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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING GIVES US
WINGS FOR TRANSITIONS TO DECENT WORK,
LEARNING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY

ACQF
African Continental
Qualifications Framework

African
Union

THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE

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Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
KNQA	Kenya National Qualifications Authority
MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
RCA	Recognition of acquired competences
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
RVCC	Recognition Validation and Certification of competences
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

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1 Recognition of Prior Leaning gives us wings

People learn anytime, everywhere. Outcomes of prior learning in all contexts of life can be validated, recognised, certified to give people wings to new perspectives and opportunities in education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, better jobs.

Across the world, countries and regional communities increasingly recognise the value of non-formal and informal learning and many are establishing systems to acknowledge competencies gained through non-formal and informal modalities.

This brief report on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) / Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE) / Reconhecimento Validação e Certificação de Competências (RVCC) / Reconhecimento de Competências Adquiridas (RCA) provides an overview on RPL, viewed as component of national qualifications systems.

Ten examples from African countries presented in this brief show some diversity in terms of scope, and design of RPL / Validation systems, but also several common traits: Angola, Cape Verde, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zambia. In 2021 Cape Verde, Kenya and Mozambique have started practical implementation in a range of sectors, and certificates were awarded. Kenya's pilot sectors are textile, auto vehicle mechanics / electricity and welding (with a total of 38 certified candidates). Mozambique conducted the first RCA processes in the sectors of electricity, plumbing and welding and certified 25 candidates. Cape Verde started RVCC processes in different branches of services and in construction.

2 Making visible non-formal and informal learning

People learn anytime, anywhere throughout life, not only in formal education and training systems and pathways, but also in non-formal and informal learning contexts. The growth of digital and online learning and access to digital skills assessment tools are new dimensions and potentialities of RPL, which can benefit candidates and RPL systems.

- Significant numbers of young people are early school leavers, due to socio-economic conditions, but they have the right to validation of prior learning outcomes and to adequate pathways to return to learning and acquire qualifications.

- Labour migrants learn in their migration experiences and bring back to their countries of origin a range of new knowledge, skills, and competences – e.g., languages, social and inter-cultural, technical, and job-specific – which can be identified, documented, assessed, and certified.

- Informal sector workers – rural and urban – acquire and apply a range of important practical skills, which often are under-valued. Attention to the informal economy has given rise to renewed interest in RPL and its potential to help move informal activities / artisans to formal economy, and jobs with decent conditions. Recognition of competences and certification is a major right and lever to support inclusion and dignity of informal workers, artisans, farmers.

- Workers, job seekers, young women / adults returning to active life may have valuable skills and competences but not a qualification – and RPL may be a life changer. RPL may offer a path to validate skills and facilitate access to further education and training or to obtain a qualification.

- Volunteers and youth activists build social and communication skills of high value for careers in civil society and social spheres. These skills can be made visible through RPL.

3 Non-formal and informal learning matter for lifelong learning

Non-formal and informal learning are fundamental parts of lifelong and life-wide learning.

- Non-formal learning means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-

teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as digital skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses by civil society organisations for their members and the wider public.

- Informal learning is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it occurs spontaneously, in daily activities, and may be unintended from the learners' perspective. Examples are technical, green, digital, managerial, language and other transversal skills acquired by doing at the workplace; a range of skills acquired in volunteering, social, cultural, youth, sports activities, and through household and family life.

"Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)" / "Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL)" / "Validations des Acquis de l'Expérience" (VAE) / "Reconhecimento e certificação de competências adquiridas" (RVCC)/ are terms with equivalent meaning, used internationally across countries and regions with some differentiation of concepts, scope and methods. "There is no universal RPL system, rather different systems that best fit the needs of specific countries" (ILO, 2018). For a balanced reference we use the term "RPL / validation".

## 3.1   Value of RPL / validation – global views

The International Labour Office (ILO, 2018: iii) sustains that "People are always learning, everywhere and throughout the course of their lives. However, learning that takes place outside the formal education and training system is often not well understood or valued. On-the-job training, informal apprenticeships, managing a household, caring for the sick and for elderly relatives are all activities that result in learning outcomes, but which often do not come with a certificate of competencies recognising the knowledge, skills and experience acquired. Recognition of all types of learning can result in benefits in the labour market, formal education and training, financially and in terms of self-esteem."

The 'European Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning' (Cedefop, 2015: 4) mentions that "Validation arrangements can be of benefit to all citizens and help combat unemployment by improving skills matching and social cohesion. Validation can offer crucial support to the unemployed or those at risk of losing their jobs by enabling citizens to communicate the value of their skills and experiences either to potential employers or when returning to formal education to earn a new qualification. Validation can also form part of the response to the current refugee crisis through identification, documentation, assessment and certification of migrants' previous experiences, to support quicker and smoother integration into host countries. For individuals that need to redirect their careers, validation can open a door to new occupations. It can also play a major role in combating youth unemployment by making skills acquired through voluntary work, or during leisure, visible to employers."

4   RPL / Validation: a coordinated approach across different policy areas

A coordinated approach to RPL / Validation (Cedefop, 2020) explores the interfaces between validation / RPL arrangements in education, employment and social policies and ways to reinforce them to achieve an integrated approach.

Figure 1: RPL – a coordinated approach across policy areas
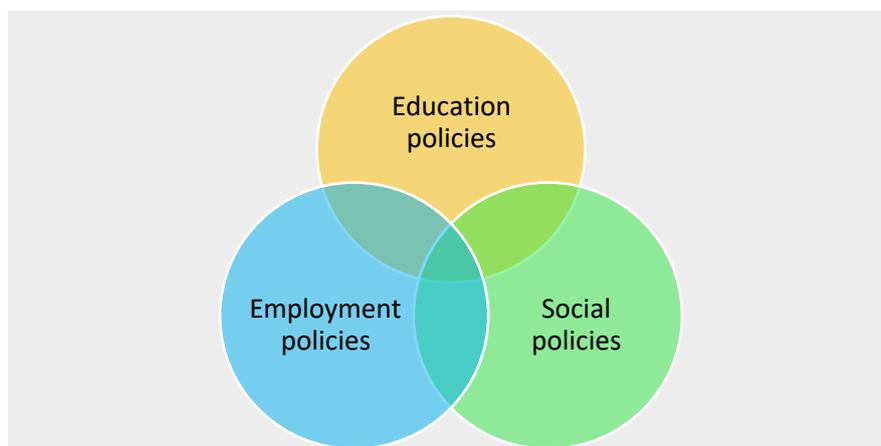
Table 1: Functions of RPL in the three policy areas

Functions of RPL / Validation in different policy areas		
Education policies	**Employment policies**	**Social policies**
- Provide more flexible access to education and training - Facilitate exemption from part(s) of an education and training programme. - Provide the basis for awarding full qualifications.	- Use skills assessments in the recruitment process - Support training and staff development strategies of employers - Increase staff retention and motivation and supports career progression - Allow individuals to re-direct their careers - Support the development of tailored training offer.	- Contribute to integration of individuals at risk of being marginalised - Provide a process of self-reflection and contributes to increase individuals' self-esteem - Contribute to make visible the learning from voluntary experience, youth work and civic engagement, especially for young people that lack work experience.

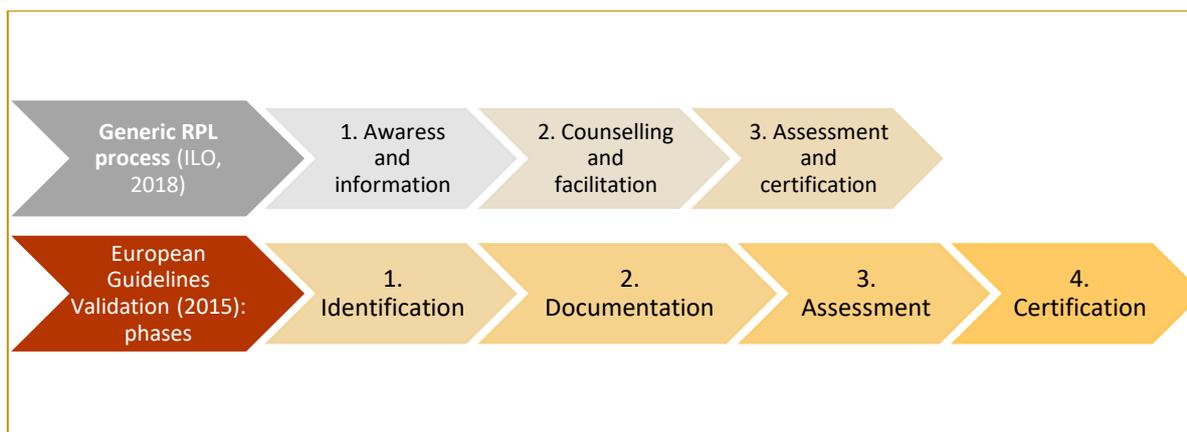*Summarised and adapted by the author. Source: Cedefop, 2020.*

In view of the roles and potentialities of RPL / validation across policy areas, it can be used more systematically to support and develop individual learning and career plans and portfolios, which in turn can contribute to better dialogue between education, employment, and the social sector.

5   RPL / validation – how, for whom, what results

RPL / validation process and phases

RPL / Validation is not only about assessment, although assessment is key. It is a process, composed of different steps and activities through which the candidates discover, describe, document their experiences and competences, and engage with the steps leading to assessment. For many individuals, this process is life-changing and highly demanding. Information and guidance is important throughout the process.

Figure 2: RPL / Validation processes and phases

Summarised and adapted by the author. Source: ILO, 2018; Cedefop, 2015.

Table 2: Four phases of validation – main questions (European Guidelines for Validation, 2015)

Identification	Documentation	Assessment	Certification
Which procedures and tools? Mix of standardised and dialogue-based identification approaches? How is guidance and counselling included?	What criteria are used for admitting evidence into the process? What formats are used for documenting non-formal and informal learning? Do documentation formats support the transfer and portability of acquired knowledge, skills and competences?	Are assessment tools adapted to the individual's needs and characteristics? Which reference point (standard) is being used and how suitable is this for capturing individual variation characterising non-formal and informal learning? Have the conditions for assessment been clearly defined and communicated in terms of procedure, tools and assessment standards (to candidates; to employers and education institutions)?	Certification – linked to national qualifications systems? Credibility of awarding body? Certificates specify the qualification (identical to certificates of formal learning?) Can the outcomes of validation (documents, portfolios, certificates, etc.) be exchanged into further education, employment?

Summarised and adapted by the author. Cedefop, 2015.

Who can benefit of RPL / validation?

- Individuals who have knowledge, skills, competences – but not a qualification. RPL / validation is not suitable for individuals without experience, skills, and competences.
- The individual is at the centre of RPL / validation

What is assessed, validated?

- The learning outcomes achieved through prior learning, not the prior learning itself.

Results of RPL / validation process can be:
- full qualification
- partial qualification
- credits or units towards a qualification

- exemption from an academic prerequisite for entering the formal education and training system or from all or part of the curriculum
- positioning potential learners on formal learning pathways (e.g. before continuing training)
- certificate of labour market competencies or
- no recognition

Digital / virtual assessment of competences, tools, and platforms

Digital transformation is having a considerable impact on RPL / validation practices and guidance. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the digital transition and recognition / validation and career guidance services had to adapt to distance service delivery. In this context, all services are changing to a new reality in which ICT becomes an embedded component of the service, not just a different form of service delivery (Cedefop, 2022).

Assessment is one aspect of education and training which has begun to be delivered through online or digital modalities. Virtual assessment provides i) e-assessments in which students complete electronic or digitised assessments in a virtual learning environment, and/or ii) fully- or partially-online simulation environments which replicate real-life workplace situations, allowing aspects of competency-based assessment in a controlled environment (ACQF Guideline 9: Innovation and Technology. 2022, forthcoming).

Context: The Covid-19 pandemic forced education institutions to migrate to online teaching, learning and assessment. This exposed both the weaknesses of systems and the opportunities inherent in distance education, which can improve access for students in rural and remote areas, as well as improving the efficiencies of systems by unblocking constraints such as limited physical environments or space for assessments, limited numbers of qualified assessors or the lack of assessors in specific areas.

Rationale: Virtual assessment can include the application of skills in context, interviews and role-playing as well as traditional assessments and reduce the financial costs associated with traditional assessment. In cases where the assessment is supported by back-end analytics, detailed data can be gathered and some aspects of marking may be automated, increasing efficiency. Data such as videos, automated marks and portfolios can be reviewed from any location, in some cases reducing pressure on available resources.

Examples:
- Europass is the European platform for individuals' management of their skills, qualifications, job search and career. Europass launched a new online tool Test your digital skills, with the following functions: test to learn about your digital skills, discover what your level is and take the next step to improve them. The test involves a range of areas of competence: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving. The tool offers users the possibility to record their digital skills, receive course suggestions and discover their learning roadmap.
- The MySkills tool and platform in Germany scales up validation of vocational skills using ICT. MySkills is designed to ease the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the labour market. The MySkills test is available for 30 professions, and in many languages: German, English, High Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Turkish, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Bulgarian or Romanian.

> Guidance for users of MySkills Test: 'When starting the MYSKILLS test, you will be provided instructions regarding what you need to pay attention to when taking the test. During the test, you will see videos and images that illustrate typical practical situations. You will be given tasks similar to those you would be assigned at a company. There are easy and difficult tasks. It is completely normal if you don't know the answers to all of the questions. MYSKILLS is divided into individual sections which comprise a profession.'

Cedefop (2022) analyses 12 practical cases of integrated management of career guidance and validation of competences through ICT operationalization. Among the cases it is worth mentioning:

- SIMHE Metropolia (Finland): supports the identification and recognition of competences of immigrants, supporting them to higher education and the labour market. Some guidance and tools for all international professionals living in Finland:
    - SIMHE personal guidance discussion will help you not only map your competence and put it into words, but also to understand professional qualifications in Finland and to develop your competence - based on your own needs
    - Guidance Generalia lectures regularly discoss topics related to recognition of competence
    - Tips and links on our website help you get started with exploring e.g. what professions require formal validation of your right to practise the profession, how you can start the process of identifying your competence and where you can develop your competence

- Du kannst was! (Austria): Upskilling with the aim of obtaining and apprenticeship qualification; promotes social and employment integration of migrants and refugees.

- LeerWerkLoket (The Netherlands) : promotes cooperation among employers, education and training providers to support individuals; promote work-based learning, career guidance and validation mechanisms for skills and competence assessment.

- Qualifica (Portugal): system to support validation of competences, training and certification of young people, adults. Integrated set of tools for guidance, validation, training. Qualifica is targeted at job seekers, low-qualified adults, youth out of education and employment. Passport Qualifica – individual digital register of all competences and qualifications acquired throughout life. Delivered by Centres Qualifica. Linked with National Credit System for vocational education and training.

For more information on European policy, country systems and research: Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe.

In Australia: Validate Skills. Get your skills recognised – free skills assessment.

6 RPL / validation building blocks and conditions

The RPL / validation system and arrangements are linked with the eco-system of education and training, skills and employment. The effectiveness and meaningfulness of RPL / validation cannot be achieved in isolation from these polices and systems.

The building blocks for construction of effective RPL systems (ILO, 2018) and the conditions for developing and implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015) share some common traits, notably the role and place of stakeholders (goals, benefits, users), institutional framework and quality assurance. Most importantly, RPL policies and mechanisms benefit if linked with the principles of the NQFs, e.g., the learning outcomes concept.

Table 3: Building blocks and conditions for RPL

ILO (2018)	European Guidelines for Validation (2015)
- Regulatory framework - Institutional framework - Stakeholder ownership and commitment - Quality assurance - Financing	- Information, Guidance and counselling - Stakeholders' coordination - Links to national qualifications systems and frameworks - Standards and learning outcomes - Quality assurance - Professional competences of validation professionals / practitioners

Summarised and adapted by the author. Source: ILO, 2018; Cedefop, 2015.

7   RPL / validation in Africa – a first tentative overview

The ACQF country reports that compose the ACQF Mapping Study (2020, and updates of 2021) found that RPL / validation has reached a differentiated degree of integration and visibility in education and training policies and qualifications systems in Africa. In many countries, the qualifications framework is welcoming to non-formal and informal learning, and regulatory-technical implementation mechanisms and capacities are in place or in development. The ACQF development Project supports peer learning and knowledge-sharing between countries and stakeholders (African ad beyond).

This overview is a first step to map RPL / validation policies and practices in African countries. The countries included in this overview belong to different regions: North (Morocco), West (Cape Verde), East (Kenya) and Southern Africa (Angola, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia).

Angola

The establishment of the system of Recognition Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) is defined in the National Development Plan 2018–2022 of Angola as one of the key objectives of the national qualifications system. Two targets of this National Development Plan concern the operationalisation of RVCC: the approval of the legal basis of RVCC and completion of 80 pilot experiences of RVCC. The project supporting development of the National Qualifications System (SNQ) contributes to elaborate the policy and main processes of the RVCC, as a pillar of the SNQ. The components and policies of the SNQ are in the process of official consultation, validation, and approval. More information in Angola country report.

Cape Verde

 RVCC is one of the statutory components of the SNQ and is organically linked with:

- the NQF: through the application of the learning outcomes approach. The primacy of learning outcomes in designing and assessing qualifications enables the access to qualifications by validation and certification of acquired competences;
- the National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNQ): through the right to acquire any of the registered qualifications via processes of recognition, validation and certification of acquired competences, in accordance with the legislative-regulatory framework; and
- the individual register of qualifications and competences: registers individually acquired competences and qualifications and identifies the competences missing to enable the completion of a certain qualification, thereby contributes to building individual trajectories of adequate training. Currently in the process of legislative regulation.

The Law on RVCC (Decree-Law 54/2014 of 22 September) of Cape Verde defines the policy and conceptual underpinnings of the promotion of validation of competences acquired in all contexts of learning. Social and labour market inclusion, economic productivity, valorisation of all types of learning and reinforcement of flexible lifelong learning paths of citizens are the benefits expected from effective implementation of this policy.

- The decree-law states: 'People acquire, with their life experience, namely in professional activities, knowledge and competencies relevant for the exercise of many activities. Those competencies can and shall be formally certified, and, if necessary, complemented with training adjusted to individual needs, thereby promoting access to higher levels of qualification.' The law also defines the RVCC processes over three phases, starting with information and guidance, followed by the recognition and validation of competencies, and then the certification of competencies.

- RVCC is defined in Article 3 of the Decree-Law no. 54/2014, as the formal process enabling individuals to obtain the recognition, validation and certification of their skills and competences, independently of the ways and contexts in which these competences were developed.

Main features of RVCC as a system:
- Target group: Individuals over 25 years of age with at least 5 years of professional/employment experience.
- Governance of the system: The Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System (UC-SNQ) coordinates the organisation and the elaboration of standards for professional certification and assessment standards. It accredits the certifying entities, monitors and supervises them and provides technical and methodological support.
- Accreditation: Only accredited certifying entities can provide services of the RVCC system, in accordance with the legal requirements. Substantive experience in professional training and in the targeted professional families are among the key criteria of accreditation of certifying entities. The accreditation can be revoked under circumstances of breach of the legal requirements and obligations, low performance or at request of the entity.

To support practitioners and implementation agencies, the UC-SNQ issued guidance materials, notably: a) Guide supporting the operationalisation of processes of professional RVCC, March 2016, and b) Process of recognition, validation and certification of professional competencies, March 2013.

In 2021 the UC-SNQ started practical implementation of RVCC, via two main actions: a) several rounds of training of RVCC professionals (assessors, coaches); b) piloting of RVCC process for priority sectors. One of the first pilot of RVCC processes took place in the sector Hotels-Restaurants-Tourism (Professional Qualification: Services of Food and Drinks, level 3). In May of 2021 a total of 32 candidates from different public and private organisations started their RVCC process to acquire the professional qualification Administrative Services and Client and User Support (level 4). In October 2021 a new sector (Construction) joined the initiative of UC-SNQ and started RVCC processes aiming at the qualification Plumbing and Building Installations (level 3 of the NQF), with a group of 23 candidates. Updates and details on RVCC processes are available on the UC-SNQ website.

Photo 1: Technical professionals trained and certified for RPL / RVCC in the sector of plumbing and construction

Photo: UC-SNQ

Photo 2: RPL / RVCC professionals trained and certified for the sector of administration and management

Photo: UC-SNQ

More information is available in the ACQF Cape Verde [country report](#) (2020). The new [updated report](#) (2021) highlights new developments and actions supported by the Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System to operationalise the RVCC system.

Kenya[1]

The [Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA)](#) was established in 2015 as set out in the [Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) act no. 22 of 2014](#).

[KNQF Regulations, 2018](#) stipulate the regulations concerning all domains of the NQF (certification; recognition, equation and approval of foreign qualifications and RPL; structure of the NQF – national qualifications assessment systems, national database. Levels, volume of learning, accumulation of credits towards qualifications, transfer of credits, award of qualifications).

Through the KNQA, the Kenya Government has published in June 2021, the '[Recognition of Prior Learning Policy Framework](#)' and the '[Guidelines for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning in Kenya](#)'. This is in line with the KNQF Act No.22 of 2014, which promotes RPL in the following sections of the law;

- Section 4(c): Mandates KNQA to develop a system of competence, life-long learning and attainment of national qualifications;

- Section 8(1)(k): Provides for the recognition of attainment of competencies including skills, knowledge, attitudes & values - regardless of where and how individuals acquired them.

A pilot phase to test the new RPL Guidelines started in 2021 with focus on qualifications for occupation in three areas: textiles, car mechanics and welding. Candidates are mostly workers from the informal sector (JUA KALI). Qualified informal sector workers, artisans, small businesses will have improved opportunities to enter and participate in the formal economy.

The RPL policy
- Aims at providing a coordinated framework for implementing all RPL related activities in Kenya;

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[1] Acknowledgements to Dr Eusebius Juma Mukhwana. for drafting the section on RPL Kenya

- Integrates RPL into the existing legal and policy frameworks in the education, training and employment sectors;
- Aligns RPL activities to the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF);
- Spells out the objectives, expected outcomes and Quality assurance mechanisms for carrying out RPL in Kenya;
- Defines the various institutional frameworks and their specific roles in the RPL process;
- Outlines the process of carrying out RPL in Kenya
- Promote access, employability, mobility, progression and fair chances to the disadvantaged, discouraged and traditionally marginalized groups;
- Enables the national coordination of RPL focusing on integrating RPL into existing Educational, Training and employment policies and legal frameworks;
- Supports expanded acceptance of workers that have been trained in various ways including use of RPL especially by employers; and encourages employees to further their careers using RPL', and training institutions to recognize and admit students that would like to use RPL to further their studies;
- To develop human and technological capacity to implement and manage RPL in the country;
- Support the implementation of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer system (KCATs) in Kenya;
- To support Internationalization of Kenyan Qualifications and facilitate mobility of Kenyans who would like to go and work in other countries;

Photo 3: Industry Expert assessing a Motor Vehicle Mechanic at NITA Athi River (pilot RPL project, 05/2021)

Photo: KNQA

The RPL ecosystem system in Kenya identifies four sectors of the education and training system where RPL can be practiced and implemented:

- The Basic Sector;
- The industrial sector (workers in employment);
- The Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) sector;
- The University sectors.

How Does RPL Work?

RPL practitioners work with candidates to ensure that:

- Skills and competencies are assessed

- Discuss the candidates´ goals are help them choose the right qualification that matches the skills for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and explain the actions and steps needed to achieve the goals;
- Portfolio of Evidence
  o Gather evidence such as: current resume, reference letters, work examples/samples, photos/videos, certificates and transcripts and overseas qualifications and learning experiences;
✓ Skills and competencies Check
  o Once RPL assessors have gone through your portfolio, they will call you in for a competency conversation and a practical observation, if required;
- Qualified/ Issuance of Certificate
  o If candidates found to be competent and meet the standards set for the level that has been assessed, then they are certified competent and issued with a certificate;
  o All certificates are nationally recognized and issued by a Qualifications Awarding Institution (which must be cccredited by the KNQA);
  o The Assessor may also find the candidate not competent or recommend refresher training for help meeting the standards set;
- Are candidates satisfied with RPL Process?
  o If not satisfied with the outcome of the assessment there is the right of appeal!
  o In which case candidates are entitled to one more assessment (at their cost).

What are the benefits of RPL

- RPL for credit transfer or harmonization (national and foreign credits);
- RPL for recognition of experiential learning;
- RPL for upgrading of skills or qualifications; and
- Regulatory requirements of some sectors in terms of employing qualified persons.

Who qualifies to assess and award RPL Certificates?

Within the Kenyan Context, the following institutions qualify to assess candidates and award an RPL certificate:

- Any institution recognized or accredited in accordance with KNQF Act. By the KNQA as a qualification awarding institution (this could be a basic, TVET, industrial and University sector examination body/institution);
- A university accredited in accordance with the Universities Act (No. 42 of 2012);
- National Polytechnics with a legal Notice;

Table 4: Example of RPL assessment tool used in Kenya

KNQF level	Portfolio of evidence	Minimum requirements
2	Samples of work / photos / video / audio files The materials or tools used by the candidate at work Referees	Compulsory Samples of work Accept any three
3	Samples of work / photos / video / audio files The materials or tools used by the candidate at work Referees Roster and time sheet	Compulsory Samples of work Accept any three
4	Samples of work / photos / video / audio files The materials or tools used by the candidate at work Referees Roster and time sheet	Compulsory Samples of work Accept any three

	Logbooks and other records of performance Curriculum vitae of resume	
5	Samples of work / photos / video / audio files The materials or tools used by the candidate at work Referees Roster and time sheet Logbooks and other records of performance Budgets of work done Workplace training records Curriculum vitae of resume	Compulsory: - Samples of work - Curriculum vitae Accept any five

The RPL Assessment process

RPL assessment processes and procedures may consist of the following stages:

a. Counselling and facilitation;
b. Establishing the purpose of the assessment;
c. Identifying the evidence required;
d. Using appropriate evidence gathering methods;
e. Interpreting evidence and making a judgement;
f. Recording the outcome;
g. Reporting to key stakeholders;
h. Successful candidate issued with Certificate;
i. Appeal process.

Photo 4: Kenya: TVET- CDACC Assessment centre - Pilot assessment assessors and candidates

Photo: KNQA

KNQA coordinated and supervised the conduction of RPL pilot projects (in May 2021), in which 38 candidates were certified in qualifications in the sectors listed below. Most candidates were women (56%).

- Textile: dressmaking and tailoring
- Auto vehicle mechanics, auto vehicle electricity
- Welding (gas and electric)

Lesotho

The Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) was approved in June 2019 as an important policy document to regulate national qualifications and to support evaluation of foreign qualifications. The LQF is an integrated framework that covers all qualifications from primary to doctoral qualifications. It covers academic qualifications, technical and vocational qualifications, professional qualifications and short-term or part qualifications and supports RPL.

The LQF concerns learners when they apply to schools or tertiary institutions to check whether programmes on offer are accredited. Employers use it during recruitment of staff for checking qualifications of potential candidates, and for evaluation of those who obtained their qualifications outside the country. Schools and tertiary institutions use LQF when designing their curricula and for admission of new students.

The [Procedures Manual](#) of the Lesotho Qualifications Framework contains a short section (pg 10) on RPL and Recognition of Current Competences (RCC), but will be supplemented by a full working policy and methodology for RCC. The Procedures Manual states that RPL and RCC may be used to recognise prior learning or current competencies by awarding credits at an LQF level that can then be used to access a qualification or in the awarding of a qualification. Decisions about RPL and RCC may take account of some or all of the following: previously earned credits, part-qualifications, short courses, work experience and portfolio evidence. In addition, there may be assessment evidence and evaluation required before any award is made. Qualification specifications do not need to specify conditions for access or credit but should accept the principle of RPL/RCC. Where RPL/RCC is applied in a qualification there should be clear, transparent and coherent procedures that accurately and consistently assess candidates' evidence.

Mauritius

The implementation of RPL rests with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) as per the provisions of the Mauritius Qualifications Act 2001 which is "to recognise and validate competencies for purposes of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems". For certification, RPL considers both recognition of accredited learning and recognition of prior experiential learning. RPL provides an alternative route for earning a valued qualification.

The NQF has been the main vehicle through which RPL has been promoted in Mauritius. The Framework explicitly aims to recognise all learning achievements regardless of the specific context where they were gained, including prior learning. It does so by establishing a single national point of reference for RPL, learning outcomes, alternative pathways to qualifications and a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications. The Authority's role is to encourage the development of processes for recognising prior learning and promoting its co-ordination and harmonization

The [Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines](#), amended in 2016, define the goals, scope and phases of RPL.

The potential benefits of RPL are not limited to the applicants.

- Employers, for instance, may benefit from RPL for cost-efficiency reasons. It allows employers to advance workers in which they have invested over the years and who possess the relevant skills and experience for a job.
- Governments, on the other hand, can use RPL to improve the educational profile of their workforce and help applicants expand their employment prospects. If RPL is integrated into the overall education and training systems, it will positively impact the labour market, as well as countries' economies, and society.

RPL process in Mauritius - The National RPL Framework

Central to the present Mauritian RPL model, starting from its conception to its implementation, reside the different phases namely the pre-application, pre-screening, facilitation, and assessment stages.

Table 5: RPL process in Mauritius: phases

Stage one	Pre-application	Candidate is provided information about the process of RPL
Stage two	Pre-screening	Candidate submits its application and identifies the qualification against which RPL will be claimed
Stage three	Facilitation	A facilitator guides the RPL candidate in the preparation of the portfolio
Stage four	Assessment	The candidate is assessed against the unit standards of the selected qualifications

RPL is proposed against unit standard based qualifications. Different sets of RPL strategies are proposed for levels 2-3, levels 4-5 and for levels 6. RPL, at this stage, is limited to NQF level 6.

These strategies are linked to a specific target group thus further increasing the reliability and validity of the system and thereby enhancing trust. The guiding principle throughout the RPL process is fairness to the candidate and continuous learning.

Figure 3: RPL model in Mauritius
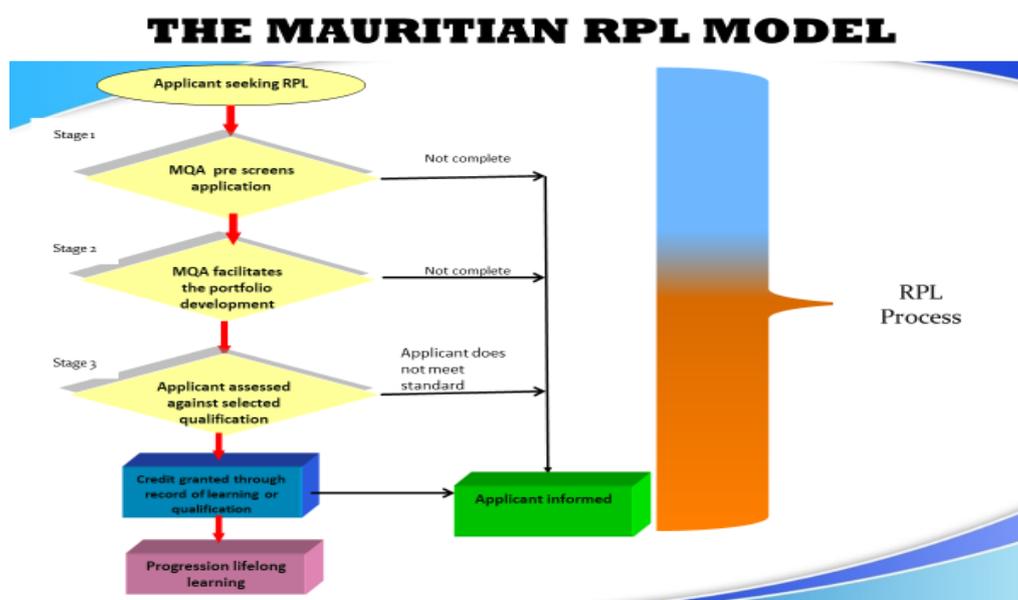
Source: _Presentation Dr Robin Phoolchund, CEO of MQA at ACQF Peer Learning Webinar, 10/09/2020._

Morocco

The Strategic Vision 2030 for a School of Equity Quality and Promotion foresees the development of a comprehensive system of VAE, noting: 'Adopt a unified system of validation of individuals' cognitive and professional achievements, overseen by an independent national body, where the various departments of education and training and professional sectors will be represented' (Lever 19, p.70).

The VAE process is structured in four phases, according to the VAE handbook of the VET Department (DFP):

1. Information and counselling of the candidates: On the VAE process and its requirements, preliminary screening of the professional experience in view of the envisaged certification.

2. Admissibility: Instruct the application file and decide on the eligibility.

3. Follow-up: Support the candidate in the preparation of the Dossier of Description of Professional Experience and prepare for the process of certification.

4. Certification: The jury decides on the validation of the competences from professional experience – on the basis of the certification standard.

The qualifications awarded as the outcome of a VAE process do not have the same value and standing as qualifications from formal TVET pathways because the adequate legislation is not in place yet.

The NQF Permanent Commission is mandated to prepare the conditions and legal-regulatory basis for establishment a functioning VAE system.

The alphabetisation agency, Agence Nationale pour la 17ute Contre l'Analphabétisme (ANCLA) offers validation of prior learning to beneficiaries in six specialised centres.

The Department for TVET (DFP), in partnership with sector federations and sector ministries, carried out several VAE projects in sectors with high demand for labour with qualifications:

- 2008–10: In the sector of construction, 138 candidates were awarded qualifications for 13 sector occupations of three NQF levels (technician specialist, technician and qualification); 320 candidates and 62 enterprises participated.

- 2011–12: In the textile/garments sector, 19 candidates were awarded qualifications.

- In the follow-up of these successful projects, between 2012 and 2016, the ministry promoted additional VAE projects in different regions, in the sectors of construction (100 candidates), hotels (200 candidates) and meat processing (400 candidates).

Mozambique

In 2020 and especially in 2021 Mozambique made progress in the establishment of the System of Recognition of Acquired Competences (SRCA). The Decree and the Regulation supporting implementation were approved in 2021 and a pilot project carried out - with 25 candidates certified.

Among the four modalities of professional training, Law no.18/2018 on the national education system acknowledges the modality of extra-institutional training, that is, learning acquired outside of training institutions and schools. In complement, the Law on vocational education no. 6/2016 (Articles 15 and 16) acknowledges the possibility of recognising and attributing value to learning acquired outside of formal training settings (institutions), under the condition that such learning is aligned with the competence standards of the national Framework of professional qualifications (Quadro Nacional de Qualificaçöes Profissionais - QNQP).

The QNQP validates and certifies learning obtained outside of training institutions and enables the access to regular courses offered by the formal training system. With the adoption and publication of Decree no. 58/2021 of 17 August 2021, the new SRCA received legal status, and the supporting SRCA Regulation has been adopted. The SRCA applies to vocational education and training, not to other sub-systems of the national education system.

The objectives of the SRCA include:

- regulate and facilitate certification of skills and competences from lifelong learning;
- increase employability of the population, by making visible and formalising skills and competences from lifelong learning;
- support further training for individuals who dropped out of education and training;
- social and formal recognition of skills and competences from lifelong learning;
- increase supply of qualified and certified professionals; and
- support development of professional careers and progression within organisations and service.

The SRCA's principles and mechanisms apply to all processes of recognition of competences acquired (RCA) through lifelong learning, in contexts of work, and non-formal and informal learning.

Main features of the SRCA:

- Eligible population: individuals aged 18 and above with at least 3 years of proven professional experience in a domain related with the target qualification of the RCA process.
- The SRCA is closely linked with QNQP, through the mandatory use of the qualifications standards registered in the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications (CNQP).
- RCA processes are conducted only by RCA Centres, which must be accredited by the regulatory body of vocational education and training. Such centres can be established TVET institutions, public and private enterprises and institutions. Accreditation is valid for a maximum of 5 years, and can be renewed upon request and verification of all accreditation requisites.
- Quality assurance of evaluation and validation of candidates' skills and competences, as defined in the RCA Regulation.
- Phases of RCA: evaluation, validation, and certification of acquired skills and competences.
- The certificates obtained via RCA are identical to those obtained as outcome of formal training.
- Candidates can obtain a full or a partial qualification (module), according to the results of the RCA.

The Order approving the SRCA Regulation was published in the Bulletin of the Republic Nº 243 on 16/12/2021. The Regulation establishes the norms and procedures for implementation of SRCA, the process of authorization and accreditation RCA Centres, registration and selection of candidates, the principles and procedures of evaluation, verification, validation, and certification of acquired competences. Validation is the quality control of the evaluation process and is performed by a jury, which verifies and confirms the certification proposal and concludes the process. Candidates can be certified for a full qualification or units thereof. Certificates are issued by the institution responsible for the supervision of the sector of vocational education and training.

Operationalisation of the SRCA has started in 2021, with training and certification of SRCA professionals, and further accreditation of RCA Centres in which these professionals operate. RCA pilot implementation started with up to 45 candidates to a qualification in one of the three occupations: electrician, plumber or welder.

Outputs of the first pilot RCA project in Mozambique:

- Elaboration of RCA standards in five qualifications
- Training of RCA professionals: 14 RCA trained trainers (8 were certified),
- Accreditation of 3 RCA Centres
- Implementation of RCA processes: 44 candidates to a qualification in one of the three occupations: electrician, plumber or welder. A group of 25 candidates were certified: 11 in plumbing, 7 in oxyacetylene welding, 7 in electricity.

Lessons learned from this phase will inform the next steps towards improvement and mainstreaming of the SRCA.

Seychelles

Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) in 2017 adopted a revised 'National Policy of RPL', and 'National Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL'. The RPL Policy (2017) builds on the Manual and Policy Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (2009) which consisted of policy and procedural documents on the conceptualization, development and implementation processes of RPL.

The new National Policy (2017) further clarifies RPL as a concept and enables implementation processes. The RPL Guidelines document is to be read in conjunction with the Policy document, to be used as a reference for all organisations and persons involved in the development of RPL models, implementation and assessment practices, and learner support processes. The Guidelines document is of importance to RPL practitioners, as well as for providers and learners, to enable understanding of the value of RPL in terms of qualifications, its possibility of increasing access, and the benefits of recognising all types of learning as suggested in the Seychelles National Qualifications Framework Regulations.

The objectives of RPL national policy for the further development and implementation of RPL are to ensure the following:

a) Facilitation of access to further study and lifelong learning opportunities, transfer and award of credits leading to certification of qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), in essence, promoting equity of access and fair chances to all learners;

b) Provision for further development, implementation and mainstreaming of RPL, including its resourcing, effective delivery and quality assurance;

c) Development of a shared understanding that RPL is real in the Seychelles; it is already happening and can be used as needed to deal with human resource needs and scarce skills;

d) Provision of a credible way of validating and certifying knowledge, skills and competencies;

e) Provision of a basis for the SQA national RPL guidelines document to be developed;

f) Creation of an enabling mechanism for potential candidates who may be lifelong learners, or potential job seekers to obtain qualifications and/or have their knowledge, skills and competencies validated as part of a qualification; and

g) Recognition of the roles and functions of the SQA, government departments, employers, professional bodies, public and private providers, and RPL practitioners in the provision of RPL across the education and training system.

Benefits: RPL has the potential to improve employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem. The key drivers of and benefits for RPL are:

a) Recognizing and validating prior learning, experience, knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in work or life experiences, previous non-formal training and workshop environments;

b) Granting formal credit for learning regardless of where the learning was achieved;

c) Allowing individuals who have gained significant experience in a particular field to be given the opportunity to become formally qualified;

d) Encouraging lifelong learning in order to create a competent and adaptable workforce that can meet the challenges of a fast changing labour market and address skills shortages and gaps;

e) Fostering employability and thus increasingly decent jobs;

f) Improving efficiency and flexibility in education systems by allowing alternative learning pathways – workplace, non-formal, and informal learning – and fast-tracking the acquisition of qualifications;

g) Establishing clear and credible quality assurance guidelines and mechanisms within education and training providers, overseen by the SQA;

h) Ensuring that resources to implement RPL are sufficient and sustainable;

i) Addressing barriers to RPL implementation, whether these be relational (between institutions and institutions and workplaces), resource-driven or legislative;

j) Recognising that different kinds of RPL processes, different purposes for RPL and different RPL assessment models exist.

RPL serves a number of purposes, namely for:

a) personal development by gaining credits towards a qualification;
b) progression into a learning programme;
c) seeking acceptance into higher studies;
d) promotion and salary enhancement;
e) changing a career path;
f) meeting requirements of present employment; and,
g) meeting regulatory requirements of some sectors in terms of employing qualified persons.

National co-ordination of RPL in the Seychelles is situated in the SQA. The SQA coordinates the implementation if the RPL counts for more than 25% of a qualification. For RPL of less than 25% of a qualification the SQA quality- assures the process implemented by the provider.

Figure 4: RPL process in Seychelles
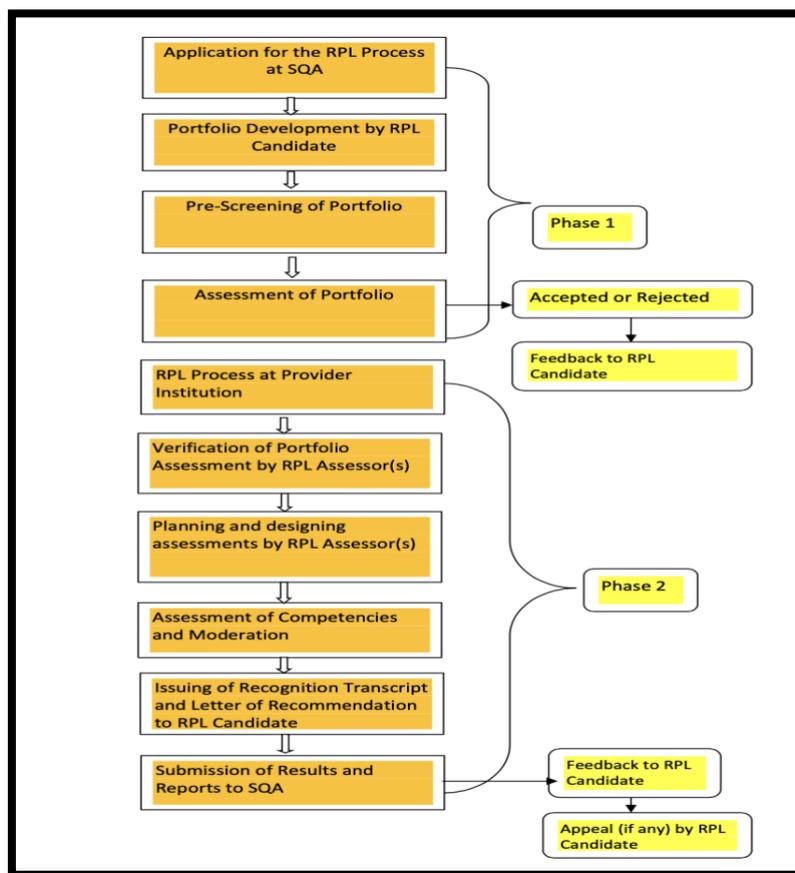
Source: National Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL, Seychelles (2017: 30)

South Africa

Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL. The National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning was amended in March 2019.

- NQF Act 67 of 2008 (Also SAQA Act 58 of 1995)
- DHET's (2016) RPL Coordination Policy
- SAQA National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL (amended in March 2019); (Also 2002, 2013, 2016)

- Quality Councils' policies for RPL in NQF Sub-Frameworks
- RPL as a flexible learning pathway (FLP) tool

Two primary forms of RPL are distinguished, one to provide alternative access routes into learning programmes professional designations, employment and career progression and the other to provide for the awarding of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF. The Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy provides for the coordination and funding of RPL and elaborates and holds SAQA and the quality councils accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act.

Since 2014, when the submission of the data became mandatory, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has made systematic efforts to make NQF stakeholders aware of this aspect and to enable the RPL data loads into the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). While it is known that there have been many more successful RPL cases than those recorded, the amount of RPL being submitted is increasing over time. At the time of writing, the number of learners who had achieved one or more part-qualifications via RPL was 87 915, with the records of achievements of part-qualifications via RPL numbering 610 956. RPL in South Africa is undertaken and awarded in a holistic way, which includes the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, and requires the involvement of the full range of NQF stakeholders.

South Africa's priorities for the future regarding RPL encompass a range of aspects and issues, in particular:

- Mapping/ developing articulation pathways for more sectors
- Taking good practices to scale
    - Enhancing communication and information-sharing
- Ring-fencing funding for RPL/ FLPs
- Expanding TVET, CET and NQF Level 5 qualifications (UPSET)
- Closing data gaps
- Enhancing:
    - articulation through curricula
    - flexibility of administration systems
    - student support in FLPs
    - flexible modes of delivery
    - sharing good practices

Table 6: Overview of national RPL initiatives in different sectors

Agricultural sector	Food and Beverage (FoodBev) sector
Artisan RPL (ARPL)	Marine Industry Association SA (MIASA)
Banking sector	National Artisan Moderating Body (NAMB)
Correctional Services	Rand Water
Democratic Nursing Association of SA (DENOSA)	Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC)
Department of Defence (DoD)	South African Police Services (SAPS)
Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA)	South African Sports Coaching Association (SASCA/ SASCOC)
Department of Social Development (DSD)	State Information Technology Agency (SITA)
Department of Transport (DoT)	Work-at-Height sector (IWH)
Education and Labour Relations Council (ELRC)	Worker Education (Workers' College)
E-TV	

Source: SAQA's presentation at ACQF Peer Learning Webinar, 24/03/2022.

Figure 5: Data on RPL in South Africa – RPL achievements
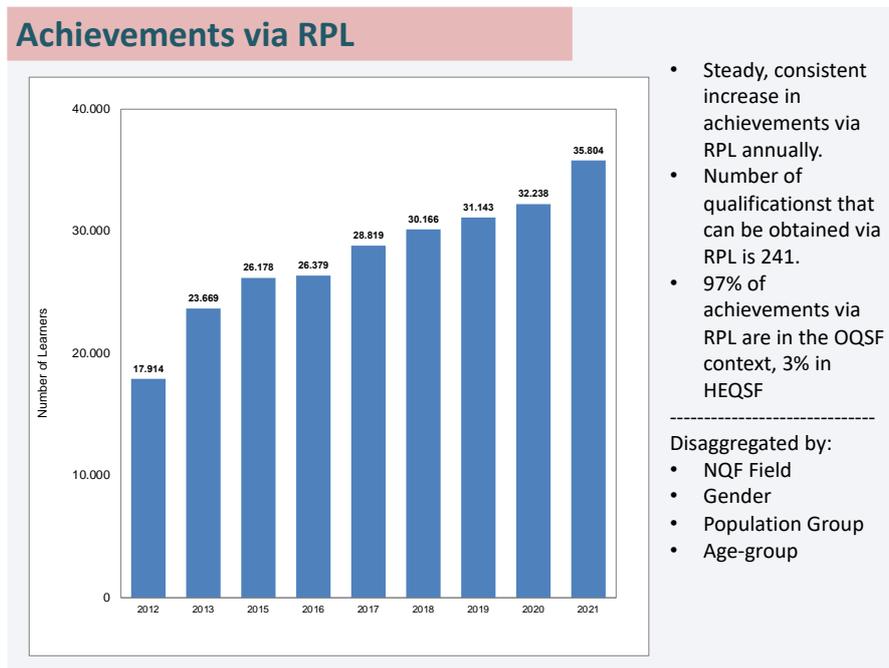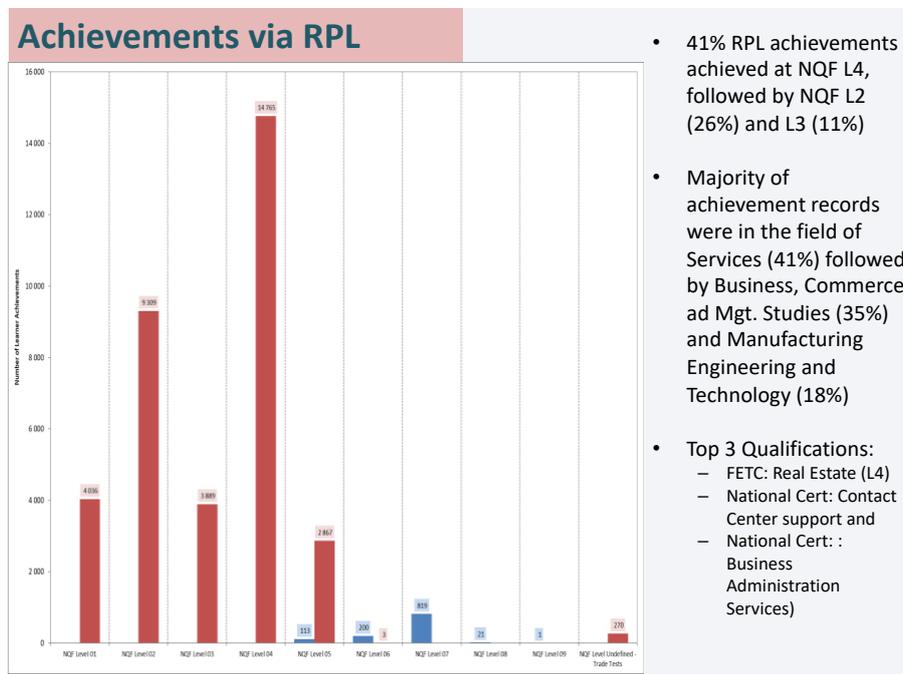

Source: SAQA's presentation at ACQF Peer Learning Webinar, 24/03/2022.

Figure 6: Data on RPL in South Africa – RPL achievements

Source: SAQA's presentation at ACQF Peer Learning Webinar, 24/03/2022.

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development study of RPL, involving over 20 countries, positioned South Africa in a cluster of only 5 countries at 'Stage 5 of 7', which signified a country with 'islands of good RPL practices'. More information: ACQF Mapping – country report South Africa (2020).

Zambia

The establishment of Zambia Qualifications Authority is underpinned by the The Zambia Qualifications Authority Act No. 13 of 2011.

According to the ZAQA Act, the objectives of ZAQA include: create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements; facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths. In respect to RPL, ZAQA

- develops and implements policy and criteria, in consultation with relevant awarding and quality assurance bodies, for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer in order to achieve the objectives of the Zambia Qualifications Framework.
- recognises and validate competences for purposes of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems;
- recognises and validates competences for purposes of certification obtained outside the country.

ZAQA published in 2016 the 'Policy and Criteria for Recognition of Prior Learning in Zambia', which sets out the policy and criteria for recognizing prior learning under the Zambia Qualifications Framework. Principles and Procedures for the recognition of prior learning are described and intended for use by appropriate Authorities and the general public as defined under the ZAQA Act. This document shall be read in conjunction with the Zambia Qualifications Framework Level Descriptors.

The aim for recognising prior learning in Zambia is to allow learners who have not been able to attend formal education but have managed to gain significant experience in a particular field to be given an opportunity to earn a qualification or to upgrade an existing qualification, which can be at any level of education and training. This policy recognises equivalences rather than a precise match between experience and academic learning. Assessment of learning from experience, consideration of relevant competences and equivalences contained in the qualification requires a set of agreed criteria, policies and procedures which this document specifies.

RPL practices of all awarding and quality assurance bodies should be guided by the following:

- policies and procedures should be explicit and fair; and applied consistently;
- policies and procedures adopted should help an institution to demonstrate that it properly exercises its responsibility for the standards of all awards granted in its name;
- information available to learners and staff should be clear, explicit and accessible;
- roles and responsibilities of learners should be clearly defined;
- learners wishing to access recognition of prior learning should be competent to undertake their responsibilities;
- appropriate support should be offered to learners;
- policies and procedures should be monitored and reviewed regularly.

The 12 Guiding Principles of RPL are distributed in five headings:

- Policies and procedures
- Information
- Roles and responsibilities
- Support
- Monitoring and review

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