

Chapter 4

RVA's Role in Education, Working Life and Society

The recognition of all forms of learning is one of the many proposed solutions to the biggest socio-economic challenges including poverty reduction, economic development, the enhancement of employability, social inclusion and cohesion, personal and professional development as well as democratic citizenship in society. Unfortunately, countries frequently focus on particular aspects of RVA as discrete fields or prioritise a single particular aspect. In contrast, this chapter aims to understand RVA in terms of the broader and overarching notions of education for sustainable development and lifelong learning. Both perspectives imply an integrative approach with the potential to draw together the various sectors and purposes of personal, social and economic development. Moreover, both concepts are underpinned by values of self-respect and responsibility, respect for difference, solidarity, dialogue and exploration. Using empirical evidence from a number of countries, this chapter examines RVA's contribution to:

- paving pathways to education, training and qualifications;
- promoting workforce development and participation in the labour market;
- social inclusion and democratic citizenship;
- personal and professional empowerment.

4.1 Paving Pathways to Education, Training and Qualifications

4.1.1 RVA as a Policy Tool Targeting Education and Training Reforms

RVA is gradually becoming an accepted feature of educational reforms in the developed world. Stimulated not least of all by the efforts of the EU in this area, many European countries recognise the importance of qualifications in the economy

and society at large. RVA is regarded as a policy tool that, in combination with other measures, targets more broadly the education and training system. In Austria, RVA is part of a recently published lifelong learning strategy (Republik Österreich 2011) designed with the objective of:

- enhancing transparency throughout the education system;
- providing certification for knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside traditional educational institutions via allocation in the NQF;
- strengthening learning-outcome orientation;
- establishing mutual recognition of qualifications across institutions and sectors as a foundation of the whole educational system;
- implementing the present validation strategy;
- raising national and international mobility, especially for persons with low formal qualifications.

A key factor influencing RVA implementation in Austria is the structural integration of the business sector with the education and training system. The practical nature of the so-called “dual education” system that is already aligned to skills development in the workplace allows the links between experiential workplace learning and institutional learning content to be acknowledged (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture 2011).

In France, the system of recognition known as the Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE) have contributed to debate on a professional hierarchy which is based to a large degree on degrees and diplomas. By taking into account acquired experience, VAE is believed to open up possibilities to limit the negative social and economic impacts of dropping out of school, or otherwise ‘failing’ within the formal education sector. The system of recognition is also having significant effects on the university system. The recognition of skills and competences irrespective of how they were learned requires a revision of university programmes. Universities must focus not on the inputs and duration of programmes, but on what students are able to do and what they know at the end of the learning process. In achieving this, the French system puts great stress on the role of guidance from the point of admission to the point of qualification.

Reforms in US higher education in terms of curricular structures – flexibility, modularisation or elective options of American institutions – have facilitated the development of RVA. Flexible pathways – horizontal, vertical and diagonal – between levels of post-secondary education are an important feature of the US higher education system and allow for other flexibilities. RVA, in its turn, has facilitated further innovations, such as for-credit-RPL workshops, in which RPL portfolios are constructed and submitted; alternative introductory courses that take field experience into account; and “trade-offs” between extra needed work (in English-language academic development, for example) and knowledge informally acquired (other languages or relevant field experience) that are considered as vital to graduate outcomes (Michelson 2012).

The approach to RPL has been quite successful in the United States, with developments in RVA tracking reforms in the higher education sector. Factors contributing to this success story include: a desire on the part of some institutions to attract adult learners; the willingness to offer many degree programmes to students studying part-time; the establishment in the late 1960s and early 1970 of a number of experimental baccalaureate-granting liberal arts colleges, technical and professional colleges, and universities; a single system that spans community colleges, baccalaureate-granting liberal arts colleges, technical and professional colleges, and universities; a relatively large number of elective courses that are not necessarily tied to a particular year of study (Michelson 2012). RPL has resulted in a critical mass of what are termed “adult learner friendly institutions”, whose policies and procedures are widely recognised.

In South Africa, RVA is closely tied to post-apartheid education and training reforms. Within the education and training system, RVA has emerged as a key tool in efforts to improve education levels among the black population in particular, operating within the wider context of various formal and informal initiatives. This goal continues to provide the current rationale for RVA in South Africa. Despite the high level of macro-stability achieved, the levels of inequality remain high. Though no longer solely based on racial divisions, high levels of unemployment exist, particularly in the under-30 age group (49 % in 2002), and are higher for women than for men. For all the above reasons, ‘redress for past and present discriminatory practices’ is still a key purpose of RVA, as is “contributing to a better educated, more skilled and more efficient workforce” (SAQA 2012a, pp. 1–9). One of the specific objectives of RVA is to increase craft and related trades, and take black African employees beyond their current elementary occupations to more advanced levels (Samuels 2013). Much attention is therefore being paid to recognising alternative traditions of knowledge and skills based on the ethnicity or craft. There is also much sustained scholarship to make RVA an effective pedagogical device to create bridges between work-related and academic knowledge (Michelson 2012).

Creating a diversified education and training system that captures the full significance of alternative learning pathways is regarded as an important contribution of RVA in Mauritius, Botswana, the Seychelles, and Namibia (Steenekamp and Singh 2012). Within these contexts, RVA has been implemented with a view to promoting equity of access and fair chances for all learners. In Mauritius, RVA is used as a means of reforming the education and training system, encouraging those people who have been left out of the system to further develop skills and knowledge acquired outside the formal education system and to provide pathways to formal qualification. In the Seychelles, too, RVA is used to facilitate access, transfer and award of credits leading to certification of qualifications within the NQF. In Botswana, the acute shortage of tertiary institutions is forcing a change in attitudes towards the recognition of non-traditional modes of learning. There, RVA is used by individuals in employment to access ODL for personal academic and professional development (Steenekamp and Singh 2012).

4.1.2 Further Education and Training: A New Site for RVA Linked to Higher Education

Germany has several RVA pathways to higher education via education and training: (1) Individuals with previous work experience are able to sit an examination at the conclusion of a vocational apprenticeship comprised of alternating work and training segments. Admission to this examination is granted by competent bodies solely on the basis of documentary evidence; (2) Within the higher education system itself, applicants with vocational qualifications are admitted to universities, contributing to the strengthening of educational mobility in Germany (Lohmar and Eckhardt 2011); (3) Adults with work experience can gain general school certificates constituting an entrance qualification to higher education at a later stage via the second educational pathway; (4) A credit point system to shorten study periods has been developed. The practice of awarding credits for vocational competences towards higher education study programmes (ANKOM) has been implemented at individual institutions of higher education and study programmes (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008, p. 24); (5) Efforts are underway to develop a reference framework for the accreditation of vocational competences towards higher education admission qualifications and the development of recommended action plans for institutions of higher education and education as well as educational policies (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008, p. 47).

In the USA, there has been a growing focus on the development and implementation of RVA (known as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)) policies and processes for adult learners in higher education institutions over the last 40 years (see Bamford-Rees 2008; in Travers 2011). There, RVA is located almost exclusively in higher education, where it is utilised not as a means to facilitate access, but in the allocation of academic credit to learners who have been admitted through other means. Opportunities for PLA exist in: (1) degree completion institutions – where students can transfer credits earned from a variety of accredited institutions from different states, including PLA credits. (2) Credit transfer support services – organisations which offer information on institutional credit transfer policies and provide students/adults with a “passport” in the form of a web-based platform, enabling individuals to consolidate their academic histories into a single location. Challenges remain however; PLA is not universally available, the acceptance and utilisation of credits may be restricted, and PLA credits are often not transferable between institutions (Ganzglass et al. 2011).

In the Republic of Korea, the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS) facilitates the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, allowing individuals to obtain academic degrees and vocational certificates on the basis of credits. Entry through the ACBS is predominantly sought by those who wish to acquire a bachelor's

or associate's degree, or at least achieve credits towards that end. A range of stakeholders are involved in the ACBS and specialists from industry are on the evaluation committee. One of the most important components in the system is the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE). This body accredits educational institutes as well as managing and operating the system as a whole (Baik 2013).

In Japan, access to higher education institutions such as universities, specialised training colleges and vocational schools can be gained through a national high school equivalency examination and certification system established under the 2007 School Education Act. This system is open to individuals educated primarily in informal or non-formal settings, and who lack secondary school qualifications.

Denmark's approach to RVA is based on its long tradition of individual competence evaluation. Starting in 2004, an increased focus was placed on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and in August 2007 the educational fields covered by relevant legislation were expanded to include vocational training, general adult education and general upper secondary education, adult basic education, VET programmes, and VVU (continuing adult education) degrees and diploma degrees. In Denmark, RVA features in reforms aiming to consolidate adult and continuing education into a single coherent system which allows adults to use RVA at all levels of the adult education system. There is support for those seeking recognition through: bridging or supplementary courses and adult vocational training courses; recognition of workplace learning; reference points that serve the educational objectives of an education and training programme; competence development within enterprises; and capacity-building of teaching and guidance staff of the country's educational institutions. In the voluntary sector, Denmark is particularly well equipped for recognition (e.g. the documentation tool My Competence Folder) (Andersen and Aagaard 2013).

In Finland, RVA is linked to vocationally-oriented competence-based qualifications. It ensures access of adults to further study at all levels of education and provides a flexible method for updating skills through competence tests with a focus on vocational competences. Many adults acquire non-formal preparatory training where they are provided with personalised learning programmes (Blomqvist and Louko 2013).

In the Philippines, adult education and training comprise three programmes, disaggregated into the "tri-focalised" education system: the functional literacy programmes of the Department of Education's Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS); the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) of TESDA; and CHED's higher education (Soliven and Reyes 2008). There is a move towards identifying standards to measure the quality of learning outcomes for application in the areas of accreditation and equivalency, literacy, and technical and vocational training among others (Philippines. National Commission for UNESCO 2011).

4.2 Working Life

Providing certification pathways, promoting training in vocational skills and facilitating knowledge development are important aspects of RVA. TVET, up-skilling, informal on-the-job training and a range of other similar types of labour-sector learning fall within this field of action. The challenge for RVA programmes is to function coherently within the education system and to align with the needs of stakeholders, particularly those sectors of the labour market for which training programmes are designed. This is a matter of creating synergies within the education and training system, and facilitating mobility for those who aspire to progress through it. This section explores the following themes:

- RVA at the interface of VET and industry;
- interfaces with social sectors – health, social services and adult education ;
- skills recognition and labour mobility across national borders;
- employability and human resource allocation;
- RVA for skilled immigrants and the recognition of foreign qualifications;
- impacts for employers and organisations;
- Family skills as a potential source of human resource development;
- industry-responsive National Competency-Based Frameworks
- development of competence standards by companies;
- RVA and skills development for the informal sector.

4.2.1 *RVA at the Interface of VET and Industry*

Workplace-based RVA has been dependent on reforms in vocational training which have promoted stronger integration between industry and the education and training system. In France, historically, there has been a strong degree of structural integration of industry with the education and training system. The term “qualifications” refers to a person’s ability to fulfil the requirements of a particular position. This is reflected in many ways: qualifications are linked to specific occupations and are referred to as descriptions of occupations in collective agreements; the training system in France is decentralised and public policy concerning vocational education is overseen – and funded – by regional agencies for youth and jobseekers; and companies are expected to allocate a training budget equivalent to at least 1.6 % of their overall payroll (Paulet 2013).

Germany provides an impressive array of examples of recognition of informal learning in the work domain. The close links between qualification and rehabilitation courses administered through the country’s employment agencies have proven conducive to the development of RVA, with close collaborative ties between the qualification system and continuing training providers in particular industries. RVA in continuing training has provided professionals in the field of ICTs with

opportunities for further development. RVA also features in collective agreements, giving greater security to individuals who have acquired skills through informal and non-formal learning in recognised apprenticeship trades. Similarly, provisions exist within the German public sector for scaled remuneration on the basis of work experience and length of service. Individuals can enrol in training programmes provided that they have a minimum of practical experience, with industry training agencies providing leadership in the design and development of RVA processes.

The recognition of competences in informal settings in Germany is very important for low-skilled workers, who often lack any formal certification. Low-skilled workers are often unaware of their specific competences and have difficulty identifying and articulating these. It is important that RVA provides opportunities to this target group to make competences visible and to improve employability (Beinke and Spilitstößer 2011).

In South Africa, the SAQA Guidelines on RVA stress the need for policies and procedures that indicate the purpose of RVA to support workforce development within industry sectors. Firms within the formal sector pay a training levy that is administered by the Sector Education and Training Authorities and is used for RVA (Samuels 2013). Despite various successes, the labour market remains concerned about the relevance of the schooling curriculum and of higher education; this is currently being addressed through various initiatives, such as the establishment of a qualifications sub-framework for the occupational sector by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. South Africa has developed and is implementing a form of industry-based training known as learnerships. Here, RVA takes place in the workplace. Learnerships are a response to current declines in apprenticeship commencements in South Africa. By 2010 more than 182,000 learnerships had been awarded and over 7,067,688 certificates awarded for skills development activities (Dyson and Keating 2005).

Many countries see the challenge of RVA in the need to align with the needs of stakeholders, such as industry, as a means to enhance the economic capacity of the workforce. Employers are encouraged to invest in the training of those with very low skills, who need to be brought into the productive economy. Mauritius is making concerted efforts through the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) to implement RVA to support workforce development in certain industry sectors (specifically tourism, financial services, real estate, information and communication technology (ICT) and seafood). Employers understand the role of RVA in supporting a highly skilled workforce and they contribute to the MQA's fees for this exercise. Moreover, well-established companies are also sponsoring RVA candidates. Currently, 19 Industry Training Advisory Committees are generating NQF qualifications in all TVET sectors of the Mauritian economy. While such qualifications are offered by both public and private providers, there is a centralised awarding body that awards the NQF qualifications. In Mauritius, RVA and the NQF co-exist in a symbiotic relationship, where the former is directly linked to the outcomes of NQF qualifications and a smooth transition of many learners is possible to the NQF (Allgoo 2013).

4.2.2 Interfaces with Social Sectors – Health, Social Services and Adult Education

The certification of professional experience on the part of adult educators is gaining in popularity in Austria. The Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie, Wba*) administers the most elaborate framework for certifying and issuing degrees to adult educators according to defined standards. Trainees are required to document a specified period of professional experience as a precondition for obtaining certification as adult educators. Such qualifications are increasingly required of employees at Austrian adult education institutions. These qualifications also provide access to higher education: graduates of the advanced *Wba-Diplom* can attend selected university courses at master's level (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture 2011).

In Scotland, the social services sector has led the way in developing RVA to support workforce development within the context of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (Whittaker 2011). In Scotland a project was conducted (2005–2008) in the context of the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) for workforce development, commissioned by the Scottish Social Services Council. This follows legislative requirements for the registration of staff in sectors such as social services and health requiring the development of a mechanism that will support experienced but unqualified staff to gain necessary qualifications. The project had clear aims: to engage social services workers who lack the confidence to undertake formal learning; to speed up and streamline the process of RVA for credit towards qualifications; and to integrate RVA into existing organisation systems of workforce development from the recruitment and induction stage onwards, and within systems for SVQ assessment. Requiring employees to repeat training that does not take into account their prior learning is both demotivating for the employee and an inefficient use of the employer's resources (Whittaker 2011).

4.2.3 Skills Recognition and Labour Mobility Across National Borders

RVA has been shown to play a role in helping youth and adults to create new employment opportunities abroad. In the Philippines, given that the majority of workers going abroad come from poor families, certifications provided by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) enable individuals to find employment abroad and provide remittance incomes to their families. The National Certificate (NC) and the Certificate of Competency (CoC) awarded by TESDA to TVET graduates and workers are recognised locally and abroad as proof of competences. Foreign employers, in particular, look for this document among

their applicants. NC/CoC holders encounter less difficulty in finding employment, making these qualifications passports to employment (Philippines. National Commission for UNESCO 2011).

4.2.4 Employability and Human Resource Allocation

In the labour market, the RVA of competences can result in improved opportunities for matching competences demanded by labour markets to the competence profiles of jobseekers. In Austria, validation and recognition are used in order to attain more comprehensive and efficient use of human capital within enterprises, raising productivity and raising qualification levels of the country's population (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture 2011).

4.2.5 RVA of Skilled Immigrants and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

In many countries that depend on attracting immigrants to fill labour gaps, RVA is to a large extent driven by economic and demographic imperatives.

Canada's per-capita immigration rate is one of the highest in the world. Roughly 250,000 immigrants arrive each year. The Canadian government has noted that more effective processes of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) need to be instituted in order to recognise the qualifications of skilled immigrants. Therefore, although PLAR explicitly states that it is focused on all areas of learning, it has a strong vocational and labour market focus. Progression through access to formal qualifications still remains the key aspect of PLAR, and opening up access and progress in skilled and professional occupations in the labour market is now reported as the key issue across Canada (OECD 2008, p. 14). The location of PLAR at the interface between economic policy and the labour market is evident in the work of the 23 national sector councils which represent economic activities within the economy and play an important role in looking at and improving education and training (OECD 2008, p. 14). Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and, in particular, its foreign credential programme is involved with activities associated with assessment and RPL.

In the area of recognition of foreign vocational qualifications, Germany has introduced a legal entitlement for roughly 350 vocational qualifications that are not regulated (occupations that require formal training in the dual system and skilled crafts and trades). This represents a milestone for the incorporation of RVA in the assessment of foreign qualifications. The new Professional Qualifications Assessment Act creates for the first time a general entitlement for EU citizens and third-country nationals to an individual assessment of equivalence, which so far

existed only for recent repatriates. The question of whether the qualification of an applicant is equivalent will be judged by consistent criteria in a consistent procedure. If the equivalence assessment indicates that significant differences exist between the foreign and the comparable German qualification, evidence of professional experience may be taken into account to possibly compensate for the differences. The new procedures create transparency for applicants, employers and responsible authorities (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2012).

The decision to emphasise the content and quality of professional qualifications over applicants' citizenship or origin has also influenced recognition procedures in Germany. Decisions with respect to the equivalence of qualifications must be issued within three months from the submission of all relevant documents.

4.2.6 Impacts for Employers and Organisations

There are many benefits of RVA for employers and organisations. In New Zealand RVA has been shown to make employees more competent, confident, reflective and analytical, improving their performance as team members and their communication skills. Employees experience onsite, work-relevant learning and show higher motivation, resulting in gains in overall productivity. RVA of existing competences may lead to an increased willingness among employees to take part in workplace training or learning. RVA procedures may motivate individuals to look upon learning not only in a lifelong sense, but also as a life-wide opportunity. It may also encourage the individual to start new learning experiences (Keller 2013). In Norway, RVA contributes to greater flexibility in working life, enabling employees to more easily move from one position or profession to another. It facilitates access to higher education, and can lead to an improved standing in the job market. RVA can lead to more interesting tasks and better wages, but also to improved social integration through better access to the labour market for those previously excluded (Christensen 2013).

RVA can also help to identify the overall stock of competences and qualifications in an organisation, thus making it easier for organisations to invest in the training of their employees. The training becomes more profitable to invest in for the organisation when it is expressed in terms of national qualifications or industry-sector standards, which employers and employees regard as relevant in the changing world of work. Also, in the case of people who become redundant, RVA can help in finding jobs that are suited to their current competences. Furthermore, RVA provides valuable feedback to educational providers to the content and methods of both formal and non-formal/informal learning. More and more flexible and customised training courses are being offered by private and public sector institutions by using RVA to gauge the existing skills levels of individuals.

4.2.7 Family Skills as a Potential Source of Human Resource Development

In Germany, there have been some attempts in the context of corporate human resource development (HRD) to recognise family work and informal skills gained outside the workplace. A growing number of staff in charge of human resource development in companies see the family as a setting where important skills are learned. A project “Family skills as a potential source of innovative HRD” (Gerzer-Sass 2001, 2005) aims at documenting and assessing social skills gained through family work. The tool “skills balance” is developed to make family skills easily visible to employers. This tool utilises a dialogue-type of assessment for documenting personal skills profiles. An information brochure on this tool has been developed for staff in charge of human resource development in companies (Gerzer-Sass 2001, 2005).

According to Gerzer-Sass (2001), unfortunately, employers and staff associated with human resource development seem to value mobility through work more than parenthood and raising children. Nevertheless, she argues, the tool “skills balance” needs to be seen against broader issues of promoting equal opportunities for women in workplaces as well as encouraging men to gain more skills in family settings. A further benefit highlighted is the gradual acceptance of including “family-related part-time work” in a professional biography, under the section on training. Finally, the “skills balance” is also likely to enhance acceptance among employers and public and private sector organisations of employees’ desires to combine family life with work. In a changing world of work, social skills and life-wide and lifelong learning skills are gaining in importance. Whether countries will be economically competitive will depend increasingly on valorising the role of the family in safeguarding human potential.

4.2.8 Industry-responsive National Competency-Based Frameworks

In the USA one of the aims of RVA is to develop a standardised method for assessing the value of occupational education and training that takes place outside or at the margins of post-secondary institutions and their applicability to post-secondary education. To this end education agencies are seeking to develop a national competency-based framework for post-secondary education that includes certificate-level workforce education and training. In the long term, this will enable authorities to scale up the practice of awarding educational credit for what is currently considered to be non-credit education. At the same time, these changes are driving the higher education system towards more industry-responsive curricula, potentially improving employment and career outcomes for students. Currently, there are a wide variety of credentials, but without common metrics or quality

assurance mechanisms, they are not portable and their value is not clear to employers, educators, or students. There are also plans to link data systems to create a more comprehensive picture of learning outcomes (Ganzglass et al. 2011).

There have been some industry-driven efforts to support the National Competency-Based Industry Standard Curricula Assessment Credentials. The Department of Labour's Employment and Training Administration, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and other associations developed the Advanced Manufacturing Competency Model, which details the development of professional knowledge, skills and abilities for successful performance. The model consists of nine tiers divided across entry level manufacturing foundational employment, and specific manufacturing occupations (Ganzglass et al. 2011).

4.2.9 Development of Competence Standards by Companies

In many countries, companies develop competence standards for the purposes of job classification, succession planning, and assessment and professional development. Concrete examples include the Competency-Based Training Framework (Bristol-Aerospace, Manitoba, Canada) and the Boeing Competency Identification (Manitoba, Canada). In Canada, RVA is regarded as a resource to support recruitment. Countries like Germany and Switzerland, with collective bargaining agreements, often reference employees' length of service as a measure of knowledge, skills and competences extending beyond the qualifications obtained through initial education and training. Recognition is a natural counterpart to this approach. RVA is also used by companies to satisfy regulatory requirements in areas such as food, tendering for contracts, consumer protection. The RVA of non-formal and informal learning may make it easier for employers to motivate employees to embark on courses leading to a certified qualification in these areas (see Werquin 2010).

4.2.10 Skills Development for the Informal Sector

In many countries with a high proportion of persons employed in the informal economy, the focus is shifting from academic pathways to an emphasis on skills development pathways with closer cooperation with stakeholders in the labour market and industry. RVA in Benin's informal economy takes place in the context of training programmes for craftsmen, who acquire vocational qualifications that are specified in the Directory of Training and Professional Qualifications. Another development is the transition from traditional forms of apprenticeship to a regulated dual training system (combining the Vocational Skills Certificate (CQF) and the

Occupational Skills Certificate (CQM)). Master craftsmen who have gained the Vocational Skills Certificate through the recognition of their traditional non-formal apprenticeship are able to train their apprentices up to the level of the Occupational Skills Certificate (Savadogo and Walther 2013).

RVA can be a powerful tool to support and enhance formal learning and can provide a platform for further and on-going formal learning. It can provide a mechanism to bring people with unrecognised skills into a system that recognises their informally acquired skills and knowledge in a formal sense. RVA, by leading to a better matching of skills with labour market demands, could also address skills shortages (Arthur 2009).

4.3 Social Inclusion and Empowerment

RVA is seen to have an ability to contribute constructively to the reduction of social inequality. Tackling inequality can be done through a variety of means, some of which attack the problem indirectly, whereas others are more direct in their targeting of inequality. Direct policies, on the one hand, tend to be aimed explicitly at reducing social inequality. They are framed as matters of social justice and are often targeted at those in the community who need assistance (minorities, migrants, low-skilled, etc.). Indirect policies, on the other hand, result in lowering of inequalities, both social and educational, but are not necessarily framed in the language of social justice. Instead, they are often directed at pragmatic outcomes, such as increasing access to higher education or vocational courses for the sake of driving the economy. In these instances, the issue of equality sits at arm's length from the explicit policy aims, but is nonetheless essential to the setting in which the policies are introduced. As is the case throughout the country examples, one education system can employ a range of methods to achieve the same goal, which means they appear at various points along the indirect to direct spectrum. The two ends of this spectrum are referred to by Amartya Sen in his distinction between human capital and social opportunities, where the former lines up with indirect policy and the latter with direct (Sen 2000). Both types of policy are useful, particularly when policy-makers ultimately value equality.

In line with Amartya Sen's distinction between human capital and social opportunities, direct and indirect policy relating to RVA across a range of countries, both developed and developing, is focused on achieving three particular goals:

- increasing numbers with higher qualifications;
- RVA linked to re-entry into formal school education;
- increasing further learning opportunities in the light of improved literacy;
- targeting socio-cultural and educational inequalities as well as poverty directly.

4.3.1 Increasing Numbers with Higher Qualifications

Raising the number of people with higher education certificates is one way to promote equality in education, but one that is only available to countries with an established, articulated and well-functioning education system. It is a policy pursued by both Australia and Finland, among others. Starting with Australia, in 2008, the Council of Australian Governments adopted a resolution to halve the number of Australians aged between 20 and 64 without Certificate III qualifications by 2020. This body also set a goal of doubling the number of higher qualification completions, such as diplomas or advanced diplomas, over the same period (Australia. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2008). The recognition of non-formal and informal learning plays an important part in these efforts, particularly because the increases in certification will serve the aim of ensuring that learners have better access to higher education, better integrating vocational education and training into higher education and collaborating with key stakeholders to encourage improved transition to work arrangements.

Similarly, Finland is using recognition to raise the level of education among the Finnish population and increase the number of post-compulsory qualifications. The efforts there are directed at the 10 % of the labour force aged between 25 and 34 that lack qualifications at that level (Finland. Ministry of Education 2008). The Finnish government has undertaken reforms of education law, introducing the Act on Liberal Education (632/1998) and the Act on Vocational Education (630/1998), which both aim at achieving these objectives.

RVA in Portugal is closely associated with efforts to reverse the historical trend of an increasingly poorly educated workforce. The Portuguese situation is unique in terms of its per capita qualification levels and educational performance compared with the majority of other EU and OECD countries. This can be attributed to the low commitment to education registered over many decades, as a result of an array of factors, including almost fifty years of dictatorial rule and the regime's opposition to universal access to education (Gomes 2013). Seeking to overcome this situation, stakeholders in Portugal have initiated a major drive for investment in adult education and training courses, including the establishment of the RVCC and a national qualifications framework.

4.3.2 RVA Linked to Re-entry into Formal School Education

With traditional formal schools unable to meet the learning needs of all children and youth in most developing countries, Equivalency Programmes (EPs) offer critical, and often the only, opportunities for learning, particularly for marginalised groups. EPs are alternative educational programmes that provide learning that is supposed to be equivalent to the formal system, and provide skills and competences that are recognised as being equivalent to those acquired through the formal system. EPs are

often delivered through non-formal education (NFE) systems separate from formal education system. Creation of synergies between formal and non-formal education is an important element of these programmes, if progression through levels of education, and transfer between formal and non-formal programmes is to take place. In the Philippines, performance in the Accreditation and Equivalency Programmes is assessed through the Accreditation and Equivalency Test at elementary/secondary level. Successful candidates are recognised as elementary/high school graduates. As such these individuals are able to enrol at technical/vocational and higher education institutions as regular students. In Thailand, four programmes exist to provide citizens with opportunities to engage in learning continuously throughout their lives: (1) basic education; (2) occupational development; (3) education for life skills development; and (4) education for community and society. Most importantly, in Thailand, the credits accumulated by learners from these programmes are transferable within the same type or between different types of education, regardless of whether credits are gained at a single or multiple educational institutions, including learning from non-formal or informal education, vocational training or work experience (Thailand. Ministry of Education, Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) 2011).

However EPs have been criticised. The Final Report of the Regional Workshop on Equivalency Programmes for Promoting Lifelong Learning (UNESCO Bangkok Office 2006) has listed the following challenges. EPs still suffer from: inadequate funding; low status and low pay of grassroots-level workers; high dropout rates as well as low achievement. The Report identified the need for substantive data to show what adults learn, their levels of achievement, and the utility of such programmes in improving the quality of life of members of disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, there is a need to equip learners with the skills required in a competitive global knowledge economy, with an emphasis on the creation, application, analysis, and synthesis of knowledge as well as collaborative learning (Ibid., pp. 24–25).

4.3.3 Increasing Further Learning Opportunities in the Light of Improved Literacy

For many countries without established basic levels of education among their population, equality of educational opportunities must be tackled at a foundational level. To this effect, many developing countries are turning their attention to recognition policy with the aim of increasing the size of the continuing studies sector in light of vast improvements in their literacy rates. Countries in this category, which includes Ecuador and Botswana, now have a predominantly literate society that is ready to enter further education. Strategies of recognition of non-formal and informal education are being designed to fill the new demand. Over the last 60 years, Ecuador's illiteracy rate has decreased from 44 to 9 % (Ecuador. Ministerio de Educacion 2008). This can be attributed to the diverse campaigns and programmes

focusing on literacy and post-literacy implemented over this period. The country is now turning its attention to expanding its processes of non-formal and informal education. Another country that has taken giant leaps forward with its literacy rates is Botswana, which has managed to improve literacy from a level of 69 % in 1969 to 83 % in 2007 (UNICEF 2010). Unemployment has also fallen over the past decade, but remains at high 17.6 % (Ecuador. Ministerio de Educacion 2008). This rise in literacy in Botswana is coupled with the country's programme of universal primary education. Not only is the national government able to offer schemes of further learning to cater for the more literate society that now exists in Botswana, but it can also do so to break the traditional barriers that keep various categories of clients from participating in further education programmes. In this sense, recognition is able to play a role in Botswana to entrench the gains made by increased literacy levels and to facilitate equality of educational opportunities.

The incorporation of the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) system into the South African NQF has allowed adults successful in the mass literacy campaign level to participate in the ABET system. While fewer than 9 % of adults between 15 and 64 years of age are illiterate, more than 500,000 adult learners are in Level 1 of the NQF, which incorporates the four sub-levels of adult basic education. The four ABET sub-levels are recorded on the National Learners' Records Database. Qualifications, unit standards, modules and short courses can be registered on the NQF. Qualifications and unit standards have been defined as learning outcomes and assessment criteria. If non-formal and informal education lead to registered standards on the NQF and the providers are accredited, then the learning can be formally recognised. The SAQA RPL policy also allows candidates to achieve qualifications in part or in full through RVA (McKay and Romm 2006).

The growing importance assigned to embedded and integrated literacy in workplace settings in Australia and New Zealand is seen in programmes that aim to shape training around the particular task undertaken by employees (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2008; New Zealand Ministry of Education 2008). RVA in these contexts entails valuing and making visible the very experience of adult learning as a means of raising self-esteem, making adults aware of their broader personal knowledge skills and competences, and consequently removing a significant barrier to more formal learning. Rapid economic and societal changes actually increase the importance of personal development, while reducing the importance of task-specific and narrowly defined instrumental knowledge and skills (New Zealand). In Canada, literacy and basic skills are a stepping stone to lifelong learning. Literacy is essential for participation in general adult education. Adult literacy programmes in the context of adult continuing education and training programmes (as part of lifelong learning) help to bridge the gap between literacy and higher education levels. In Canada, data shows that individuals at higher literacy levels are more likely to participate in further education and learning.

4.3.4 Targeting Socio-cultural and Educational Inequalities as well as Poverty Directly

The potential contribution of RVA in closing the gap that exists between the education opportunities of a diverse range of groups in society is another theme that occurs in policy and practice in both developing and developed countries. In many developing countries, where qualifications and certificates are highly valued, tackling educational disparity is an important element in seeking to redress broader structural and economic inequality. In developed countries, too, recognition plays an important role in closing the gap between different sections of the community, particularly immigrant groups, indigenous populations, rural groups and those trapped in the poverty cycle.

In the context of post-conflict societies, the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR (Kirk 2009) sees RVA as an essential tool for displaced persons and refugees – children, young people and adults – to record what they have learned or their prior learning and results obtained. UNHCR calls for the right of access to examination or assessment processes that are validated by the relevant authority or educational institution, for displaced persons and refugees to continue, resume and complete schooling, as well as to attain access to further learning opportunities and employment opportunities (Kirk 2009).

In South Africa, one of the purposes of RVA specifically promoted by trade unions is redress for past and present discriminatory practices. This policy objective is reflected in the country's skills development agenda, which aims to contribute to a better educated, more skilled and more efficient workforce, and development for workers (SAQA 2012a). RVA helps to identify skills gaps that may be compensated for by education and training (Samuels 2013).

In the Philippines, clients of the non-formal/informal education programme are mostly illiterates and school leavers from elementary and secondary schools. They come from marginalised and depressed communities in both rural and urban areas, penal and rehabilitation institutions, remote and otherwise inaccessible regions, areas of armed conflict, and indigenous communities, etc. This group represents 45 % of the Philippine population, or some 40 million persons. Some ALS clients are of school-age (6–15 years) but most are older (15+). They generally want to participate in the programmes and consider ALS as a “second chance” education. The support for learners in the above programmes includes: recognition/certification of learning by NGOs and community centres; CD modules and workbooks; a tracking system (for NFE A&E learners); livelihood projects and microfinance; leadership training; and a referral system for graduates/completers operated by NGOs.

Mexico is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation (the country has 62 ethnic Mesoamerican language groups). It is a country with low completion rates at the basic education level as well as low literacy levels. In Mexico there are over 34 million people over the age of fifteen years who have not completed their basic education (Castro Mussot and de Anda 2007). Demographic features such as a

relatively young population, combined with low birth rates and high life expectancy, mean that Mexico will face the problem of an ageing population over the coming decades. Already, young people are under pressure to enter the workforce without completing their formal education and this trend is set to continue. It is for these reasons that the recognition of non-formal and informal education is central to Mexico's education policy and broader social planning. Through accreditation, Mexico is aiming to encourage the development of small enterprises. Accreditation programmes also stand to assist in reducing the damaging effects of migration from Mexico to the USA of working-age family members.

Mauritius has a programme to support the training of low-qualified workers from the sugar and textile industries for work in the tourism industry by taking into account their prior learning. Candidates develop a portfolio based on the unit standards and qualifications defined by the MQA with the help of RPL facilitators. In addition, the MQA is working on an RPL project with the Mauritius Prisons Service for the reintegration of detainees through RVA by assessing their skills (Allgoo 2013).

In Chile recognition of informal learning is a powerful tool for the promotion of inclusion. It is a country where almost 50 % of the adult population do not finish school and where there are many unemployed young people with very low levels of training (UIL 2011). A reform of the adult education system (2003–2009) was initiated in response to the need of many youngsters and adults to catch up with their school studies.

Closing the gap between educational opportunities for different groups in society is an important goal for many developed countries. In New Zealand, for example, the Tertiary Education Strategy 2002–2007 includes RVA to improve foundation skills in general, including particularly those of Maoris in order to bring Maori learners into tertiary education and higher education levels (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 2008).

The Australian government is working through the Council of Australian Governments to reduce indigenous disadvantages (Australia. DEEWR 2008). The government's Social Inclusion Agenda seeks to skill potential workers who can and want to work or are currently excluded from the labour force (see Australian Government, Social Inclusion Unit 2009). In Canada, RVA has been a promising approach among indigenous populations. Research conducted in Saskatchewan firms shows that Aboriginal people value most experiential lifelong learning, which includes, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual learning. By comparison, the Western formal learning approach tends to focus primarily on intellectual learning (see Werquin 2010).

In Scotland, RVA and NQFs are linked to career guidance for "young leavers at risk"– youth who have no positive destination in terms of education, training or employment. Whittaker (2011) describes a project undertaken by Skills Development Scotland, which includes Careers Scotland, to integrate the SCQF into careers guidance, specifically through the use of RVA. The majority of participating pupils were leavers at risk with no "positive destination". RVA allowed the candidates to benchmark their attainments and achievement to the SCQF to facilitate participation

and workforce development. Learning and skills gained through informal learning were mapped against the appropriate level of the SCQF. In doing so, the project explored whether young people could gain a better idea of the types of job they could seek, or the types of the learning or training programmes open to them. The project showed that young people do understand the role of RVA in their career development.

In Norway, efforts are made to assist marginalised groups by providing RVA at the level of public employment services. As an alternative pathway to formal qualifications, it can help marginalised persons/groups to document their competences and provide access to both employment and further education. For immigrants and refugees without formal proof of qualification, identifying and validating competences can speed up integration and prevent racism and discrimination. Unemployed persons with a right to complete upper secondary education can have an assessment of their non-formal and informal learning paid for by the employment office as part of an approved jobseeker's agreement. Validation has been successful, especially among unqualified women working in the health sector, leading to more secure jobs and higher wages. One important effect of this is the greater availability of more formally qualified employees in the health sector, an issue that has had priority during recent years. In order to shape the validation system as intended by the Public Employment Services (PES), a training programme has been developed for individuals working in this sector. To function effectively this has required close cooperation and coordination between the public education system and the employment service at county level (Christensen 2013).

Germany faces a set of issues of its own. While the country's unemployment rate has declined as a result of greater buoyancy in the labour market, there are nevertheless concerns related to qualifications and unemployment, particularly as affecting specific groups such as migrants and youth (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008). The recognition of migrants' prior learning and experiential learning is expected to become an important integration policy issue in the coming years. Germany is committed to implementing more formalised recognition systems and has stated that its aim in doing so is to engage more people in social and economic participation by emphasising recognition of the skills and knowledge needed in the labour market. This is directed primarily at the integration of low-skilled workers, raising occupational mobility and increasing the number of persons entitled to enter higher education (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008). A focus on economic and social participation is a priority with respect to education policy, though an emphasis on less formal pathways has been gaining ground over the last decade. The current emphasis on recognition in Germany is driven by the combined objectives of providing equal access and utilising existing potential skills in the economy (Germany. Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) 2008).

In Austria, recognition of non-formal and informal learning can enhance the integration of marginalised groups such as migrants, elderly persons or the unemployed by giving them a "second chance". The process of recognition can influence people's awareness of their knowledge, skills and competences, strengthen their

self-perception, enhance their careers and raise their motivation for further education (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture 2011). However, experience from Austria shows that data on the impact of RVA on the integration and empowerment of marginalised groups and individuals is not available. While a small number of studies exist describing the benefits of single mechanisms for individuals, none of this data refers explicitly to marginalised groups. Benefits from the recognition process mostly refer to higher self-confidence, increased problem-solving competences or stress-coping strategies. Knowing and formulating one's own competences has helped many participants in portfolio initiatives to find a (new) job. However, there are always a larger number of factors that need to be taken into consideration when it comes to evaluating the impact on marginalised groups. The Austrian experience demonstrates that the integration and empowerment of marginalised groups are very complex processes which are connected with a wide range of factors and cannot easily be observed or "measured". Accordingly, it is difficult to attribute changes in these respects to RVA only (Austria. Federal Ministry of Education Arts and Culture 2011).

In the US, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (Public Law 105–220) was instrumental in establishing a fund for Adult Basic Education (ABE) services, which encourages the development of RVA pathways for low-skilled adults to increase their educational attainment and obtain higher skilled jobs. The fund targets at-risk youth, under-educated and/or unemployed/underemployed adults, youth and adults with disabilities, and English language learners (ELL). Progression pathways in the US are called "certification crosswalks". These include: College Credit for What You Already Know: a project developed by CAEL designed to bring prior learning assessments to scale, and increase the number of adults who would benefit from access to these programmes; LearningCounts utilises faculty experts nationwide to teach online portfolio development courses and review student portfolios. The latter sends credit-recommendation transcripts to colleges and refers students to training-program evaluation and standardised-exam services. The users may be unaffiliated students, military personnel and veterans, low-income and unemployed, individual employers and industry groups, unions, and the public workforce system. These services are not intended to replace existing PLA programs offered by individual institutions, but rather to augment services at institutions or provide the resources for institutions that have not developed these programs (Ganzglass et al. 2011).

There are pathways between work and education. The Ivy Tech Community College uses a certification crosswalk to award a consistent amount of educational credit for a wide range of industry certifications and apprenticeships. The Ivy Tech campuses reached an agreement on how to develop a common portfolio assessment. Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) provides apprenticeship-related instruction as approved academic programming with full program status. Ohio's Career-Technical Credit Transfer (CT) is an initiative which helps to ensure that workers can earn educational credit for technical instruction. This initiative awards educational credit for occupational and technical instruction is provided

through the state's Adult Career Centers. Stakeholders determine which types of occupational and technical instruction merit educational credit (Ganzglass et al. 2011).

4.3.5 Research on Equity Issues and Equity Groups

Research evidence from Australia is critical of governments' perceptions and assumptions regarding the contribution of recognition to access and social inclusion agendas. (Maher et al. 2010) identified little research on equity issues and equity groups (indigenous, non-English-speaking background, women returning to the workforce) showing that these candidates are less likely to access and complete education than other groups. The dominant model of recognition in Australia is the credentialing model. Butterworth (1992) and Cameron (2004) found that recognition is neither relevant nor appropriate to the needs of disadvantaged and disengaged groups of learners. According to Cameron, it is those with 'significant accumulated educational capital who are familiar with formal learning systems and the associated discourse who are more likely to utilise the RPL processes' (Cameron 2006, p. 119).

In Australia, the number of students with one or more subjects gained through RVA as a proportion of the student population rose from 2.4 % in 1995 to roughly 4.0 % in 2001. Age is an important factor with regard to RPL take-up. These results emerged from a study on uptake by Bowman et al. (2003) commissioned by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)¹ and published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). RPL take-up was greatest for students in the 25–39 age bracket. Students in the 40–65 age bracket were the next highest, and those up to 19 years of age had the lowest RPL rates. In many cases, equity group members had lower uptake than students overall. Hargreaves (2006, in Cameron 2011) argues that this is because equity group members are more likely to participate in training than to seek recognition of existing skills. A similar picture presents itself in Sweden, where females in the workplace context are recommended further training, whereas male competences are readily recognised as such.

Summing up the available research on this aspect, Cameron (2011) concludes that uptake remains low although VET sector services are required to offer RPL to any student enrolling on an accredited course. These formal arrangements apply in the adult and continuing education sector. However, Cameron argues that due to limitations of secondary data and on account of the fact that only "up front" enrolment-recorded RPL is counted, the dataset does not account for RPL that occurs through forms of early progression, accelerated learning or challenge testing after enrolment (Bowman et al. 2003; Bateman 2006; Hargreaves 2006). These

¹In 2005 functions of ANTA were transferred to the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

authors also note that these forms of RPL are more effective than the “traditional methodology of RPL assessment conducted up-front and prior to training” (Bowman et al. 2003, p. 47).

4.4 External and Internal Dimensions of Personal Development

In many North countries, RVA is framed in terms of an individualistic perspective that is rooted in the traditions of citizenship and the right of the individual to education. This approach is enshrined in the principles of the European Guidelines for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, which places the individual at the centre of the validation process (CEDEFOP 2009). Accordingly, many of these countries address the purposes of recognition in terms of its benefits for individuals and learners. These purposes can be described in terms of “external dimensions” or in terms of “internal dimensions” of personal development.

According to a review of studies from Australia addressing the purposes of recognition in terms of its benefits for *individuals/learners* (Cameron 2011), a primary driver for RVA uptake is the opportunity it presents to gain a qualification either for its own sake or for work requirements. Not having to repeat skills and knowledge training has been identified as another significant factor (Bowman et al. 2003, p. 13). RVA could motivate individuals to continue along the path of further education and skills training. Recognition of one's own capacity to learn induces an on-going desire to seek further learning. This applies across a range of individuals, including those who have had limited access to, or low achievement in, formal education and training; those who learnt skills predominantly in non-formal institutions and the workplace; and those who are or have been disadvantaged in further learning and training and have had trouble securing employment that adequately reflects their skills and previous experience. Helping these people to get their competences formally recognised gives them evidence of their personal capital, which in turn assists them in improving their employment and career prospects. Other benefits include: reducing individuals' study time or fast-tracking qualifications (Miller 2009); and gaining assistance with career planning (Cameron 2009).

The recognition of competences in the labour market is a major driver for *individuals*. From Austria, positive effects include: better opportunities for matching competences demanded on the labour market to competence profiles of employment-seeking persons; enhanced opportunities for access to educational programmes; possibilities for receiving credits for parts of programmes; enhanced integration of marginalised groups through second-chance opportunities for migrants, elderly persons or the unemployed; greater awareness of knowledge, skills and competences, greater self-perception, and enhanced careers and strengthened motivation for further education (Prokopp 2010).

In Scotland the value of the RVA process in terms of increasing learners' confidence and motivation to undertake further learning and development was confirmed through project evaluation. RVA promoted a positive view of learning, based on an enhancement rather than a deficit model. The peer-group approach to developing learner self-awareness of skills prior to embarking on a formal programme, and to the development of reflective skills and writing skills, was seen as streamlining and accelerating the process of completing a qualification. As a result of formative RVA, learners embarked on a formal qualification pathway with greater self-confidence and greater understanding of how they learn, and how to express and demonstrate their learning (Whittaker 2011).

In the Republic of Korea, RVA has been shown to protect learning rights by providing learning opportunities anytime and anywhere (Baik 2013). The benefits of RPL for *individuals* include formal acknowledgement and certification of skills, improved access and equity in vocational education and training, self-assessment allowing individuals to identify skill deficits, and the building of confidence, self-esteem and motivation. It relieves learners of the obligation to repeat training to learn skills which they are already applying in the workplace. RPL ensures each learner's right to choose diverse learning options and promotes self-directed learning management. In addition to this, learning results can be linked to general and vocational certification schemes. The Lifelong Learning Account System enables *learners* to plan their learning process systematically (Baik 2013).

In New Zealand, RVA has been shown to improve personal reflection. The impacts of a qualifications framework that recognises prior learning for learners are personally meaningful and reflective. They enable learners to integrate understanding from experience, providing peer insight and support. It is of relevance to the learner's current career, provides increased confidence and enhances the *individual's* ability to contribute to business (Keller 2013).

Several recent studies on RPL criticise the overemphasis on the external dimensions of personal development to the neglect of the "internal dimensions" such as self-esteem, confidence and motivation, greater self-awareness, improving personal reflection, increased confidence and self-directed learning management. Singh (2009) argues that institutional and systemic, as well as individual perspectives on recognition, need to be united so as to open the way to a more holistic and integrated approach that would result in: (a) creating greater self-awareness; (b) understanding what counts and is valued as knowledge in our vision of the world; (making sense of the world by acting consciously); and (d) promoting sensitivity to the cultural context of the individual and different forms of knowing (cognitive justice) (pp. 2598–2600). In a recent exploratory study, Armsby (2013) for example, argues that RPL could be promoted through an ontological focus in higher education, where RPL affects ways of being rather than or as well as ways of knowing.

4.5 Summary

It is clear from this chapter that there is considerable variation in the purposes of RVA across countries. While countries tend to concentrate on one or the other purposes depending upon the contexts and circumstances, it is important to keep in mind the entire range of social, economic, cultural and personal purposes – particularly those relating to social inclusion, equity, and personal self-esteem and self-awareness – as expressed in the goals of lifelong learning and education for sustainable development.

On the basis of empirical evidence gathered from various countries, a number of criteria – educational, economic and social and personal development – can be identified to improve countries' contribution to education for sustainable development and lifelong learning.

In the educational context we found that the formal education sector is in the forefront of RVA. Many countries are committed to developing RVA as a policy tool alongside other measures with the aim of enhancing the transparency and sustainability of the education and broader learning system (Austria, Mauritius, Botswana, Namibia); promoting a diversified lifelong learning system; granting flexible access opportunities; establishing synergies between formal and non-formal basic education (Philippines and Thailand); promoting permeability and educational mobility between subsystems of the education and training system; and acknowledging the importance of work experience and vocational skills for achieving qualifications in higher education (Germany).

Besides providers in the formal context, non-formal and individual education and training providers also exist, such as community-based adult learning centres and non-governmental organisations that implement the recognition of non-formal basic education and training programmes as well as adult and continuing education. This applies particularly in developing countries. More and more providers in the field of continuing vocational education and training (CVET) (particularly in the developed countries) are delivering support services which enable adults to use RVA at all levels of the formal education and training system (Denmark and Finland) in addition to providing certified qualifications.

A range of themes relating to RVA's role in workforce development were highlighted: RVA is used in rehabilitation courses administered through employment agencies, with close collaborative ties between qualification systems/frameworks and CVET providers. RVA is also used by training providers in particular industries. It is a feature of collective agreements in the private and public sector. It is used for linking non-credit workforce programmes to educational credit. RVA's importance has also been highlighted in matching labour market competence requirements to the competence profiles of employment seekers. In many countries RVA is used for attracting migrants to fill labour gaps. RVA has been shown to meet part of new qualification requirements in different sectors (e.g., for adult educators; construction, or social services). RVA has supported workers in the private and public sector organisations to complete primary and upper secondary education (Denmark). In

the informal economy, RVA helps in the acquisition of vocational and occupational certificates based on previous work experience and informal apprenticeships. The integration of academic credit with non-credit workforce programmes is driving governments to develop national competency-based reference frameworks, learning outcomes-based approaches to curricula and learner databases.

Drawing on Amartya Sen's distinction between human capital and social opportunities, this chapter also highlighted how in some country contexts social-justice related policies are used to tackle inequality, while other countries use indirect policies to deal with increasing equality in educational opportunity. Depending on the particular contexts and circumstances, both policy types have benefits. While in some countries RVA is a tool to increase the number of persons with higher education, in other countries RVA efforts are more targeted and are designed either to entrench the gains made by increased literacy levels (Botswana, South Africa) or to close the gap between different sections of the community, particularly immigrant groups (Norway), indigenous populations (New Zealand), rural groups, low-qualified workers (Mauritius) 'young leavers at risk' (Scotland) and those trapped in the poverty cycle. In the latter approach, recognition is an important tool for the promotion of inclusion.

The chapter also highlighted research evidence showing low-uptake of RVA among equity groups such as women. This finding is related to the lack of familiarity with formal learning discourses. Instead, equity groups are more likely to participate in training than to seek recognition of existing skills.

The use of RVA to promote equality of access and participation in education is often driven by wider policy frameworks or contexts. In Portugal, the high number of under-qualified young people entering the labour market is a major driver of RVA (Gomes 2013); in Scotland, recognition became a means of recognising the skills of learning and qualifications of migrant workers and refugees. In the Netherlands, validation is applied as a tool to tackle the economic crisis and targets young unemployed persons lacking Level 2 vocational qualifications, those who are at risk of losing their jobs, or those who need to achieve mobility on the labour market. In Botswana and South Africa recognition serves to allow adults to participate in adult basic education and training (ABET) upon becoming literate; in post-conflict societies international organisations like the UNHCR are promoting policies so that children, young people and adults record what they have learnt. In many countries, recognition is a part of skills development agendas. In Canada, recognition is an important policy for recognising the experiential learning of indigenous populations; in New Zealand recognition is a part of the Tertiary Education Strategy to close the gap between Maori and the rest of the population. In Australia, recognition forms part of the social inclusion agenda.

RVA benefits individuals by improving career and employment prospects and creating pathways to further learning and qualification opportunities. Beyond the bounds of these external dimensions of personal development, RVA contributes to self-esteem, confidence and motivation, greater awareness, improving personal reflection, increased confidence and self-directed learning management.

This chapter has shown that a diversity of approaches exists to the recognition of competences and outcomes from non-formal and informal learning, as well as a diversity of options to access education, training and qualifications. This multiplicity of forms of recognition systems across sectors, and addressing a broad range of purposes (personal, social, cultural and economic), is a prerequisite for the realisation of lifelong learning within an integrative perspective.

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