key drivers for establishing the national RPL framework in Jordan was the wider national agenda on formalization. RPL was introduced to provide access to occupational licences and formally signal a worker's skills. The process was understood by national decision-makers as playing a catalytic role in formalization.

In Kenya, PROSPECTS intervened upstream to support the development of an inclusive RPL framework and implementation guide. Support was directed through a National Steering Committee on RPL, under the purview of the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA). As part of its work with the committee, the PROSPECTS team also helped build the capacity of its 15 members. Several rounds of training were conducted so that the members could develop RPL tools and guides, capacity-building manuals and standards for RPL practitioners. A review of the RPL policy was also carried out with the committee, with a view to ensuring it included refugees and other marginalized groups. As a result, the framework itself featured language that provided for the extension of RPL services to refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Having this in writing in a document approved by Cabinet (the executive branch of the Government of Kenya) reinforced measures downstream to make RPL inclusive of refugees.

¹⁵ The TVSDC was established in 2019, based on the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Law, and serves as a governing body for upgrading the quality and relevance of vocational education and training in Jordan.

► A phased approach to establishing Jordan's RPL framework and implementation guide

1. Selection and preparation phase:

- identification of high-demand occupations in the Jordanian labour market for the pilot, aligned with existing occupational standards;
- assessment of prior RPL practices and tracer studies dating back to 2016, serving as the foundation for developing relevant assessment tools;
- establishment of technical working groups, composed of practitioners and NSSC members, to design and refine the assessment tools.

2. Implementation phase:

- development of an applicant service guide, detailing processes and certification requirements, which underwent multiple technical reviews;
- training of future RPL assessors and administrators;
- design and launch of a digital self-assessment tool, enabling applicants to document and submit evidence of prior learning and experiences as part of their RPL application.

In Kenya, to support the continued operation of RPL in the country, PROSPECTS commissioned a costing exercise for the RPL assessment process, whereby the Differentiated Unit Cost of RPL¹⁶ was calculated based on the policy framework and implementation guide. This established costing model accounts for differences based on qualification levels, units of competence and types of occupational profile. The exercise also informed recommendations that were made to the government regarding cost-sharing arrangements between key stakeholders in the RPL process and financing models for the continuation of RPL.

In Uganda, prior to PROSPECTS' intervention, there was merely a process whereby existing foreign qualifications were equated to national ones. This was only useful for refugees who possessed formal degrees and certificates from their host country. Through a partnership with the Federation of Ugandan Employers (FUE), PROSPECTS crafted a solution to have the skills of those without formal certification recognized, too. Based on a joint assessment of the occupations that required certification in Uganda's industrial sector, PROSPECTS and the FUE approached the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) to explore the possibility of having a "Worker's PAS" (Practically Acquired Skills) document granted to workers without formal certificates, subject to examination of their skills and competencies. The Worker's PAS demonstrates workers' competence to industrial employers. On a pilot basis, the DIT conducted a skills assessment with a cohort of refugees who had experience in the industrial sector but no proof of qualifications. Upon receipt of the Worker's PAS, close to 70 per cent of assessed workers were employed, demonstrating the value of both sector-specific certification and working in close partnership with employers. While this certificate is not equivalent to qualifications in the formal system, it nevertheless proved to have value in the labour market.

¹⁶ A Differentiated Unit Cost analysis looks at the individual components of RPL, from curriculum development to awarding certification, allowing policymakers to more accurately account and plan for the costs of RPL across different occupations.

3. Making qualifications recognition more accessible to refugees and host community members

In Jordan, a partnership with a private sector technical college, Luminus, helped refugees who had participated in the training obtain occupational licences in the absence of an effective RPL system. These licences were accredited by the TVSDC based on the trainees' skill level and constitute a formal certification. Applicants for the occupational licences are normally required to complete a 48-hour pre-assessment training course. However, because the refugee cohort had already undergone technical and practical training at Luminus, the TVSDC agreed that they could complete an abbreviated online course and assessment to fulfil the accreditation criteria. This also reduced the travel time associated with attaining the formal certification.

► Promoting Social Cohesion and Peaceful Coexistence in Fragile Contexts through TVET

Promoting Social Cohesion and Peaceful Coexistence in Fragile Contexts through TVET is a guide that was developed to strengthen the role of TVET practitioners as active promoters of social cohesion. It provides practical guidance to trainers and managers of training centres on how to adapt delivery to mixed groups of students; embed conflict-resolution skills, cooperation and other relevant core skills into training curricula; and create conflict-sensitive, inclusive and diverse learning environments for all. The guide sets out a four-day curriculum to build the capacities of TVET trainers in facilitating core skills in social cohesion, so that they are able to include social-cohesion elements in their skills development curricula.

Sample four-day curriculum:

- **Day 1:** Creating the learning group and wider context
- **Day 2:** Understanding social cohesion in fragile contexts working with youth and adults – the role of the trainer
- **Day 3:** Exploring resources: what we bring and what else is out there to promote inclusion
- **Day 4:** Assessing social cohesion and preparing for change

The guide was piloted under PROSPECTS in Kenya, Ethiopia, Jordan and Uganda, in cooperation with the Peaceful Change Initiative. A total of 73 trainers took part in a training-of-trainers session on incorporating conflict-sensitive methodologies and elements into the design and planning of vocational training programmes. In the Kenya pilot, occupational standards for technical trainers and the corresponding teacher-training curriculum were revised to take account of the role of trainers in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, following the guide. ■

In Uganda, PROSPECTS supported efforts to equate and validate the qualifications refugees obtained in countries of origin through the National Council for Higher Education (UNCHE). This was the first time the UNCHE had been in direct contact with refugees, so these efforts also served to raise its awareness of the challenges refugees face in having their skills and qualifications formally recognized. A radio campaign was run to raise awareness among refugees and host community members regarding qualifications recognition. This helped more than 300 refugees have their qualifications equated at certificate, diploma and degree levels.

Digitalizing aspects of the RPL process, whether in the form of online assessments or applications, helped improve accessibility for people living in remote areas. In Jordan, the above-mentioned abbreviated RPL course was available online, while, in Uganda, a digital platform was developed to simplify the process of recognizing and equating qualifications, and avoid refugees having to travel to Kampala from the distant Nakivale and Rhino settlements to access these services. In Kenya, the PROSPECTS team supported the digitalization of these services by developing an RPL management information system. This system, which was piloted with a cohort of refugee and host community RPL candidates, allows the candidates to submit applications and take assessments online, thereby removing the need to travel to assessment centres.

► Inclusive recognition of prior learning in Kenya

The value of RPL has long been recognized in Kenyan legal and policy frameworks. The National Industrial Training Authority (NITA), part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, has implemented a type of RPL since the 1960s in the form of Government Trade Tests. In an effort to standardize these tests, the Kenya National Qualification Framework Act No. 22 of 2014 mandated the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) to coordinate the development of national policies on RPL. A national policy was drafted in 2018 but not implemented, owing to limited funding and technical expertise. PROSPECTS responded to this gap in application by supporting the KNQA and relevant national bodies in the development of a framework, implementation guidelines and assessment tools that were piloted with groups of refugees and host community members.

Under PROSPECTS, the ILO's first line of support was to the Ministry of Education, through the KNQA, and involved setting up a National Implementation Committee on RPL (NIC-RPL) and a National Advisory Committee on RPL (NAC-RPL) and building their capacities. The next stage involved providing technical assistance and guidance on developing an RPL policy framework and implementation guidelines. In doing so, the PROSPECTS team was able to encourage the inclusion of language that made the extension of RPL services to refugees and asylum-seekers explicit. This then provided grounds for piloting in the refugee-hosting areas of Garissa and Turkana Counties, particularly as PROSPECTS Kenya already had memoranda of understanding with the County governments.

To give practical effect to the policy framework and guidelines, support was also provided for capacity-building and piloting. Fifteen members of the NIC-RPL received training and extended coaching sessions, which proved critical in the development of RPL national training standards and practitioners' guidelines.

In May 2021, an RPL assessment conducted in collaboration with the NITA and the TVET Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council identified five occupational profiles for a pilot intervention: textiles, automotive mechanics, welding, hairdressing, beauty therapy and agriculture. In all, 38 young refugee and host community members were assessed in these different occupational profiles.

Following the pilot, the Cabinet approved the RPL policy framework in April 2022, preparing the ground for country-wide implementation. In the same month, the ILO supported the development of a national implementation plan, in which stakeholders from, among others, accreditation bodies, TVET colleges and employers' and workers' organizations participated. In May 2022, a costing exercise was commissioned to calculate the Differentiated Unit Cost of RPL, in order to determine the cost of RPL processes and put forward recommendations for financing models. PROSPECTS also provided technical assistance to identify occupations that required proof of competency in sub-sectors that were attracting foreign and domestic investment and that showed potential for considerable decent-job creation. This helped focus efforts on operationalizing RPL based on demand and contributions to economic development.

The ILO also provided support to train national RPL practitioners on assessment tools and methodologies to further expand the system. Between August and December 2022, an extended RPL pilot was implemented, which resulted in 500 candidates being assessed overall. In one such case, PROSPECTS collaborated with Base Titanium, a subsidiary of an Australian mining company, whereby 28 refugee and host community employees of the company were assessed, 22 of whom were found to be competent and so were certified through RPL. This helped the employer facilitate the movement of staff between its various locations in Kenya and abroad. Other private sector actors, such as Kengen (an electricity producer) and the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, invested their own resources in implementing RPL exercises and having their employees assessed. In these cases, formal certification facilitated the companies' administrative processes, making it easier to identify employees for relevant appointments and transfers.

The PROSPECTS team also coordinated with other donors in Kenya to encourage them to include RPL as part of the skills development programmes they were funding. In the absence of RPL, individuals trained through these donor-funded projects would ultimately lack formal certification. PROSPECTS complemented activities under the Swiss-funded Skills for Life programme in Kakuma, for example, by certifying trainees through RPL, so that they graduated with a qualification.

Building on its active role in supporting the development and rollout of RPL, PROSPECTS Kenya leveraged opportunities to invest in further RPL curriculum development. For example, the ILO had established a partnership with an ICT training organization, Learning Lions, to train young people in coding, web design and animation. However, the certificate issued at the end of the course was not nationally recognized. In collaboration with the Technical and Vocational Education Training Authority (TVETA), PROSPECTS supported a review of the Learning Lions curriculum and used this as a basis to establish an RPL curriculum in creative design and web development. Refugee and host community trainees then had the opportunity to access the national RPL process and have their credentials certified. ■



► 1.2 Narrative and lessons learned

Operational lessons learned

While the insight gathered by PROSPECTS into skills recognition tended to focus on RPL as a concept, lessons were also learned regarding the role of the certifying authority, curriculum development, the assessment process and the role of the private sector.

Leveraging pilot programmes to develop and strengthen national skills recognition processes

National RPL frameworks and policies can take considerable time to develop, in part because they necessitate widespread consultation and are subject to government review and approval processes. In the absence of a fully developed policy and framework on RPL in most countries, the PROSPECTS teams initially supported pilot activities on skills recognition and certification. These served as both proof of concept and a basis on which to embed RPL within a national institution. Activities also included building the capacity of institutions involved in RPL to develop a framework and policies.

A pilot digital skills training course in Kenya served to help develop the curriculum used as a basis for RPL standards by the KNQA. In Jordan, a pilot RPL was conducted with Luminus Technical University College, focusing on training in construction and construction-related occupations. As part of the process, PROSPECTS supported Luminus to become a nationally certified RPL training provider, thereby increasing the number of institutions that could provide RPL training under the purview of the TVSDC.

Engaging employers to identify priority occupations and develop occupational and assessment standards

Employers are best positioned to identify the types of skills and qualifications they need for their operations. At sector level, employer organizations and industry associations can help prioritize skills needs. Individual employers and sector experts also have a role to play. PROSPECTS teams actively engaged employers and industry experts in the development of market-relevant training and certification processes. For the purpose of skills recognition and certification, teams worked at the national and local levels to incorporate employers' perspectives in the identification of skills needs, prioritization of sectors and occupations for RPL, and design of occupational and assessment standards.

Sector Skills Councils are one type of organizing body that contributes to the development of national skills strategies, curriculum and monitoring. Critically, they contain employer representatives at sector or sub-sector level, providing consensus on skills needs and anticipation. At sector level, the PROSPECTS team in Jordan supported the development and operationalization of an NSSC in the agriculture sector to help determine skills needs and develop occupational profiles and standards that reflected the needs of employers. This helped lay a foundation for RPL in the sector by prioritizing in-demand occupations – such as date-picking, post-production packaging and pruning – and developing a relevant training curriculum, examination processes and standards in consultation with employers.

In Kenya, NITA was key in bringing sector expertise to the RPL process. As the sole national institution mandated to develop and deliver training in the industrial sector, it was well positioned to inform the operationalization of RPL. The Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) is represented on the board of the NITA, alongside a breadth of other industry expertise. This allowed employers to help prioritize occupations for RPL. In the 2022 pilot, Base Titanium, an existing partner of the NITA, indicated the occupations where it needed certified workers. In Uganda, the Federation of Ugandan Employers (FUE) was also instrumental in identifying the skills and occupations for which workers required national certification. This helped prioritize occupations for equating qualifications in partnership with the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT).

Engaging employers in skills development, recognition and certification is key in identifying relevant training and certification that lead to employment. To this end, the PROSPECTS country teams focused their efforts on employer organizations and industry associations working in sectors with large numbers of refugees. In many instances, the sectors and occupations in which refugees can work are limited by law. Therefore, strategic partnerships, such as those with the NITA and DIT, can help direct skills training and certification in a manner that is responsive to employers' needs and therefore more likely to end in employment. The active participation of employers can also help build confidence in the RPL system, particularly in sectors and geographical locations where it has been weak or absent.

Planning for costs and financing models of RPL

RPL processes can be costly to operationalize, as they require individualized counselling and assessment. They may also entail visits to work sites to observe the candidate demonstrating their skills. Most PROSPECTS countries had existing RPL legislation, but there were no systems in place to support its application. In countries where competency standards and assessment tools exist, costs can be lower. For example, in Kenya, where RPL was introduced in digital sectors, the structures and capacity had already been built, so costs were lower. To ensure that RPL processes could be scaled up, a costing exercise was conducted to support national planning. The calculation of the Differentiated Unit Cost of RPL in Kenya is an example of good practice that helped stakeholders anticipate costs of the assessment processes and consider financing models.

RPL assessments also entail a cost to the RPL candidate in the form of RPL fees. While these fees will be lower than the cost of full-time training or education, they may still be beyond the financial means of PROSPECTS' target groups. Cost-sharing arrangements based on assessments like those conducted in Kenya can help determine a financing arrangement that can offset the cost for RPL candidates of limited financial means. The example from Kenya, where the firm Base Titanium paid for RPL assessments of its employees working in various countries, can also be considered where there is clear value to the employer in having existing employees certified.

Raising awareness and providing support to skills recognition candidates

RPL processes are time-intensive and require dedication on the part of the applicant. Depending on the sector, applicants may need to prepare a portfolio of work, evidence of credentials they may have and a résumé. The way these items are to be presented will also vary from sector to sector. The process can take several months to complete. In cases where the applicant's portfolio is deemed below standard, they are typically given an option to rework and resubmit it, which prolongs the process and, potentially, the costs involved. Therefore, it is important to clearly outline the associated costs and time expected, so that applicants can make informed decisions from the outset about pursuing RPL.

In Uganda, even though the intervention focused on equating and validating qualifications through the UNCHE, the PROSPECTS team still dedicated time and resources to awareness-raising among the target group. This included the aforementioned informational campaigns on radio talk shows, television ads and workshops delivered within the two main refugee settlements. In Kenya, the programme team engaged national actors on RPL processes through a free Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on RPL, hosted by the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO). This served to expose members of the NIC and NAC for RPL to international good practices and encouraged knowledge exchange in the design and implementation of RPL systems.

As qualification recognition and RPL processes get underway and are increasingly promoted by national institutions like the KNQA and UNCHE, interest from industry and employers grows. In Kenya, the Kenya National Federation of Jua Kali Associations (KNFJKA), an umbrella body for informal artisans and small manufacturers, had advocated for the use of RPL since first engaging with PROSPECTS in 2022.¹⁷ This was seen as a measure to improve the access of artisans and manufacturers to opportunities for marketing and selling their products. Following an awareness-raising workshop, the KNFJKA cascaded information on RPL down to members and helped encourage them to get assessed and certified.

Creating accessible assessment and certification processes

As noted above, the way and place in which assessments are administered can have implications for participation. Onsite observation of skills can facilitate skills recognition, while also reducing time and resource barriers. For example, in Kenya, the PROSPECTS programme facilitated the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Eldoret National Polytechnic in Turkana County to conduct RPL. The MoU allowed the TVET trainers to use their training venue as an RPL examination centre, thus saving costs for refugee and host community members interested in obtaining RPL certification. In Kenya, Jordan and Uganda, PROSPECTS also helped digitalize part of the RPL process, reducing the need for applicants to travel to centres to submit their applications or sit abbreviated courses. In these cases, additional measures needed to be taken to make training and testing accessible. In countries where refugee-hosting areas and settlements are in remote locations, for example, physical infrastructure, such as satellite centres, may be required.¹⁸

Demonstrating the added value of skills recognition and certification to employers and workers

While skills recognition and signalling undoubtedly has value for both workers and employers, this will vary according to the context. It will be higher, for example, in contexts where systems are well established, with clear steps to obtain qualifications through a standardized approach from an awarding body. In the PROSPECTS countries, national RPL and other skills recognition systems were underdeveloped, so creating awareness of the process and the value it can add was a critical first step. This was even more relevant in instances where the PROSPECTS team partnered with employer and industry associations, thereby building employers' trust in national certification as an indicator of workers' skills and competencies. A case in point was Uganda, where 70 per cent of workers who received a Worker's PAS through the Directorate of Industrial Training subsequently found employment.

From the perspective of workers, skills profiling and recognition can give them greater confidence in their job-search process. For refugee populations, in particular, having a nationally recognized qualification further legitimizes their participation in the labour market and provides a greater sense of security and protection.

¹⁷ For more information on the engagement of KNFJKA, see ILO, "Bringing recognition to the skills of informal 'Jua Kali' sector workers in Kenya", *ILO News*, 6 January 2022.

¹⁸ In Ethiopia, a TVET satellite centre was constructed in Jigjiga, which brought TVET closer to refugees in the Kebribeyah settlement.

► 1.3 Sustainability

Anchoring skills recognition processes in national policy and implementation plans helped promote coherence across policies, as well as the allocation of necessary national financial and human resources. For instance, in Kenya and Uganda, the local development plans are led by the district and county governments. National frameworks, such as RPL, are reflected in those local plans and subsequently implemented at the local level. To bring the national policy frameworks into practice, PROSPECTS supported the production of clear implementation guidelines, training and piloting.

To ensure the sustainability of PROSPECTS' RPL work, training and recognition processes were developed and embedded within local training institutions. For instance, in Kenya, Eldoret National Polytechnic incorporated two digital skills training courses into its certified training package, which meant the RPL pilot supported by PROSPECTS became part of a regularly offered TVET course. Eldoret will continue to offer training and assessment in these two courses, beyond the pilot. Because the training institutions involved in these pilot programmes have invested time and resources, they now have processes in place and experience of navigating RPL. Therefore, maintaining courses on an ongoing basis is easier and less costly, as the start-up investment has already been made.

Key to the sustainability of RPL programmes is willingness on the part of job-seekers, workers and employers to invest time and resources in them. For job-seekers and workers, they must offer enough value in terms of helping them secure a job and/or progress in an existing job. For employers, the value lies in being able to find qualified workers. Although PROSPECTS subsidized most RPL costs that would otherwise have to be paid by the applicant or prospective employer, in the long-term these costs will need to be met by workers, employers, training institutions and/or governments.

For refugee and host community job-seekers and workers, covering the full cost of RPL will likely be difficult without subsidies or grants. Costings and recommendations for financing models can help decision-makers account for such costs in the longer term. In this context, the Differentiated Unit Cost of RPL calculated in Kenya helped determine the level of financial investment required and guided forward-looking RPL planning. There are also instances where requests for RPL come directly from the employer, who is able to cover the costs of application and assessment. For example, momentum is growing in Kenya, with large, private sector companies, such as Base Titanium, now interested in having staff go through RPL processes

► 1.4 Integration with other areas of work

Within PROSPECTS, skills recognition, as pursued in the examples outlined above, has been integrated into other active labour market programmes (ALMPs). Skills profiling has been used to inform career guidance and has helped direct job-seekers to relevant skills training and employment. SkillLab and other profiling tools have shown how these can be used to offer a snapshot of job-seekers' competencies. In contexts where job-seekers lack formal certifications, a snapshot of their skills can be used to make referrals to relevant employment opportunities, as seen in Lebanon and Egypt. At the same time, employment services can also refer job-seekers into RPL when formal certification is needed to participate in an industry or occupation.

A less prominent but nonetheless direct link between skills profiling and entrepreneurship was also observed in identifying skill sets among job-seekers who were better suited to business development and, subsequently, referred to business development services, such as Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) training. This was seen in both Lebanon and Egypt, where SkillLab was put to good use.

Subsequent chapters of this report discuss the clear links that emerged between Employment Intensive Investment Programmes (EIIP) and skills, where TVET training institutions play a role in developing the skills of workers to build and maintain infrastructure work. For the purpose of skills recognition, where courses end in formal certification of skills, this can help EIIP workers transition into longer-term work in the construction sector. For instance, in Kenya, the PROSPECTS team partnered with the Vocational Training Centre and Department of Public Works in Lodwar to establish a cobblestone production training course, targeting young people in the area.

The provision of information on labour rights was another useful element of market-relevant training and certification. For example, in Jordan, refugee trainees, prior to sitting the RPL exam, participated in four days of training on labour rights. While this is not standard in RPL, it does demonstrate that additional awareness-raising elements can be added before or after RPL to address gaps in trainees' knowledge.

► 1.5 Challenges

The cost and time involved in supporting RPL processes at national level were significant in both Kenya and Jordan. In the early stages, establishing the institutional framework and guidelines required a series of training sessions, consultations and validation exercises. Supporting RPL processes and examinations, even on a pilot basis, was both time- and resource-intensive. Even in Kenya, which had an existing training curriculum and materials, it took time for the TVETA to review the curriculum against its standards and then adapt it for RPL purposes, using trainers and industry representatives, as well as TVET and TVETA staff to carry out this work. These are useful and important multi-stakeholder participatory processes, but they are also costly.

Building up human resources to support RPL processes is also a time-consuming and costly endeavour. It requires qualifying assessors, administrators and facilitators, and delivering professional training on developing assessment tools and, in particular, on how to gather and check evidence of skills and competencies. For training institutions and bodies, there is also the cost of setting up practical scenarios for the demonstration of skills, in addition to organizing classroom exams to test theoretical knowledge. There are costs involved, too, in sending assessors to conduct assessments in alternative venues, particularly where geographical access is a factor. Even in Kenya, where RPL is the most developed, few assessors are suitably qualified and able to carry out examinations, which can limit the reach of RPL. One possible solution to geographical and access challenges is to train and empower refugees to become assessors. However, without documentation and nationally recognized ID, or acceptance by national institutions that refugees can be trained and certified as assessors, this remains aspirational.

The cost of sitting an RPL exam is also high and likely beyond the financial means of PROSPECTS target groups, unless they are subsidized or supported through scholarships. In Kenya, three companies paid for their employees to get certified – Kengen (electricity producer), Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) and Base Titanium. In Jordan, Luminus Technical University College offers some scholarships, but these remain dependent on donor finance. Regarding the costs of sitting examinations in Jordan, PROSPECTS covered these.

For those sitting RPL examinations, written tests can be a barrier to success. While greater weight is given to observation of practical skills, in some countries, a written theory test must be completed before the practical assessment. This can be problematic for population groups with low literacy rates or poor language skills, thus impacting their successful certification.

- ▶ When grounded in labour-market information, skills signalling and recognition – including skills profiling, qualifications recognition and RPL – can smooth the transition into employment.
- ▶ For refugees and other forcibly displaced populations, having their skills recognized is particularly relevant, as many have fled their homes without their academic certificates or proof of qualifications and competence, which may, in any case, not be recognized in the host country.
- ▶ Identifying and demonstrating skills in a résumé or CV is invaluable to build the confidence of job-seekers and can lay the foundations for future skills development. It can also help job-seekers understand how their previous experiences can translate into future job opportunities.
- ▶ Digital skills profiling typically requires the support of employment counsellors or TVET trainers, particularly for individuals with low digital literacy. This includes support to capture skills using a web-based or mobile application, and to use the skills profile as part of a job application or job search process.
- ▶ RPL has emerged as a particular area of focus for PROSPECTS, as it has served to nationally certify the skills of refugees and host community members and support their employability. This falls within the objective of the PROSPECTS programme to include refugees in national systems and support their economic empowerment.
- ▶ Most PROSPECTS countries have legislation in place for RPL but no, or limited, systems to apply it in practice. In these contexts, PROSPECTS provided support to help operationalize RPL frameworks, develop and build the capacities of supervising bodies, train instructors and assessors, and pilot RPL programmes to test and inform national RPL processes.
- ▶ National RPL policies and frameworks can take considerable time to develop, as they need to be consulted upon, reviewed and approved by government and/or other relevant stakeholders. In those countries where policies and frameworks were not fully developed, the PROSPECTS teams nevertheless were able to support the piloting of skills recognition and certification activities. These served as proof of concept, in particular, and were therefore key in advocating for and securing further development.
- ▶ Recognition of qualifications and RPL can appeal to policymakers as a tool to support formalization more widely, not just for displaced populations. Like refugee workers, members of host communities also have informal work experience and knowledge that may not be recognized. Having a formal qualification is a significant step towards formalization.
- ▶ Employers are best positioned to identify the types of skills and qualifications they need for their operations. At sector level, employer organizations and industry associations can also help identify priority skills needs.
- ▶ RPL processes can be costly to operationalize, as they require individualized counselling and assessment. They may also entail visits to work sites to observe the demonstration of skills and competence by RPL candidates. Calculating a Differentiated Unit Cost of RPL is good practice, as it helps stakeholders anticipate the costs of assessment processes and consider financing models.
- ▶ RPL processes are time-intensive and require dedication on behalf of the applicant, who may need to prepare a portfolio of work, credentials and a résumé. The way these items are presented varies from sector to sector and the process can take several months to complete. Therefore, it is important to clearly outline the associated costs and time expected to complete the process, so that applicants can make informed decisions from the outset about pursuing RPL.

