Peer learning activity in the context of the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and the Council Recommendation on the validation of the non-formal and informal learning

"The role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning"

21-22 September 2017, Lisbon (Portugal)

Escola do Comércio Lisboa, Rua Vice-Almirante Augusto de Castro Guedes, 51

SUMMARY REPORT
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1. Introduction

The EQF AG Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on VNFIL was held in Lisbon, Portugal on 21-22 September 2017. The activity focused on the role of non-state actors in the implementation of the 2012 Recommendation on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. The PLA was hosted by Escola do Comercio and organised by Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) in cooperation with the European Commission, CEDEFOP, co-ordination with European Volunteer Centre (CEV) and the support of the Portuguese national agency ANQEP and ANESPO. The event was attended by ninety people representing different State and Non-State stakeholders from across Europe.

PLA objectives

The purpose of the PLA was to examine and exchange information on the role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing the 2012 Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning together with the responsible national authorities. In addition, the PLA aimed at bringing together various participants representing both state and non-state actors in order to allow them to meet and exchange with each other. To conclude this PLA aimed at showcasing how non-state actors do, and can, contribute to the process before (during roadmap / setting up phase) and after 2018 (post-2018 arrangements for implementation) in the different Member States.

The PLA was structured in a way that a diversity of participants could easily exchange and share with each other. There was for such purpose more informative sessions such as panel discussions and more practical sessions such as workshops. In addition, the participants had the chance to have a few country updates as well as project presentations.

Purpose of the Report

This report summarises the discussions that took place during this PLA. It is intended to support the work of the European Commission, PLA participants, EQF AG members and other stakeholders in developing follow up actions. The report is structured according to the main topics of the PLA and draws on a range of presentations and workshop discussions. The Full PLA agenda is included in Annex I.

Background note

A Background Document, prepared by Cedefop, LLL Platform, CEV, and DG EMPL was made available to all participants in advance of the event. The background note aimed at helping participants get an overview of the state of art in validation in Europe (See annex 2).
2. Welcome from Host Country

2.1 Experts Panel - welcome address

The first day, began with a warm welcome from the host organisations and host country through an expert panel. The panel was moderated by Brikena Xhomaqi, Director LLLPlatform, and started with a welcome address from Teresa Damasio, the President of Escola do Comercio, followed by Joao Costa, the State Secretary for Education of Portugal, Joao Paulo Rebelo, the State Secretary for Youth and Sport of Portugal and Alison Crabb, from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Head of Unit E2 Skills & Qualifications from the European Commission, who highlighted the relevance of coordination and collaboration between Member States on the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is also of interest for Portugal, since one of the main aims is to develop stronger infrastructures in terms of recognition of non-formal learning.

3. Session 1 - Setting the Scene

The objective of the session one was to set the scene for the PLA. Three experts took the floor with the moderation of Cedefop expert Ernesto Villalba followed by a plenary feedback from the discussions.

To introduce the panel, Ernesto Villalba, Cedefop, and CEV Director Gabriella Civico, exposed the main conceptual and practical challenges when attempting to validate non-formal and informal learning and highlighted the questions introduced by the background paper, explaining that the PLA will focus its discussion around formulating responses to them.

The panel discussion chaired by Ernesto Villalba, discussed that validation can be defined as a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. The issue of definition still remains a challenge, although the Recommendation provides a useful blueprint. There is still, however, not harmonised concept at the European level.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that all learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place, is valuable for the individual and for society and, therefore learning outcomes from formal education need to be complemented by processes of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Currently, validation remains an education and training phenomena. Most validation arrangements in Europe can be found within the education sector, followed by the third sector and finally the labour market. However, in terms of stakeholder involvement, while the education and labour market sectors seem to be relatively well entailed in the process of validation, the third sector is still lacking involvement.

The presentation of Anni Karttunen (Finnish National Agency for Education - FINEDU) focused on what the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the 2012 Recommendation in relation to the involvement of relevant stakeholders are and how can non-state actors (civil society organisations, volunteer organisations, youth organisations, employers and trade union organisations) become key players in the implementation of national and European validation strategies.

This was followed by Andrew McCoshan (Consultant and Senior Research Associate, Educational Disadvantage Centre for the Dublin City University in Ireland) who talked about how can we ensure coordination and coherence across initiatives, in order for the individual to benefit the most and
which methods and techniques can be developed in order to assure coherence. Lastly, Martin Noack (Senior Expert of the program “Learning for life” at Bertelsmann Stiftung) in his presentation highlighted the need for innovative and accessible instruments for the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of competences. These should be modular, multilingual and visualized and thus support and/or facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning particularly in disadvantaged target groups, like persons with low levels of formal qualification or with migration background. He also pointed out the importance of quality-assured procedures and outcomes of the validation process, in order to guarantee the uptake and value of the resulting certificates at the labour market. Finally, he emphasized the need to embed validation arrangements into a low threshold guidance infrastructure which could greatly benefit from the wealth of experience of non-formal and informal learning providers.

3. Session 2 - National Approaches
The PLA was the opportunity to share a number of national case studies on the role of non-state actors in validation processes and general update about the progress in the country. Each case study combined inputs from State and non-state actors.

Portugal: progress made and challenges ahead

In the Portuguese presentation, Vitor Dias, from the Vocational Training Centre of Metallurgical Industry and Metalworking CENFIM, Portugal was representing the social partners. He focused upon the definition of non-formal and informal learning and suggested that these terms presuppose already a negative connotation. He, therefore, proposed the concepts of casual and free learning respectively instead, which express a more formal approach to the subject matter. He also divided the role of non-governmental stakeholders in two main perspectives: the conceptual and the operational. Within these two notions, it was emphasised, that in Portugal the conceptual aspect is not yet achieved and more prominence should be given to this aspect.

Ana Claudia Valente, Deputy Director of the ANQEP had also explored Portugal’s context within the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In particular, the main milestones for Portugal to reach out the national objectives in terms of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) were presented together with its links to National Catalogue of Qualifications (NCQ). One of the main milestones in the Portuguese context was the launch of Qualifica centers which main role is to motivate adults for lifelong learning, raise awareness, provide information and guidance in addition Qualifica centers play a key role in involving the different stakeholders and developing local partnerships for qualifications and lifelong learning.

Following the Portuguese presentation, Ireland, Slovakia, Romania and France held presentations focusing on “What are the national experience of cooperation with non-state actors in developing or implementing validation arrangements: challenges & opportunities?”

Ireland
The first presentation was made by Andrina Wafer, Head of Access and Lifelong learning at QQI and Denis O’Brien, Vice President of the National Youth Council Ireland. It emphasised that in order to achieve cooperation between actors in implementing validation a willingness and involvement from different actors must exist, as well as, individual and collective benefits from participation, in order to achieve positive results for all parties.
Slovakia
Slovakia was represented by its state actor Ildiko Pathoova and Alena Minns, the Director General of IUVENTA. The presentation was focused on the standardisation of non-formal education for youth workers. She talked about KomPrax, a national project focused on non-formal education, where the aim is to develop practical skills of young people to be better prepared for the labour market. It was recommended that to achieve better validation arrangements the involvement of NGOs as an expert group is a fulcrum point and that cooperation between non-formal and formal stakeholders in the development of EQF should be fostered. The project itself had allowed a number of consultations with stakeholders.

Romania
Romanian case, presented by Ana Radulescu from the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice and Dr Catalin Ghinararu, from the National Labour Research Institute talked about the state of the evaluation and certification mechanisms in Romania. It concluded that it is necessary to design a quality system that focuses on the needs of the beneficiaries, the employers, employees and the unemployed and that it is necessary to involve more actively the unions and employers, as well as other partners. In Romania although still not happening as non-state actors would wish there are attempts to involve stakeholders from the start.

France
This was presented by Anne Tangy from the Ministry of Labour, National Agency for Adults of France and it made reference to how Orange SA setup a national VAE (Valorisation des Acquis de l’Expérience) project with different partners, in order to secure the employees’ skills and place them on a motivating and continuing path, by enhancing their mobility. It also mentioned the support of several ministries for an initiative launched by a national volunteering association on the development of a skills portfolio for volunteers, which can now be used as a supporting document for VAE applications.
4. Session 3 - Parallel workshops

Two sets of parallel sessions were held, introduced by a presentation by Hanne Christensen from Skills Norway to present the role of non-governmental/non-state actors in developing and implementing validation processes in Norway. The presentation distinguished the four different stages in which the validation process consists: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. It also mentioned that from a learner’s angle there are multiple purposes on why it is relevant to acquire a validation and that this should be taken into consideration when developing strategies.

For the first round of parallel sessions the participants were divided in a random way into three separate groups. The groups spent 25 minutes to hear about specific examples of the types of role of non-state actors from different sectors i.e NGOs, Social Partners and Formal Education in validation processes and ask questions and discuss about it. The presenters, facilitators and rapporteurs stayed in the same room, while the groups moved around between the three parallel sessions.

The workshops presented case studies on the different types of non-state actors, that play an important role on the functioning of the validation system. Their role differed from country to country and from level and type of education as well as target group. The discussions were focussed on: “What is the role and status of non-state actors in validation and how is this role assigned or acquired?” More specific questions presented were “How are they involved in reaching out to most vulnerable groups and in promoting and providing information? How are these actors involved in the actual process of identification, documentation, and assessment of competencies and/or learning outcomes? Are these actors able to provide certification, what type of certification? what’s the value of this certification? How does it relate to formal education qualifications? In what way is their involvement assured?”

The second Parallel Sessions, focused on the experience of non-formal and informal learning providers in the validation of learning outcomes and competencies and how they can play an important role in the setting up of validation systems and aimed at discussing the actual methodologies, processes and tools that non-state actors can use or are using to identify, document, assess and certify competences. The overall guiding questions were: What are the methods and techniques used in the validation process in which non-state actors are involved (and/or lead)? More specific questions asked were “What does the validation process looks like when involving non-state actors? What documentation, assessment and certification mechanisms exist that can support and/or facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning? What are the tools and strategies used by non-state actors to identify and document knowledge and skills? How do they carry assessment and how systematic is it? What is its relationship to the formal education system? What standards are used? What type of certification is provided? What is the value and how does this certification relate to formal qualifications? In what way is NQF used? How could it be used?”

The results of these thematic parallel sessions were as follows:

1) NGOs/Not for Profits’ Perspective

Overall situation
- General Fragmentation: incoherent implementation in the validation system and
- Fragmentation of the tools used by Non-State actors in structuring the validation (there isn’t one unique tool for every country and one unique -really- comprehensive European tool)
- Lack of financial resources;
- Lack of sufficient financial resources causing
- Lack of guidance and expertise;
- Different definitions of quality and different ways of measuring it (if possible);
- Validation System Not updated with new emerging competences or with competencies required in the curricula but which certificates are not accepted by the system;
- Lack of clarity about the role of NGO/ Not for profit sector and how it relates to the role of other sectors in NFIL provision and validation. From within and outside the sector.

Outcomes
- Need for a coherent and well-structured validation system
- Raising awareness of the importance of validation of NFIL and the benefits its outcomes could give to the society especially with employers
- These two aspect can be guaranteed with an effective inclusive mechanism, enhancing cooperation and guaranteeing a multi-agency approach
- This should be based on trust and on mutual respect of the experience, expertise, capacity, competencies and knowledge of every stakeholder
- The cooperation guarantees also the sharing of good practices and limits experienced by the different actors assuring a coverage of gaps and a smooth and fluid validation system (i.e. where prior learning is taken into consideration in the formal education system; where teachers are aware of the value of NFIL and they become themselves promoters
- Enhance the motivation (involving NGOs that have experience in “motivating”)
- Understanding and knowledge of the stakeholders involved (not only between formal and NFIL but also between those delivering NFIL)

2) Economic and Social Partners Perspective

We saw that most partners in this sector are very well involved already, but they are also aware on the lack of involvement of other type of stakeholders such as civil society organisations and aspects such as volunteering, In the Economic and Social Partners perspective workshop the main conclusions were:
- that there needs to be a clarification of roles and a coherent strategy involving all stakeholders, namely employer representatives and civil society organisations;
- this implies that there is a need to develop strategies and guidelines both at national level and at the European level;
- Where all stakeholders must be involved, in order to develop a more coordinated approach. This will provide a better understanding of the actor’s own role and how they can relate with each other;
- Transparency in the processes at national level are very relevant, emphasizing an involvement of both non-state actors and the relevant authorities;
- While ensuring coordination and coherence, individual perspectives should be taken into consideration, ensuring complementarity and consistency in a cross-sectoral and cross-national way, since until now it is mostly reflected on a national set of competencies and qualifications
- There should be an emphasis on gaining validation, rather than just the recognition of it and on developing transversal skills;
- Certification should be available upon demand of the individual, however, there should not be a systematization;
- In the assessment phase, a competence-based system should be put into place and all actors must be involved, as well as, qualification standards must be set and approved by all parties;
- It was emphasised the need for a more accurate framework and guidelines, delineating the assessment of examinations;
- Lastly the occupational and transversal competencies should be given equal attention and valued while the validation processes are being developed.

3) Formal Education Perspective

Two presentations illustrated validation systems in the French and Flemish higher educational sector
- Relatively low uptake in Flanders compared to France (incl successful cases)
- French and Flemish systems are organised differently

PHE/HE
- Able to provide certificates
- All types of certificates depending on the country, from package of learning (module certificate) outcomes to whole diploma including Masters Degrees (France) which is recognised everywhere (not the case for Flanders)
- Short term qualifications specifically for vulnerable groups (France)
- France: Type of those involved 1) have previous formal qualification validated or 2) adults adding to their existing education

Programme design
- A change from teacher-centred to student centred approach (what student knows and is able to do – Learning outcomes approach -> Impact on recognition and employability)
- Employers value that employees have their competences updated and validated
- Academics have to specify knowledge to be acquired and competences/soft skills in programme design

Procedure
- Applicant gathers portfolio of documents
- Applicant checks if there is a match of own competences with programme
- Studies programme design
- Jury assesses if outcomes have been achieved
- Everything needs to be very well documented and rejection motivated

Reaching out and promoting validation
- Career guidance and support by dedicated staff dependent on means of school
- Info mostly given through the web
- Free individual support to understand the full process
- Increased guidance for vulnerable groups
Collaborations with other stakeholders to reach out to vulnerable groups (France)
- Importance of building trust in collaborations
- Collaboration with social organisations/associations at local and regional level
- Reach out through employment agencies
- Cooperation with EC (access to online language courses for own students and refugees)
- Involvement of students who are studying social work who support refugees (mutual benefit)

Strategies
- There needs to be a political level to recognition to harmonise procedures and standards
- Flanders has a fragmented validation system with several systems in place and HE left out in new decree because too complicated
- Clear orientation of students needed. The path chosen might avoid validation at a later stage.
- Validation needs to become a norm and not be an exception and be a way to obtain a qualification in a normal way.
5. World Cafe Workshop

The World Cafe Workshop took place in the plenary room and had as main topic “How to create synergies between all stakeholders?” The aim of the World Cafe was to have different stakeholders discussing in small groups on how to create coordinated validation systems by having a close collaboration of actors working together. There were 10 tables with a fixed number of 6 chairs around them and the participants were asked to sit randomly in the groups. Each table had a facilitator who stayed always in the same table and helped facilitate the discussion by briefly describing the previous discussions to each new group. Rather than having an agreement, the idea was to gather thoughts and notions on a flip chart. Each group had 10 minutes to participate in the group discussion and after the time was over, participants were asked to rotate to other groups.

The specific questions attributed to each table and the gathered responses were as follows:

Table 1: How can we find a balance between the different actors, target groups and objectives of validation?

The different stakeholders have different needs. The balance between the different needs depends on the specific context in which validation might be applied for example at local levels. This has to be translated also at a higher scale, creating sectoral skills councils or other type of forum that allows for the exchange of views between the different stakeholders. It is crucial, however, that this body/ institution is given certain power to take decisions and that it is ruled by clear mandate, given time to provide solutions and resources to make a difference. Financial, issues, time available and personal relations are critical factors in reaching balance. Regular meetings between the different stakeholders are important to build trust and a common understanding of the challenges ahead. Finding a balance is easier at the local level and we should explore ways to upscales these examples.

Table 2: How do we ensure mutual support & trust among the different stakeholders?

With clear common interest and defined values; Transparency; Appointing the right, motivated and competent people in the needed roles; Legitimacy & credibility; Balanced add value; Respect for cultural differences; Common contribution / ownership; good quality assurance is essential.

Table 3: How can the involvement of non-state actors be ensured? What are the conditions needed for them to get involved?

Clear phases for implementation identified and engagement and coordination of actors. Sectoral councils for qualification invite all stakeholders; sectoral responsibilities according to needs; Steering committees should include a mix of relevant stakeholders and so facilitate shared feeling of commitment and responsibility. Collecting Erasmus plus projects on the issue and bringing results together for implementation; State involvement to gather relevant stakeholders together to enhance ownership; Marketing is needed - what is it for?; Vouchers for employers to improve employee’s competencies through validation; regions and municipalities should include NFIL in their strategies and involve suitable partners at their level. Trust needs to be developed for competence development and umbrella organisations should activate grassroots actors and liaise between ministries, citizens and other stakeholders. NGOs/ non-state actors should know better one another, what are each others strengths? What do we do? The role of non-state actors in validation processes should be specified at strategic policy level.

Table 4: What are the methods and techniques that can be developed to ensure coordination and coherence in validation processes?

Clarification of what is validation is needed and also better legal basis and clearer division of roles and responsibilities between sectors and stakeholders. A common set of tools, coherent with existing
references is also important, as is consultation with all stakeholders in a common forum to build trust, transparency, transferability and ownership. Using NQFs and other formal standards for benchmarking and building bridges between different validation processes is additionally important.

Table 5: What are the challenges for employers in valuing already validated NFIL from an external entity when selecting new employees or employees for promotion/upgrading?

Trust; better explanation of the contents of the certification; Certification according to legislation; Updating with the upgrading; Understandable language by employers & employees; Comparable documents (content vs certification); employers to be more open to reading CVs with 'eyes wide open'; Employers to be more involved in definition of validation standards; State and CSOs to provide common validation standards; Search for cost reductions; Comparable standards are needed; Market value should be developed and understood.

Table 6: How can learning outcomes that are acquired through processes without a specific curriculum be better understood and valued?

Employers should understand better the value of a learning outcomes approach and give it the same value as more traditional formal education approaches. Documentation of experiences and opportunities by each individual should be supported and encouraged. Portfolios should be used and guidance offered and made available. The purpose must be made clear to all actors involved. Need to connect learning outcomes to specific skills and competencies.

Table 7: How can validation processes be more applicable to people of all ages?

There is a need for greater counselling, guidance and information for learners, and valuing the experience of every candidate should be the norm. The goal of the individual as regards how they will use the validation of learning outcomes should be better understood as this is likely to change with age. Tools should be more user friendly and therefore more accessible to people of all ages.

Table 8: How can NFIL and the validation of learning be better taken into account for students/learners in full time formal education, therefore reaching a more holistic approach to their education?

There should be incentives and be more attractive to students. Self assessment should be promoted. Need to persuade stakeholders that validation doesn’t threaten formal learning. ECTS can be allocated for volunteering & student representation roles. Regarding the will of FE institutions of validation NFIL as a quality indicator and ranking is a supporting measure that could be taken. Clearly distinguishing between Recognition of qualifications (by different countries and institutions) and validation of NFIL will help. Formalizing the informal is a problem/challenge. Learning outcomes should be made precise and understandable from the part of validating organisations and NFIL providers. FE institutions should encourage and provide tools for students to get their NFIL assessed and mainstreamed. Teachers should act as change agents to bring paradigm shift of combining FE and NFIL.

Table 9: What steps are needed for citizens to better understand the advantages of validation of NFIL?

Showcase good practices and gather testimonials of successful applicants was mentioned during the discussion. In addition, more information should be collected about the benefits of validation and added value for the individuals. Validation is a way to open up formal education to other forms of learning. Therefore better communication tools/forms should be used to reach out to the most in need targets. A more active role should be played by employers to actively promote validation opportunities.

Table 10: What is “One thing” that needs to change or happen for validation of NFIL to be of greatest added value to citizens?
Practitioners have to actually use the ‘one million’ tools that have been developed; Inform better the citizens and show concrete examples and success cases; Demonstrate better the benefits to employers / HR companies; Communication - better shared understanding to all stakeholders of benefits of validation; co-ordinate better on the details of how validation works between stakeholders, what tools are available and who pays?; Employers should ask about NFIL when hiring or promoting people; Change mindset - promote validation to the employees; Increase the credibility of the validation systems so it is the same value as formal education certificate; Training to employers and employment agencies so that they understand the value; Legisl ate for the right to validation and to have it financed; Formal education system needs to ‘want’ validation and give it the space it needs to operate alongside formal systems; Needs driven approach should be developed; Include NFIL when training formal education teachers; Systems should be developed with the right policies so that it can be implemented - an entity needs to be made responsible; Promote all learning so validation is an option where it is needed.

The Flip charts were then presented in the Plenary, where the facilitators summarised the main ideas and suggestions collected, and these were also incorporated into the final conclusions of the PLA as detailed in section 8 of this report.
6. EESC Expert Remarks

The expert panel involved main day workshops and sessions reports by rapporteurs to which the EESC expert had to comment to by bringing his expertise.

Pavel Trantina, President of SOC of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) explained the EESC position on validation and highlighted the 5 main areas that need to be addressed in order that efforts on Validation of NFIL can sufficiently advance in regards to the 2018 deadline for the Recommendation implementation. He explained that it is very important

- (1) to setup frameworks, by defining qualifications, however, it is also necessary to consider the impact that these would have in its real application. Another recurrent problem is who would then implement these frameworks? HR agencies are an important actor in this field and should support strategies. Other important aspects referred were
- (2) the motivation aspect to take part in the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which can be both based on demand or money (ESF),
- (3) cultural differences and the way Member States perceive the concepts of learning outcomes and diplomas,
- (4) the “language” of the stakeholders and lastly
- (5) the accessibility concern and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.
7. Project Presentations

Participants that wished to present projects of work done in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning could do it in the Plenary, by preparing a One Minute Elevator Pitch, in which they should have registered the day before. 12 projects were presented (The full Posters can be found in the annex):

**VOLCAR**  
**Partners:** BONSAI, EDOS Foundation, CEV  
**Project goal:**  
To deliver guidance for volunteers to raise their employability through triple support in getting their learning outcomes validated (based on the ch-q method for competence management, with special focus on translating competences that volunteers gained whilst volunteering).  
**Project Result:**  
➔ Booklet (PDF/printed) for volunteers how to “translate” their learning outcomes acquired whilst volunteering for the labour market.  
➔ Online Moodle training to support the use of the booklet.  
➔ Face to face training in addition to the online training, custom made for volunteering organisations.

**LEVER/LEVER UP (Project secured for another two years, changing the name from LEVER to LEVER UP)**  
2014-2016/2016-2018  
**Partners:** Good Network Foundation (Fundacja Dobra Sieć); Hominem Challenge SL; Via University College; European Centre Valuation Prior Learning; Scuola Nazionale Servizi; Confindustria Lecco e Sondrio; LAVOPS; Fondazione Politecnico di Milano; CEV; CSVnet  
**Project Goal:**  
➔ Collection of good practices to feed a shared model of competence/transversal skills certifications, in line with EUROPASS.  
➔ To foster the virtuous connection between the informal education environment (voluntary environment) and the profit environment.  
➔ To provide common guidelines to implement the model and the approach.  
**Project Result:**  
➔ Cross National Survey;  
➔ Model creation;  
➔ Webtool;  
➔ Assessor Tutor Training;  
➔ Certification Release and Report;  
➔ Dissemination Dashboard and Report;  
➔ Impact Monitoring;  
➔ Sustainability Plan

**BEVIN**  
2015-2017
**Partners:** The Centre for Education and Enterprise Support; Sea Teach S.L.; VOL.TO; Center RUNI; Eurofortis.

**Project goal:**
To raise the indicator of recognizability of adult’s competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning through realization of the following operational goals: developing of database of effective tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning, developing of validation opportunities trends analyzer.

**Project Result:**
Database of effective tools for validation of non-formal and informal learning and Validation opportunities trends analyzer.

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**RIVER**
2012-2013

**Partners:** Die Berater, Bupnet, CSVNet, Kamut, Lunaria, Alliance of EVS, Budapest Cultural Centre, Austrian Red Cross.

**Project Goal:**
➔ To make the learning benefits of senior volunteering activities visible;
➔ To provide and improve learning opportunities for the increasing number of senior citizens in Europe;
➔ To develop and test a planning and validation system for senior volunteering;
➔ To motivate older people to engage in senior volunteering as a learning experience;
➔ To promote intergenerational learning by working with intergenerational senior volunteering projects

**Project Result:**
➔ Internal training workshop LEVELS;
➔ Concept and software of the RIVER methodology;
➔ Concept for a training workshop and coaching guidelines for learning and volunteering facilitators to enable them to apply the RIVER methodology;
➔ Dissemination Products

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“**Certification of the Qualifications of the Youth Workers in NGOs – road to greater recognition of youth work**”

**Partners:** Modavi ONLUS; Institute of Entrepreneurship Development; Cracow University of Economics; Coordinator; AEGEE.

**Project Goal:**
➔ Establishment of European youth worker’s competence profile with defining competence areas and steps of competence development in order to facilitate lifelong learning paths development.
➔ Adoption and development of a suitable common methodology for evaluating and certifying learning outcomes and qualifications.

**Project Result:**
➔ Development of a system of certification using three main steps:

   ◆ (1) CV evaluation
(2) on-line test and
(3) case study presentation

**VAPOVO**
2013-2015
**Partners:** University of Presov, EDOS Foundation, European Alliance for Volunteering.
**Project goal:**
- To support organizations in developing a validation policy and strategy, so “validation” is not limited to the availability of tools, but becomes part of the organisations policy in recruiting and supporting volunteers. Special attention will be payed to volunteering by students at universities, and how this volunteering can be linked to their scientific study / development.
- To develop a training aiming to foster the recognition process
**Project Result:**
- Develop, test and disseminate the training

**e-Voc**
2016-2018
**Partners:** Spanish Volunteering Platform, CSVnet, EDOS Foundation, National University of Ireland.
**Project goal:**
To improve the offer, accessibility and quality of training for Volunteer Coordinators on the validation of competences.
**Project Result:**
To develop the first open and multilingual online training course for Volunteer Coordinators on the validation of competences.

**I Have Experienced**
2014-2016
**Partners:** Youth Volunteering Organizations from 12 Countries (Italy, Belgium, Spain, Finland, France, Czech Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Serbia, Korea and Mexico) 2 Research Institutes and 2 Volunteering Networks (the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organizations and the Italian Volunteering Centres Network).
**Project goal:**
To launch at European level an open source, free to use, well documented and smooth validation system - including its digital tools for mobile and desktop devices- so to allow its mainstream adoption by youth organizations involved in volunteering and informal/experiential learning.
**Project Result:**
Research Report

**GREAT**
2014-2016
**Partners:** AEGEE, LLL-P, La Ligue de l’Enseignement, VUB, WOSM, YEU.
**Project Goal:**
- Creating common guidelines for recognition of NFIL acquired in a volunteering context, supporting youth organisations in providing internal validation systems which can be of value externally.
- Helping long-term volunteers to raise the self-awareness on their acquired competencies, their value in an employment context, and acquainting them with the identification and documentation procedures. This will be useful to go through National Validation Systems.
• Raising awareness of employers on the benefits and impacts of long-term volunteering for the development of transversal abilities.

**Project Result:**
• Study report on expectations from external stakeholders (formal education institutions and employers) regarding competences and recognition processes of NFIL, especially employers’ understanding, views and needs regarding this recognition.
• Assessment methods for non-formal and informal learning.
• Common guidelines for recognition of NFIL within youth organisations.
• Online platform enabling stakeholders to find all the developed tools and more!
• Training 15 youth activists to act as coaches supporting organisations and individuals willing to implement an internal recognition system in their organisation or willing to go through the process.
• Awareness-raising campaign towards European youth-led organisations and companies.

**NCNA**
2016-2018
**Partners:** Jugend am Werk Steiermark GmbH, Fachhochschule des Mittelstands, WinNova, FormAzione Co&So Network, BRIDGES Programmes, E.N.T.E.R. GmbH, VARAŽDINSKA ŽUPANIJA, CPU.

**Project goal:**
to develop an innovative and target-group-oriented model for the assessment, validation and recognition of prior experiences and informal learning of refugees and asylum seekers with a positive perspective to stay in one of the EU member countries. The model will be based on a learning-outcomes approach and use EQF/ECVET tools, credits and descriptors. The NCNA model will be European, target-group-oriented and holistic

**Project Result:**
• Research Study: The NCNA target group is both quite unknown in Europe as well as diverse. Therefore, it was necessary to implement an investigation study related to possible tools and approaches to be used in the assessment model and to investigate briefly the background of the target group.
• Model Handbook: Based on the results of the NCNA research study, the partnership is developing an EQF-/ECVET-based approach for the assessment, validation and recognition of, mainly informally acquired, competences in the sectors of metal, wood, tourism, and construction.
• Labour Market Integration Plan: The final core output of the NCNA project will be the structure for a labour market integration plan.

**InnoVal**
2016-2018
**Partners:** LLLP, ANESPO, UCLL, EIESP, DAFNE-KEK, EUCEN

**Project goal:**
InnoVal Project (Innovative Assessment Methods for Validation) aims to address the urgent need to offer valid & reliable assessment methods that allow all learners to have a chance at validation with a special focus on disadvantaged groups such as migrants, long-term unemployed, and those who have had an adverse experience with formal education including with school-based assessments.

**Project Result:**
• Research Phase – Review of innovative assessment methods
Innovative Methods Toolbox – Collecting and analysing case studies
Development of a Training Programme and Open Educational Material (OERS)
Creation of an Online Learning Environment – hosting the Open Educational Material (OERS)
Piloting Phase: Testing the Training Programme & OERS in practice
Advocacy Pack – Campaign targeted at both educational stakeholders & policy makers

**Competence card by Bertelsman Stiftung - Meine-berufserfahrung.de**
2017
**Partners:** Bertelsmann Stiftung

**Project goal:**
to develop a multilingual picture-based web-site for self-assessment of vocational skills in 30 professions. This tool was to be based on competence models developed by professional experts and validated by representatives from the regulatory bodies, masters, trainers and other occupational practitioners, as well as representatives from respective professional associations and scientists from renowned research institutes. The competence models define 5-8 occupational fields of application for each profession, which again encompass 3-8 typical occupational actions each.

**Project result:**
- For each of the professions 20-40 photos of typical occupational actions are shown. The core of the website is the simple question: “How often have you done this?” The learner then can choose from four options for each picture/occupational action. After about 5 minutes of reviewing the professional experience, the result of the self-assessment is displayed and can be downloaded, printed or e-mailed. The client can switch between six website language options at any time: German, English, Russian, Farsi, Arabic and Turkish.
- The website www.meine-berufserfahrung.de presents the first 8 professions in November/December 2017 and will include all 30 professions by mid 2018.
- The output of this instrument will be a positive list of the respondent’s experiences in the occupational fields of application constituting a profession. It can be a useful basis for the counsellor and the client for decisions about further strategies regarding employment, training or even formal recognition.

**The validation of Learning Outcomes in Poland - New Opportunities for Attaining Qualifications**
The polish study on validation is out and focuses on What has changed in the assessment of competences with the recently introduced Act on the Integrated Qualifications System? What exactly is validation? What methods are used in validation? Who should be involved in the process?

Link to the study [here](#).

**8. Conclusion**

Involving non-state actors from different sectors in the implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of NFIL is a necessary condition for successfully putting in place working validation arrangements. Combined, collective efforts of stakeholders working together with common aims and messages will have a greater outreach and impact, leading to the creation of a broader understanding and engagement from citizens in validation processes. More coherent and coordinated validation processes will increase labour force potential with more validated skills that are relevant for the modern labour market, contributing to a better match of skills demand and supply. Better synergies and cooperation between sectors and different stakeholders will increase
citizens’ motivation to take up more learning opportunities for personal development and lifelong learning leading to increased employability and mobility for citizens.

Non-state actors should work together with National Authorities to ensure that the identification, documentation, assessment and certification mechanisms that can support and/or facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning move beyond tests and examinations and even portfolios that are still largely based on written form. Other methods such as declarative methods, observations or simulations, games can be more widely used especially in a targeted way with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups perhaps most in need of making their learning visible. Other examples of possible methods to be used are: Online CVs; Portfolios; Mobile Apps; Multimedia tools etc.

The process can also benefit from the wealth of experience of non-formal and informal learning providers in the recognition of learning outcomes and competencies and they can contribute to providing training and capacity building for employers or other stakeholders to help them better understand the value of NFIL and what it can offer them in terms of advanced skills from existing and potential employees, and its value to society as a whole in the development of citizens personal development and lifelong-learning journey. Previously experimental and/or pilot validation processes that have been proven to work well, but only so far used by a limited number of entities in specific sectors, can be mainstreamed.

There are also challenges however. Differences in language & terminologies used by actors from different sectors makes it difficult to establish a fluent dialogue and common understanding. Objectives and interests in the establishment of validation arrangements might differ due to stakeholders’ different mandates and needs. The lack of existing cooperation with and between different non-state actors might make dialogue difficult. Citizens’ lack of understanding in how to acknowledge, identify and describe/articulate their learning outcomes and connect this to practical application/use in the labour market makes a common understanding of validation processes across sectors and stakeholders even more important and at the same time more challenging. Finally, the challenge of cost and adequate resourcing cannot be avoided. Deciding on the funding, allocation of resources and ways of working is not an easy task to solve. The EQF AG PLA on RNFIL concludes that:

For different non-state actors to become key players in the implementation of national and European validation strategies there should be:

1. Mechanisms developed to facilitate all stakeholders (such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations, other non-formal education & training providers) clear involvement from the start, in the design, development, implementation and promotion of validation strategies
2. Clearly defined roles for the different stakeholders within a coherent strategy jointly prepared involving all stakeholders.
3. Increased proactivity from employers about recognising and valuing NFIL in employment application and selection processes that take into account and value skills and competencies of existing and potential employees gained in a variety of ways and from a variety of providers, not only through formal education or vocational training.
4. Increased proactivity from other non-state actors in getting involved in the validation processes, through the outreach of individuals, promotion of benefits and carrying out identification, documentation, assessment and certification.
5. Clear guidelines developed about what is an NFIL “Authorising Organisation” in the national context and transparent National processes are established regarding how to become one.
National databases of “Authorising Organisations” for Validation of NFIL developed by non-state actors working together with the relevant authorities.

6. Upscaling of Pilot or experimental validation processes, where there is evidence that they are fit for purpose, into the mainstream and identification of ways to fund their use.

To ensure coordination and coherence across initiatives to ensure that the individual citizen benefits the most, stakeholders should:

1. Create a coordination framework for all stakeholders
2. Develop strategies and guidelines for validation that are coherent across sectors and assure complementarity of processes
3. Provide a series of national cross-sector Guidebooks/ manuals targeted at all of the stakeholders (training providers, employers, citizens, non-governmental organisations) identifying benefits to individuals emphasising that these processes are aimed both at those looking to access formal education opportunities and those seeking employment that requires a specific proof of competence.
4. Make the links between validation processes and National and European frameworks and Levels such as NQF EQF
5. Make use of and develop further existing tool, such as Europass, ECVET, etc., taking steps towards a standard, recognisable tool for validation available for stakeholders and citizens.
6. Contribute to the development of the CEDEFOP inventory to include a directory of different tools and processes for validation of NFIL that have been developed, particularly those as a result of EU funded projects.
7. Collectively clarify the terminology and the distinction or links between “Validation of NFIL”, “Recognition of Prior Learning” (RPL) and “Credit Transfer” etc in the national contexts.
8. Make more visible and develop better links to the fact that Validation of NFIL is an aspect of “learning by doing” and important for dual education processes.
9. Work together to amend national qualification lists and job categories and profiles (eg ESCO references) to better reflect the reality of non-formal and informally acquired learning outcomes.

To ensure coherence and better synergies between the work and activities of non-state actors in the field of Validation of NFIL different methods and techniques should be developed:

1. Ensuring that Education strategies take into account not only formal but also non-formal and informal learning possibilities and having a life-long-learning perspective.
2. Nationally and potentially European agreed glossaries of terminology and acronyms
3. Capacity building concerning NQF and EQF and on how to write learning outcomes and referencing to NQFs and EQF validation processes outcomes.
4. Cross-sector capacity building and training opportunities - adapted to the national context and delivered online for easy access.
5. Ensuring that occupational and transversal competencies are given equal attention and value in the validation processes developed.
6. The establishment of National cross-sector working groups on a permanent basis to develop and monitor the process. (Governance)
7. Suitable cost-benefit research undertaken to build the evidence-base for the ‘business case’ for Validation to be useful for all stakeholders, especially employers.

To quality assure the process, and the outcomes of the validation process, several developments are required:

1. A mechanism to monitor and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes in place, in order to assure quality.
2. A consensuated ‘checklist’ or “indicators” for quality assurance, including eg: Must be decision by citizens if they participate or not, related to learning outcomes, Overseen by a cross-sector advisory body, etc.

3. Identification of a Government contact point for this purpose.

4. Establishment of clear National processes for accreditation with the Authorising Bodies of the different validation processes and tools used by different actors.

5. Ensuring the quality of the authorising bodies and the professional development of their staff

6. Provision of adequate funding and resourcing for the validation processes.

7. Ensuring that whilst validation can be more cost-effective than the provision of a (full) training course this does not result in reduced quality of or access to the opportunities that citizens have for learning and skills and competence acquisition.

8. The integration of NFIL into the work and activities of the Education quality assurance bodies.

9. The development of peer review and participatory processes.
Annex I - Agenda

**Thursday 21 September 2017**

**08:30 - 09:00**  
Registration and list for elevator pitches

**09:00 - 09:15**  
Welcome address  
- Alison Crabb, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion  
- Margarida Marques, Secretary of State, European Affairs  
- Brikena Xhomaqi, Director of Lifelong Learning Platform  
*Chair: Gabriella Civico*

**09.15 - 09.45**  
Setting the scene – conceptual and practical challenges  
- Ernesto Villalba, Cedefop  
- Gabriella Civico, European Volunteer Centre  
*Panel discussion with experts*  
- Anni Karttunnen, Finnish National Agency for Education, Finland  
- Andrew McCoshan, Consultant and Senior Research Associate, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Dublin City University, Ireland  
- Martin Noack, Validation Expert Bertelsmann-Stiftung, Germany  
*Chair: Ernesto Villalba*  
Questions to answer from background note.

**09.45 - 10.15**  
National approaches  
1. Portugal & Spain  
The Portuguese and Spanish cases - *what progress has been made, what are the strengths & weaknesses of current validation systems in relation to involvement of non-state actors in the process?*  
Ministry representatives, Adult Education Council, Youth Council, Education CSO, Social Partner (tbc)  
Q&A  
*Chair: Eszter Salamon (LLLP-EPA)*

**10.15 - 10.30**  
Coffee break

**10.30 – 12.00**  
Parallel sessions (I)  
These parallel sessions focus on discussing and determining the role non-state actors are playing or might play in a functioning validation system. Their role might differ from country to country and from level and type of education as well as target group. The parallel workshop should each develop a common view on what role non-state actors can play and how to assure this role.  
*Setting the scene plenary presentation by Hanne Chistensen (Vox Norway): What is the role of non-governmental non-state actors in developing and implementing validation processes? (short introductory speech)*  
Followed up by 3 (tbc) parallel Workshops; rotating every 30 minutes  

1 expert & 1 facilitator per workshop:
1. NGOs/ Not for Profits perspective: Mattia Baiutti (University of Udine - Italy) & Elisa Briga (EFIL - Europe)
2. Economic & Social Partners perspective: Carlo Frisig (ETUC - Luxembourg) & Eurochambers (tbc)
3. Formal education perspective: Sylvie Bonichon (EURASHE)

The overall guiding question is: **What is the role of non-state actors in validation and how is this role assigned or acquired?** More specific questions are:

- How are they involved in reaching out to most vulnerable groups and in promoting and providing information?
- How are these actors involved in the actual process of identification, documentation, and assessment of competences and/or learning outcomes?
- Are these actors able to provide certification, what type of certification? what’s the value of this certification? How does it relate to formal education qualifications?
- In what way is their involvement assured?

Rapporteurs: Giulia Bordin (non-formal), Helena Gandra (social partners), Ulla-Alexandra Mattl (formal)

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>12.00 – 13.00</td>
<td>Lunch (choose parallel sessions)</td>
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| 13.00 - 13.30 | Plenary: Reporting from group discussions (Rapporteurs)  
Q&A |
| 13.30 – 14.00 | National approaches  
2. Ireland & Slovakia  
The Irish and Slovakian cases: **What are the national experience of cooperation with non-state actors in developing or implementing validation arrangements: challenges & opportunities?**  
Ministry representatives, Adult Education Council, Youth Council, Education CSO, Social Partner (tbc)  
Q&A  
Chair: Eszter Salamon (LLLP-EPA) |
| 14.00 – 14.30 | Coffee break (continue choosing the parallel sessions) |
| 14.30 – 15.00 | National approaches  
3. Romania & France  
The French and Romanian cases: **What national experience of cooperation with stakeholders in developing or implementing validation arrangements in the country: challenges & opportunities?**  
Ministry representatives, Adult Education Council, Youth Council, Education CSO, Social Partner (tbc)  
Q&A  
Chair: Eszter Salamon (LLLP-EPA) |
| 15.00 – 17.30 | Parallel sessions (II) |
The experience of non-formal and informal learning providers in the recognition of learning outcomes and competencies can play an important role in the setting up of validation systems. It aims at discussing the actual techniques and processes that non-state actors can use to identify, document, assess and certify competences.

**Setting the scene plenary presentation (tbc): How to validate skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings?**

(introductory speech)

Followed by **3 (tbc) parallel Workshops:**

1 expert & 1 facilitator for each sessions:
- NGOs/ Not for Profits perspective: Susana Oliviera (EAEA - Portugal) – Gabriella Civico (CEV)
- Social Partner: Joaquim Santos (ETUC - Portugal) & Sandrine Javelaud tbc MEDEF (France)
- Formal education perspective: Rudy Van Renterghem (EUA - Belgium) – Brikena Xhomaqi (LLLP – Europe)

The overall guiding question is: **What are the methods and techniques used in the validation process in which non-state actors are involved (and/or lead)?**

More specific questions are:
- What does the validation process looks like when involving non-state actors? What documentation, assessment and certification mechanisms exist that can support and/or facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning?
- What are the tools and strategies used by non-state actors to identify and document knowledge and skills?
- How do they carry assessment and how systematic is it? What is its relationship to the formal education system? What standards are used?
- What type of certification is provided? What is the value and how does this certification relate to formal qualifications? In what way is NQF used? How could it be used?

**Rapporteurs:** Giulia Bordi (non-formal), Helena Gandra (social partners), Ulla-Alexandra Mattl (formal)

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17.30 - 18.30  (study visit or social activity)

**Friday 22 September 2017**

08:30 - 09:00  Registration

09.00 - 09.30  Reporting from group discussions (Rapporteurs)
- **Expert response:** Pavel Trantina, President of SOC in EESC
- Q&A

09.15 – 09.30  Presentation from stakeholders on work done in the field
- 1 minute elevator pitch (register a day before)
- Volcar Great YEU WOSM

09.30 – 11.00  World café – plenary room: How to create synergies across all stakeholders!
The aim of the world café is to have different stakeholders discussing how to create coordinated validation systems in which the different actors work together. 10 tables each one question to discuss for 10 minutes and then move to the next.

Chair: Martin Noack

Table 1 YFI (Finland), Table 2 WOSM (France), Table 3 LLP (Europe), Table 4 CPGME (France), Table 5 CEV (Europe), Table 6 ESU (Europe), Table 7 Cedefop (Europe), Table 8 (tbc), Table 9 (tbc), Table 10 (tbc)

The overall guiding question is: **In what way can we assure coordination and coherence across initiatives, to ensure that the individual citizen benefits the most?** More specific questions are:

- How can we find a balance between the different actors, target groups and objectives of validation?
- How do we assure trust among the different stakeholders?
- How can the involvement of non-state actors be assured? What are the requirements for them to get involved?
- What are the methods and techniques that can be developed to ensure coherence?
- + 6 more questions needed

Rapporteurs: facilitator from each table

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<td>11.00 – 11.15</td>
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<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<td>11.45 – 12.00</td>
<td>Conclusions: main outcomes “One page conclusions” LLP &amp; CEV</td>
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<td>(open discussion with participants)</td>
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<td>Closing remarks</td>
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<td>● Goncalo Xufre, Portuguese National Agency President</td>
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<td>● Lieve Van den Brande, European Commission, DG EMPL</td>
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<td>12.00-13.00</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; departure</td>
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Annex II - Participant list

(attached excel file in the shared presentation folder)
Annex III - Background note

Introduction

Validation initiatives aim at making visible and providing value to all learning an individual has acquired, so the person can use it in the labour market or in education and training. Understood as the process in which an authorising body\(^1\) confirms against a set of standards the learning outcomes an individual has acquired in non-formal and informal settings, validation consists of four stages: Identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

The Council recommendation of 2012\(^2\) puts forward a series of principles for countries to take into account when they are establishing their validation arrangements. The different principles have been further developed in the European Guidelines for validation\(^3\) and they are further explored in the regular updates of the European inventory on validation\(^4\).

One of these crucial aspects and a critical success factor for the creation of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe is the involvement and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders in the design, implementation, awareness raising and promotion of the systems. The 2012 Recommendation asks Member States to:

> promote the involvement in the development and implementation of the elements and principles [...] of all relevant stakeholders, such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.\(^5\)

Non-state actors (civil society organisations, social partners, private education providers) are important in making validation of non-formal and informal learning a reality. They are major providers of non-formal and informal learning opportunities and they are central actors in reaching out to those that can benefit the most from validation. Their work with individuals who are unemployed, at risk of unemployment, migrants and other disadvantaged individuals place them in a strategic position for the implementation of validation. In addition, in several countries, they directly

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\(^1\) Each Member State and stakeholder concerned is free to determine whether or not a body is ‘authorized’ in this regard through their own quality criteria


\(^4\) www.cedefop.europa.eu/validation/inventory

carry out validation processes resulting in, for example, certificates for learning acquired through volunteering, or personal competence portfolios.

In many cases, these activities from non-governmental organisations are not linked to government-led validation strategies and they are rarely connected to formal education or to the National Qualification Frameworks (NQF). While there might be reasons to have separate developments in validation depending on the aims and objectives of the validation process and the target groups and actors involved, coordination across sectors and between actors is an important element of creating better functioning, more individual-centred validation arrangements.

Objectives

This PLA aims at exchanging experiences and advancing understanding across the member states’ and amongst all stakeholders on how to successfully involve non-state actors in the design, development, implementation and awareness-raising of validation strategies. The main focus of the PLA is to reach a better understanding about how the different stakeholders can work together in implementing coordinated, well-functioning and effective validation arrangements in the context of NQF developments.

The PLA, thus, explores how actors from each sector individually and collectively cooperate and contribute to the validation systems before, during and after the setting up of the arrangements. This can be for example, through membership of advisory committees, contributing with own examples and experiences, awareness raising, mapping of existing systems, needs analysis, etc.

The PLA will present case studies and allow time to discuss possible alternatives and approaches to link the validation initiatives in which actors from the different sectors are involved. Thus, allowing actors from across the members states to learn from each other and better cooperate at EU level, consequently contributing to better mobility and employability of the targeted individual learners.

Current situation – evidence from the 2016 European Inventory

The 2016 update of the European inventory on validation collects information on validation divided into three different broad sectors: Education and training, labour market and third sector. By labour market, we refer to validation initiatives in which private sector (for-profit) institutions play a central role (alone or in collaboration with public sector institutions). This might include validation initiatives in the for-profit sector that aim to enable individuals to access jobs or to move within the labour market. These initiatives might therefore be promoted, for example, by employers or employee or employers’ associations. In the third sector, validation initiatives might relate to learning achieved through youth work or volunteering and concern arrangements developed by third sector organisations such as charities or NGOs, to support a variety of target groups (e.g. third country nationals, the unemployed, young people facing exclusion, people with a disability, etc.).
Stakeholder involvement

Figure 1 shows the number of countries that have validation arrangements by broad sector. There are significant amounts of initiatives across Europe within the third and labour market, where non-state actors play a major role. Figure 1 shows that in the third sector, validation initiatives are in place to varying extents in 22 countries and in 15 countries there exist some short of systematic arrangement covering parts of the labour market. Third sector validation initiatives, however, are only prioritised in Italy, the Netherlands, Iceland and Denmark while labour market initiatives are prioritised in 10 countries.

Figure 1: Validation arrangements by broad sector (Number of countries with validation arrangements)

Source: 2016 European inventory country fiches

Non-state actors in the third sector collaborate much less with national and government organisations than labour market initiatives (see figure 2). Government and national organisations are involved in validation arrangements in the third sector in less than 20% of the countries, while in labour market initiatives Government organisations are involved in 60% of the cases and national organisation in 80%. In general, labour market initiatives tend to involve more actors than third sector initiatives that tend to be smaller in scale and mainly connected to individual youth or civil society organisations. This seems to suggest that third sector initiatives are generally disconnected from the national strategies or overall approaches to validation.
Civil society and youth organisations are also less connected with validation processes in education and training sector than employer associations, trade unions or chambers of commerce (see blue bar in figure 2). Further analysis of the data shows that they are normally involved in raising awareness, promotion activities or providing counselling. They also, to a lesser extent, participate in the identification and documentation of skills in validation initiatives from within the education and training sector. Social partners, such as trade unions, employers or employer organisations are more commonly linked to education and training validation practices. They are also involved in raising awareness, promotion activities or providing counselling and they are more active than civil society or youth organisations in setting up standards.

Connection to Qualification frameworks

The 2016 inventory shows that there is an increasing link between validation and NQFs. In 2016, 28 of the 36 countries under study allow for access to or the acquisition (full or partial) of a formal qualification included in the NQF. An analysis of the links between third sector organisation validation initiatives and NQFs shows that these are much less linked to NQF or formal education programmes than initiatives in education and training or in the labour market. The data from the 2016 inventory show that of the 22 countries with validation initiatives in the third sector, only 3 were reported to have a link with the formal education sector, while this is the case in 12 countries in the labour market initiatives. This is not surprising, third sector initiatives tend to focus on
identification and documentation, not placing major emphasis in certification that has the potential to lead to the award of a qualification.

Formalising the informal?

Third sector organisations have sometime criticized the ‘formalization’ that validation brings to the non-formal and informal learning activities. The argument is that by developing processes that potentially seek to link these activities to formal qualifications (and NQFs) these experiences might lose the essence of the work carried out in NGOs, civil society or voluntary organisations, that is often carried out on a voluntary basis without any expectation of personal gain.

The European guidelines, however, illustrate how the conceptualization of validation into four phases allows for the accommodation of different purposes in validation initiatives. While the four stages of validation - identification, documentation, assessment and certification – are important, different emphasis might be placed in each of them, depending on the purpose of the validation process. Processes of validation within the third sector will normally not place major emphasis in the phases of assessment and certification. This does not mean that assessment and certification are ignored, rather that their aim tends to be more related to assisting in self-assessment and personal growth.

Another aspect to consider is that when, for example, a volunteer wants to have a certificate that indicates the learning and skills and competencies gained through volunteering experience on a full time or part time basis, a document issued by their association and signed by their manager might be sufficient provided this document is understandable from other stakeholders especially formal education institutions and employers. However, if the volunteer wants to use this experience to gain formal credits at a University in a degree of international studies, this certificate might constitute only a small part of the documentation required to prove knowledge and skills gained to be accredited as being of value for a formal qualification.

In this respect, it is important that the formal system (The formal education institutions, in our example) recognises the certificate issued by the volunteer organisation. In order to do so, the certificate needs to show the learning outcomes acquired in relation to the existing standards. The process requires a certain level of common language between the different sectors and an understanding of the utility of the certificate. This can only be achieved through a coordinating effort of government organisations, education and training providers, non-formal learning providers other third sector organisation and the social partners (employers and trade unions), in addition to the existence of a clear and agreed understanding from all parties of the process and methodologies associated with validation.

Overall guiding questions

The PLA, thus, will focus on the following questions:

➢ What are the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the 2012 recommendation in relation to the involvement of relevant stakeholders?
➢ How can non-state actors (civil society organisations, volunteer organisations, youth organisations, other non-formal learning providers, employers and trade union organisations) become key players in the implementation of national and European validation strategies?
➢ In what way can we assure coordination and coherence across initiatives, to ensure that the individual benefits the most?
➢ What are the methods and techniques that can be developed to ensure coherence?
➢ What documentation, assessment and certification mechanisms exist that can support and/or facilitate validation of non-formal and informal learning?
➢ How do we quality assure the process and the outcomes of the validation process?
➢ How can the process best benefit from the wealth of experience of non-formal and informal learning providers in the recognition of learning outcomes and competencies?
Annex IV - Glossary

**Formal learning**: learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education;

**Non-formal learning**: 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 ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public;

**Informal learning**: learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child);

**Learning outcomes**: statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and autonomy and responsibility;

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**: a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

1. IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2. DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual's experiences;
3. a formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and
4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification;

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**Qualification**: a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;

**Recognition**: is a type of assessment of individual qualifications. However, while an assessment may be any kind of statement on the value of a foreign qualification, recognition refers to a formal statement by a competent recognition authority acknowledging the value of the qualification in question and indicating the consequences of this recognition for the holder of the qualification for which recognition is sought.

**National qualifications framework**: means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;

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