MATCH

Informal and non-formal competences matching devise for migrants' employability and active citizenship

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Workpackage 5: Review of processes in the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the partners' countries
Deliverable 23: Final comparative report
July 2011

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Centro Produttività Veneto
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Partners involved:

Colophon

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Table of contents

Executive Summary

The overall objective of *Workpackage 5: Review of processes in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the partner countries* is to examine and analyse a wide range of relevant international and national literature about the recognition, validation and certification of non-formal and informal learning and to review the partners' national policies and practices. The intention is to generate relevant information and data on the partners' national frameworks, institutional structures and already existing programmes that will feed into the elaboration and implementation of a transferable model for the recognition and validation of learning taking place outside the formal system which could operate across Member States and across sectors and into the definition of the technical specifications for the LO-MATCH web-tool based on the main results of the present survey.

The essential of WP5 is also to provide input for *WP6 – Strategies and tools for semantic description in personnel recruitment and job seeking contexts* and *WP7 – Identification of profiles ad KSC semantic description* respectively aimed at developing a methodology for ontological description of offer and demand in the context of personnel recruitment and job seeking, specifications of a semantic engine for learning outcome based job matchmaking and at identifying occupational profiles in selected sectors.

The present *Deliverable 23 Final comparative report* constitutes one of the outputs of MATCH WorkPackage 5 under the coordination of Fondazione Giacomo Rumor Centro Produttività Veneto (P1). The other partners involved are:

P2 – CREDIJ, FR
P3 – DAFPIC, FR
P6 – USRV, IT
P7 – KCH, NL
P8 – ZDZ, PL
P9 – CPI, SI
P10 – CPU, SI
P11 – CC OVIEDO, ES

Deliverable 23 comprises:

- a literature and initiatives/programmes descriptive and comparative review outlining the current issues, debates, good practices and state-of-the-art in the field of the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. This review, mainly drawn on two sources of information (secondary analysis of existing information and primary research through the selection of some case-studies) provided a vital underpinning both for collecting data and interpreting patterns found at partners' country level and for capturing different dimensions of the national practices/experiences/existing models. Detailed accounts of the methodologies used for both the secondary analysis and primary research is provided in Deliverable 21. Since much is already known from past researches, MATCH partners do not intend to replicate existing work but to focus their work on the most recent developments.

- a compared in-depth analysis and interpretation of the collected country-based case-studies on existing models, procedures and practices regarding the

assessment, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning possibly targeted at migrants.

This part of the research has been aimed at complementing the literature review by providing practical approaches, models and procedures currently used in the partners' different national/regional socio-economic systems for recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning;

- a detailed description of a shared methodology for the process of recognising and validating prior learning specifically focused on migrants, to be completed by a certification and the Implementation Plan of the recognition model (standards references, application methodologies and specific tools, etc.) and technical specifications for the web-tool to be tested with the end-users in order to verify its functionality and effectiveness and finally validate it.

The present deliverable is structured in sections (to be completed once the document will be finalised):

- in the first section, the research conceptual and methodological framework, design and the overall implementation of the research strategy are outlined; further details of the research approach and framework are provided in Deliverable 21 – Conceptual development of the desk-based research;
- the second section provides a conceptual clarification on non-formal and informal learning in Europe as well as on the core concepts related to validation, assessment and recognition. An overview on the EU framework and the most recent development on systems and standards for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning developed in the European Union is also provided.
- the third section summarises the main findings of the first stage of the comparative research focused upon providing evidence from existing international and national literature and the partner countries' current legislative and regulatory framework as well as approaches and methodologies.
- The annexes contain the collection of the literature reviews and the data and information on the case studies selected in the partners' countries. The use of a common template has allowed synthesising and interpreting the results standardisation and support findings and cross-case comparison.

Research methodological framework

This paragraph outlines the research methodological framework and design which combines the review of the state-of the-art on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, nationally, with a case-oriented research design concentrating on a certain number of national/regional cases.

Accordingly, the research direction (CPV) pays a special attention to methodological issues and the development of comparative methods in order to exploit the advantages of comparison and achieve cross-fertilisation among experts' contributions. The development and acceptance of a common terminology has also been considered crucial in the process towards transnational cooperation and joint comparative research activity. For this reason, the first step in the research phase has been to agree on the proposed common language of process, procedures, definitions and specific terms.

The research design is both comparative and multi-disciplinary. It strives to compare national experiences from six countries. Furthermore, the consortium is of a very composite nature; re-uniting experts from various backgrounds (not necessarily sharing the same concepts, terms of reference or research methods) and having diverging degrees of experience in research projects.

The research methodology has been based on a combination of mixed methods of desk-based research drawing together and analysing findings from primary and secondary sources:

1) Qualitative survey and analysis: literature review/taxonomy of approaches.
   The literature survey has been focused on the existing most recent international and European literature base on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and a literature review of partner countries' specific policies, background information on the current political, economic and social factors affecting skills development.
   For this secondary research, the body of literature has been mainly identified via general Internet indexed sources and databases together with access to full text of selected books and other relevant working papers and publications.
2) Selection of country-based case-studies and provision of case-study materials for in-depth analysis on existing models, procedures and practices regarding the assessment, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning mainly targeted at migrants.

   The following key criteria have been suggested for identifying case-studies for in-depth analysis:
   - ✓ *Geographical and territorial representativeness* i.e. to identify cases distributed on the national territory;
   - ✓ *Minimum level of regulation–standardization* of the model/practice/devise;
   - ✓ *Innovation* regarding the methodology, organization, functions, results;
   - ✓ *Replicability* of the model/practice/devise;
   - ✓ *Representativeness in terms of users and validation tools:* an additional element to guide the selection of the case-studies should be the level of representativeness of the users of the model/practice/devise in relation

to socio-economic dynamics, policies and guidelines expressed by the European strategies.

Common templates for the collection of data and information have also been provided both for the literature review and case-studies in order to promote standardisation and support cross-case comparison.

In some cases (e.g. Slovenia), this methodological approach has been backed and supplemented by the organisation of briefing and consultation seminars involving relevant stakeholders (selected among public authorities, adult education/VET providers, employers, trade unions, guidance-organisations, etc.) where the results of the in-depth analysis of the case-studies have been debated, commented and enriched.

THE CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING AT EU LEVEL

Non-formal and informal learning in Europe: a conceptual clarification

The validation and promotion of informal and non formal learning refers to many different concepts that need to be recalled.

Learning

" A cumulative process whereby individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and competences.

Learning outcome(s) / learning attainments

The set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process."[1]

In view of the objective of this document, the definitions used by the European Commission are of particular interest as they can be adopted as the guiding operational tools in identifying what type of invisible learning is to be validated and accredited.

The Cedefop glossary[2] defines the core concepts of formal, informal and non-formal education as follows:

CEDEFOP GLOSSARY

Formal learning consists of learning that occurs within an organised and structured context (formal education, in-company training), and that is designed as learning. It may lead to formal recognition (diploma, certificate).

Non-formal learning consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designed as learning,
but which contain an important learning element;

Informal learning is defined as learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is often referred to as experiential learning, and can to a degree, be understood as accidental learning.

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[1] European Commission, "Common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning", p.10. Available at: http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/publications/EC_common_principles_validation_20040303.pdf
[2] Cedefop, *Terminology of vocational training policy – A multilingual Glossary for an enlarged Europe*, Tissot, P., 2004.

A slightly different perspective of these three concepts is given in the definition by the European Commission within the Communication on Lifelong Learning[3]. The three core concepts in this instance are defined as follows:

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION - COMMUNICATION ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Formal learning is typically provided by education or training institutions, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective;

Non-formal learning is not provided by educational or training institutions and typically it does not lead to certification. However it is structured, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view;

Informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support. Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional.

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These two sets of definitions highlight the context within which learning takes place as well as the intentionality of the learner as the main indicators to distinguish between the different forms of learning. The learner is considered at the core of the learning process within the perspective of lifelong learning. The two dimensions identified are used to distinguish between formal, informal and non-formal learning. The different perspective in these three types of learning are summarised in the table which follows.

Nature of Learning: intention and structure			
Structure of the context	**Learning is intentional**		**Learning is not intentional**
Planned learning activities	Formal Learning		
Planned activities		Non-formal learning	
No planning			Informal Learning

Understanding core concepts related to validation

It is often the case that in the process of making all forms of learning visible, a number of key concepts related to the whole process are used. The most commonly used terms include: validation, assessment, recognition as well as certification. These other concepts also need to be defined and discussed.

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[3] Communication from the European Commission, 2001, Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a reality, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs

Validation

Validation is the tool through which invisible learning is made visible. It is the tool through which, within a lifelong learning perspective, what is learnt, in whatever way, can be assigned a recognised value for personal use, social recognition, and employment. Validation is used as a common term to cover a whole process involving first the identification of learning outcomes, undergoing assessment and/or testing processes, to recognition, certification or accreditation at the end of the process. A formal definition of validation used in the Cedefop glossary[4] and the Communication on Lifelong Learning includes identification, assessment and recognition of skills and competences which people develop through their lives and in different contexts, through work, education and leisure. The importance of validation has been highlighted in trying to value all types of learning, whenever and wherever it takes place and with a view that it makes visible learning what has so far still remained invisible.

Assessment

Validation involves at some point of the process, an assessment of the skills, knowledge and competences that the individual has acquired. Assessment means 'the sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how and/or competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification. Assessment in validation has two perspectives and fulfils two important requirements. The two forms of validation include: summative and formative assessment.

A <u>summative assessment</u> considers the end product and officially recognises those skills and competences that an individual already possesses. In the case of formative assessment, the process goes further as it provides feedback to the individual with respect to what other skills and competences need to be learnt. The main purpose of summative assessment is to provide a statement of the learning that has been achieved including the date of the assessment and specifically certifying and formalising it such that it can be integrated within the official qualifications system.

<u>Formative assessment</u> of informal and non-formal learning has a different role and serves a different purpose. Formative assessment provides the learner with feedback in order to guide the learning process, career progression of an individual. This is achieved by highlighting strengths and weaknesses as well as provides guidance for further learning and development to individuals, and to human resource development in the case of enterprises. Formative approaches often are decentralised systems which have been set up and developed on a local, regional, and sectoral level.

Recognition

Recognition plays an important part of the whole validation process. Many are those people who have followed courses and obtained certification only to realise that it has no recognition within educational institutions or the labour market. The same circumstances may occur to the validation of informal and non-formal skills where the certification provided will not have the recognition in education and the labour market. Cedefop[5] provides two perspectives of recognition in providing a definition for the term. Recognition of competences includes:

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[4] Cedefop, *Terminology of vocational training policy – A multilingual Glossary for an enlarged Europe*, Tissot, P., 2004

[5] Cedefop, *Terminology of vocational training policy – A multilingual Glossary for an enlarged Europe*, Tissot, P., 2004.

a. **Formal recognition:** This refers to the process of granting official status to competences. This takes places either through the award of certificates or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences; and/or

b. **Social recognition:** through acknowledgment of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders. Both aspects of recognition are important to the process of validation.

Central to recognition is the issue of "mutual trust". A zone of "mutual trust" is an agreement between individuals, enterprises and other organisations concerning the delivery, recognition and evaluation of vocational learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences). Zones of mutual trust offer practical help with decisions about the value of qualification and certification, further learning and recruitment into employment. They can also play an important role in the recognition for the different validation systems across Europe. These zones may be dynamic in nature and may become more or less formal in scope and form according to the mutual confidence and needs of the stakeholders involved.

The European framework for the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning

The need to establish common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe is stated in the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002 on European co-operation in vocational education and training. In it, 31 European Ministers, the social partners and the Commission stated the need to develop a set of common principles regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

The "Education and Training 2010" report states that "the common European principles should be developed as matter of priority and implemented at national level, respecting Member States competencies"[6] furthermore, the development of common criteria can support and spread the credit transferability system developed within the context of the formal systems of education and training (the ECTS *European Credit Transfer System* in particular).

The principles defined in the document are intended as a stimulus for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level and as a support to a process, autonomously conducted by the Member States, which may lead to coherent and compatible validation practices in Europe.

The main focus is on the following areas of validation:

- **validation of learning** taking place **in formal education and training settings**;
- **validation of learning** taking place in relation to the **labour market (enterprises, public organisations and economic sectors)**;

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[6] The "Education and Training 2010" report can be consulted on the website:
http://www.indire.it/socrates/content/index.php?action=read_rivista&id=5908

- **validation of learning** taking place in relation to **voluntary and civil society activities**, as well as **in community learning**.

The final document of the working Group stresses that in the policies of the European countries particular attention should be given to validation approaches aiming at the (re)integration of individuals into education and training (for example targeting the needs of school drop-outs, unemployed and immigrants).

This policy objective, common to all the three areas mentioned above, confirms the crucial role played by the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning. The principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning are a guide for the development of non-formal and informal methods and systems for validation; they do not prescribe any particular methodological or institutional solutions and represent a set of basic requirements.

The set of common European principles for validation is organised according to six areas reported below:
- purpose of validation
- individual entitlements
- responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders
- confidence and trust
- impartiality
- credibility and legitimacy.

1. The purpose of validation
The validation of the learning outcomes, irrespective of where these have been acquired:
- aims at making visible the full range of knowledge and competencies held by an individual
- supports lifelong learning, employability and active citizenship
- can result in formal and personal recognition of learning acquired

2. Individual Entitlements
- an individual accesses the validation process voluntarily
- in cases where validation is part of a compulsory system arrangements should be put in place to ensure transparency, fairness and privacy
- in organisations where validation is implemented this should be based on social dialogue
- the individuals must have the right to use the results of the validation
- special provisions should be designed for individuals with special needs
- the results of the validation must be the property of the individual who requested it
- In cases where validation is part of human resource management in enterprises the privacy of the individual must be ensured

3. Responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders
- results of validation must be presented in such a way that they can be understood at European and international level
- the privacy of the individual must be respected
- validation should be supported by information, guidance and counselling services
- education and training systems, enterprises, public organisations and economic sectors, non-formal
- learning organisations, including NGOs, should provide a legal and practical basis enabling individuals to have their learning validated
- validation should be an integral part of human resource development in enterprises and public organisations and should be based on social dialogue

4. Confidence and trust
Transparency of procedures:
- to guarantee confidentiality to all
- the methodologies for validation should be stated clearly
- clear information on time and cost should be presented
- transparency of criteria
- availability of, and access to, information

5. Impartiality
- assessors should operate according to a code of conduct
- assessors must be professionally competent and take part systematically in initial and continuing training actions

6 Credibility and legitimacy
- the development, implementation and financing of a mechanism for validation must involve all relevant stakeholders
- validation bodies need to be impartial and shall involve all stakeholders significantly concerned

The basic logic of the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning implies the passage from a diagnostic approach to an evolutionary one and from a fragmented approach to a global one: the different competences acquired at the workplace, through personal experiences or voluntary work are not considered in isolation but in interaction with each other, taking into account the experiential dimension of an individual.

The most recent developments on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning

As of 2005 a new phase in the European works on the theme of the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning has begun: in fact said theme takes on a central position in the debate on lifelong education and training at EU level.

Firstly it is important to recall the process of construction of a system of Credit Transfer for vocational Education and Training: *ECVET- European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training*, inspired by the *ECTS (European Credit Transfer System)* system, already used in the higher education sector. The ECVET should enable the transfer and capitalisation of learning outcomes from a learning context to another or in the case of individuals who pass from an education and training system to another.

The construction process of the ECVET system was established with the start of a consultation process between Countries (Commission staff working document, 2006), which ended only in 2008. The European integrated credit transfer system (ECVET) is part of the set of instruments included in the European Qualification Framework strategy, - EQF, which will be discussed at a later stage. ECVET is constructed as a system of credit awarding (*credit points*) to qualifications and/or their components (*units*).

The second relevant area of discussion, with reference to the objective of establishing a common reference system for the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, is the one represented by the definition of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) for the education and training system, which enables to put in relation and position, in a structure consisting of levels, the different titles (qualifications, diplomas, certificates etc.) obtained in the Member States. The meeting of EU Heads of Government held in Brussels in March 2005, consisted of a consultation between the member States in order to evaluate the different positions with regard to the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework.

On the basis of the conclusions of the consultation process, on September 5th, 2006, the Commission issued a Recommendation Proposal on the establishment of the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* (EQF) (Commission of the European Communities, 2006), which led to the definitive Recommendation of January 2008 (European Union, 2008). The EQF is a translation device – a converter or reading grid – enabling to position and compare, within an eight-level structure, the different titles (qualifications, diplomas, certificates etc.) obtained in the member States: the comparison is based on the learning outcomes. With said grid, the member States, on a voluntary basis, are encouraged to review their own education and training systems, so as to establish comparability between the single national reference systems. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has been hence thought and established as

a proper common reference code, so as to enable the different European countries to position and thus make transparent their national systems.

Additionally, a further explicit objective of the EQF is supporting the processes of validation of non-formal and informal learning, enabling the definition of knowledge and competencies acquired in the study and training paths. Among the key elements defining the EQF are the common reference levels, connected to the learning outcomes and placed in an eight-level structure. The structure of levels enables to organize in increasing order – from minimum to maximum complexity – the learning outcomes that can be acquired in an individual's lifespan, not only through formal, but also non-formal and informal paths. The learning outcomes express what a person is expected to know, understand and/or is able to do on completion of a learning process; using the "learning outcome" as a comparative indicator means overcoming a comparison logic based on learning methods and paths of acquisition. In the EQF the learning outcomes are represented through knowledge, skills and competencies descriptors, which are also coherent with a new formulation of the *key competencies* (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). On the basis of this structure it is possible – on the national, regional and sectoral level – to classify academic and vocational titles (diplomas, qualifications, certificates etc.), recognizing the learning outcomes achieved by the individuals, referring them to the appropriate level of the EQF.

More recent documents also make an explicit reference to the principle of recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning. In fact, the Commission communication *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn.* (Brussels, October 23rd, 2006) states that: "A lifelong learning paradigm values all kinds of learning – formal, non-formal and informal. Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning form a cornerstone in the lifelong learning strategy. The learning outcomes should be recognised and valued, regardless of where and how they are achieved" (Commissione delle Comunità Europee, 2006, p. 8).

The following Commission Communication: *Action Plan on Adult learning: It is always a good time to learn*, (Brussels, September 27th, 2007) includes among the operational objectives to be achieved by 2010 "speed[ing] up the process of assessing and recognizing non-formal and informal learning for the disadvantaged groups. […] Assessment and recognition of skills and social competencies, regardless of where and how they are achieved, are especially important for those who do not have basic qualifications, in order to facilitate their integration in society" (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, p. 10). Said themes are developed and systematized in the *European Guidelines for the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning* of 2009, by a working Group of the DG Education & Culture of the European Commission and Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training).

The ten commitments featured in the European Universities Charter on Lifelong Learning confirm a vision of lifelong learning in higher education as a path that does not just contemplate initial training, but integrates all the ages of a citizen's and worker's life, regardless of the site of learning.

The recently adopted Europe 2020 strategy calls for *'the promotion of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning'* as part of the Youth on the Move flagship initiative with a strong link to the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs flagship initiative which underlines the role of non-formal and informal learning in helping to ensure that citizens acquire the competences they need to engage in further learning and the labour market. The Commission considers that a stronger political basis is now required to pursue more systematic co-operation and tap the full potential of this field.

Mapping EU Member States approaches and practices: a brief overview

During the past twenty years, a majority of European Member States have started to develop methodologies and practises facilitating identification, assessment and certification of competences, also included those acquired outside formal education and training institutions.

The "*European Inventory on validation of non formal and informal learning*"[7] (*Otero MS, McCoshan A., K. Junge, 2005*), research commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission to ECOTEC Research & Consulting, has enabled a wide overview of methodologies, systems and standards for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning developed in the European Union.

From the detailed analysis of the countries reports, it is possible to conclude that **no common and unified European approach currently exists**. The fact that initiatives have been taken at different points of time and within the context of different education and training systems has determined a heterogeneous mix of national, territorial and sectoral approaches.

Nevertheless most initiatives show some common elements and seem to focus on the same challenges:

- firstly, formal (especially vocational) education and training turn themselves **from** strictly **input oriented to output oriented** (or performance oriented) **systems**. In countries such as the United Kingdom and Finland what matters are competences, not how you have acquired them. By accepting alternative pathways to learning, in addition to the ones provided within the formal schemes, the question of assessment becomes central;

- secondly, the growing importance of lifelong learning implies a stronger focus on **the link between different forms of learning in different areas at different stages of life**. While the formal system is still mostly focused on initial education and training, a lifelong learning system has to face the challenge of linking a variety of formal as well as non formal learning areas. This is necessary to meet the individual need for continuous and varied renewal of knowledge and competences – a sort of knowledge reservoir to face the unexpected. Also in this context, the question of identification, assessment and recognition shows itself as crucial. Competences have to be made visible if the are to be fully integrated into such a broader strategy for knowledge (re)production and renewal. In addiction, economic factors may influence the decision to begin developing methodologies; in fact, it would be a strong motivation if public authorities were to introduce assessment systems to avoid unnecessary repetitions of education and training patterns.

In some countries, methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of competences are looked upon as necessary tools to open up new pathways. But the issue should not be limited to a question of how to modernise and vitalise existing systems for education and training. Institutional and methodological experimentation may also be looked upon as a reflection of basic changes in our understanding of learning and competences. Closely related to the unprecedented

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[7] Consultable at: http://www.ecotec.com/europeanInventory/

growth in formal education and training is **a growing scepticism towards the output of the formal system**. Traditionally, formal education and training systems were important vehicles not only for the (re)production and renewal of competences, but also for selections of jobs and positions. In a situation where many European countries combine mass education with mass unemployment, the role of education as a selection mechanism becomes more problematic. In many cases, it can be observed that the market is increasing, whereas at the same time the relative value of formal education and training has been reduced. As long as the challenge is to select individuals with the most relevant competences, formal education and training systems may increasingly appear as insufficient and the need to utilise other sources becomes more urgent.

The European situation about identification, assessment and certification of competences can be represented, mapping the different approaches and practices into **six countries clusters**, sharing geographical nearness and/or cultural similarity, even though countries within each cluster may differ somewhat in their institutional architecture and methodological foundation:

a. The French approach (France and Belgium)

This approach is defined on the basis of geographical nearness rather than a common approach towards identification, assessment and certification of competences and recognition of non formal learning. The topic of non formal learning has moved into the forefront of the French debate on education and training during the past two decades. Both in legal and practical terms, the French experiences are important. The bilan de competance can be described as the first effort to introduce a full-scale system for the identification and assessment of non formal and experiential learning. Since the introduction of the bilan in 1985, attention to these issues has been very strong. Belgium is at an advanced stage of developments.

b. NVQs model and influence (the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands)

In the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands we can record a strong acceptance of an output-oriented and performance-based model of education and training. General consensus of learning outside formal education and training institutions as a valid and important pathway to competences is a basic feature in these countries.
All three countries have based their vocational education and training on modularised system, a factor which seems to support the rapid and large scale introduction of institutions and methodologies in the field. As a high-profile system emphasising modularisation and output, the NVQ system has become an important reference point in the international debate. Ireland and the Netherlands can be looked upon as countries where this influence has been strong, especially in the field of assessment and recognition of non formal learning.

c. The Nordic context (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden)

Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have chosen different approaches but have taken practical steps through legislation and institution initiatives, towards

strengthening the link between formal education and training and learning taking place outside schools and training centres. Despite the fact that some elements of this strategy have existed for some time, the most important initiatives have taken place in recent years, mostly since 1994-95. The mutual learning between these countries is strong and has become even stronger over the past five years. The influence of Finnish and Norwegian approaches on recent Swedish documents illustrates this effect. Finland and Norway are clearly opening up for the institutional integration of non formal learning as part of a general lifelong learning strategy.

d. The "dual system" area (Austria and Germany)

The Austrian and German approaches to the question of identification, assessment and recognition/certification of competences are very similar. It is interesting to note that the two countries where work-based learning has been most systematically integrated into education and training (through the dual system) has so far been very reluctant to embrace this new trend. But, in spite of this, a substantial amount of project-based experimentation and the attention towards these questions is increasing. The discussion on recognition of non-formal learning in Austria and Germany is closely linked to that on modularisation of education and training.

e. The Mediterranean context (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain)

There are certain common features linking together the Mediterranean countries of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain in the area of identification, assessment and certification of competences. All these countries have a much weaker tradition in the area of vocational education and training. Only recently, over the past twenty years, initiatives have been taken mainly in the direction of a competence-based system for education and training.

f. New EU Member States

This cluster is aggregated more on the basis of geographical nearness than of a common approach towards identification, assessment and certification of competences and recognition of non formal learning. Actually, in these countries initiatives have been taken at different points of time and within the context of different education and training systems, determining a heterogeneous mix of national, territorial and sectoral approaches.

MATCH Partners' national policies and practices in validating non-formal and informal learning: a review

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, at national levels and with different intensity during the last decade, EU members started to introduce methods and procedures for recognition and validation of results of non formal and informal learning but their nature and extent vary from country to country; experience and expertise are also very unevenly distributed.

The countries involved in MATCH project similarly have varying degrees of experience and are at different stages of development. France and the Netherlands probably have the most experience of national initiatives in VET using a range of different approaches while in the other partner countries provisions for bridging between different kinds of learning, particularly non formal and informal, are being implemented although often with no single generalised coherent framework. Furthermore, migrants are not specifically focussed by these experimentations in general, even less when addressing recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The recognition of the skills, competences and qualifications of migrant workers in the EU is still a problematic issue.

The following paragraphs summarise the main findings of the first stage of the comparative research focused upon providing evidence from existing international and national literature and the partner countries' current legislative and regulatory framework.

FRANCE

The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in France

General background

In France, the notion of formal qualifications relates to certifications connected to initial or primary vocational training and to all continuing education open to those aged 16 and over (end of junior secondary school and age at which school ceases to be obligatory). Formal training generally leads to a diploma, degree or branch certificate facilitating the learner's insertion into the world of work. Certifications for this category are listed in the national directory of vocational certifications or RNCP *(Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles[8])*.

The creation of the national professional certifications directory or RNCP, in accordance with the Europass principle of supplementary certificate descriptions, is one of the impacts of the European policy cooperation.

The RNCP has brought together under the same framework all the vocational qualifications whether created by a ministry or other accrediting bodies. This national directory constitutes the French NQF (National Qualification Framework).

The French certification system is based on a tripartite consultation (State and social partners employers / employees), and diplomas, degrees and branch certificates registered with RNCP are valid nationwide. This situation gives holders geographical mobility and facilitates recognition of their qualifications by professional groups, and notably in collective bargaining agreements. Qualification levels constitute one of the basic indicators for recruitment.

Certifications are created and/or updated to take account of labour-market needs after a desirability study based on long-range, quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted by research bodies such as CEREQ (centre de recherches sur l'emploi et les qualification [Research centre on employment and skills]. Content is generally reviewed

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[8] http://cncp.gouv.fr

at least every five years. Concerning diplomas under the responsibility of the Education Minister, 10% of the diplomas linked to secondary teaching are renewed each year.

Formal and vocational education may be said to cover all of the economy needs. In France, more than 600 technological and vocational qualifications are awarded by the Education Ministry. Other Ministries awarding qualifications include Employment (300), Agriculture (150), Culture (31), Maritime Affairs (13), Youth and Sport (100), Health (15), Defense (190) and Higher Education (11 000). The chambers of trade, commerce and industry have also created specific qualifications for their domains. Lastly, since the end of the 1990s, the social partners in around forty professional branches have created their own certifications, usually known as vocational qualification certificates.

There are, in all, some 15 000 certifications in France. For many years, certain qualifications (notably those awarded by the Education Ministry) could be obtained by independent candidates, through a credits system, through continuous assessment or through an end-of-course examination. In 1992, these also became accessible **through validation of professional experience**. Since 2002 (law on the validation of experience), all certifications registered at RNCP are accessible regardless of the learning mode (formal, informal or non-formal) that has enabled an individual to acquire the capacities and knowledge constituting entitlement to those certifications. These certifications relate to the results of the learning and not to the learning path or mode.

A number of changes have been made in recent years in order to break away from the all or nothing approach. Qualifications may also be obtained through validation of experience, **a system that enables formal, non formal and informal learning to be taken into account.**

VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience): background of its gradual development

Although the validation of experiential learning is not new to the French educational and training system, its development has been, for the last six decades or so, a long gradual and adaptive process in scope and contents.

The first validation notion was initiated by the 1934 Act of the 10th July. In fact this law provided the primary general conditions for the delivery of an "engineer diploma" to individuals who accumulated at least five years of working experience in engineering field (*Dif, 2007, Lenoir, 1996*).

The second major development also took place in higher education by the mid-eighties. The 1985 decree of the 23rd August extended the concept of validation, under the name VAPP ("*Validations des Acquis Professionnels and personnels*", i.e. Validation of Acquired Professional and Personal experiences and competences) to allow adults (over 20 years old) with a limited formal education to access higher education studies through a non-certification based accreditation of their prior professional and personal learning and competences. In practice, applicants were exempted from normal entry requirements and individual courses. This validation regime, which is still in effect, sets out specific procedures to identify, assess and make a general judgement about the candidate's potential and ability to usefully complete her or his course of study. This is based on checking up that the level of responsibilities and related issues addressed by the candidate, demonstrate the skills and knowledge that correspond effectively to the normal entry required qualifications. For this purpose, criteria, standards and procedures for identification and assessment of the candidate'

prior professional and personal experiences and responsibilities, in connection with their relevance to the chosen study programme, are fully taken into consideration. VAPP is still up to now, one the most used non-certification based instruments for promoting access to higher education, especially among individuals with a deficient formal education but possessing a strong work experience However, VAPP remains limited in scope, as it does not allow for access to formal education and training levels lower than those of higher education.

In parallel, in 1986, the Ministry of Employment created a network of over 100 inter-institutional centres for competence audit called CIBC (*Centres Interinstitutionnels de Bilans de Compétences*). They were designed to enable individuals to have their professional and personal competences and skills assessed through a BC ("*Bilan de Compétences*", i.e. competence audit) with the aim of allowing them to informally define or redefine their projects for career development and related learning. After a period of experimentation, the 1991 Law of the 31st December gave all worker, with at last five years of work experience, a legal right to have access to a competence audit, including the possibility of benefiting from a paid leave for a competence audit CBC ("Conge du Bilan de Compétences) of 24 working hours. However, as a simple guidance instrument, BC has no formal validation role. It might just guide informally its beneficiaries to construct or reconstruct their professional and learning projects and even to go for a validation instrument like VAPP or VAE (*Dif, 2008; Hawley & Roy, 2007; Calafuri, 1996*).

At the beginning of the 90s, the 1992 Act and its successive implementation decrees and regulations extended effectively the concept of validation to a certification-oriented assessment and accreditation of prior work-based learning under the acronym VAP ("*Validation des Acquis Professionnels*", i.e. Validation of Professional Experience) covering all levels of qualifications and certifications connected with the national qualification framework. It was designed to allow any individual who accumulated regularly or irregularly a working experience of five years (full-time or equivalent) in at least one activity related to the domain of the candidate's targeted diploma, to apply for an exemption in all the required credit-units but one (n-1).

In 2002, additional legislations (via the Social Modernisation Law of the 17 January and its consecutive implementation decrees) were passed to deal with some of the observed deficiencies of VAP and place a national legal duty on all higher education institutions to move on with the key objectives of Lisbon strategy and Bologna- Copenhagen process by promoting
further access to learning, especially in higher education through the introduction of four basic related reforms. The first and most important is connected with broadening the scope of the validation instrument to take into consideration all the individuals prior experiential non-formal and informal learning outcomes, including those connected with charity work, social, political and cultural activities under the new acronym: VAE ("*Validations des Acquis de l'Expérience* – Validation of Acquired Experience).

The above-mentioned laws have enabled people with the required experience (3 years) to obtain accreditation of learning. Validation of experience enables those with experience to obtain official recognition in the form of partial or full certification (diploma, degree or certificate with a professional end or professional qualification). It is considered as experience any activity which is salaried, non-salaried or voluntary (within a union or an association).
This experience, related to the intended certification, is validated by a panel.

All certifications registered on the National Repertory of Vocational Certifications (in French RNCP: Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles) are available through VAE.

Any individual, disregarding his/her age, nationality, status and education level who can attest of at least three years of salaried, non-salaried or voluntary experience can undertake a VAE process.

VAE is a voluntary process. It's part of an individual project and it cannot be imposed by either a company or by a board but can be initiated by the company with the employee's consent. VAE is an individual right.

Validate one's experience is neither an examination nor training. Its principle is based on the assumption that you have the required skills and theoretical knowledge to obtain the diploma you are targeting, without training. It is what must be proved. VAE is a work on the evidence.

At the end of the procedure, the candidate obtains, through validation of experience, the same qualification as a pupil, student or apprentice who has taken an examination.

This system has had a considerable influence on the frames of reference used for diplomas and degrees, all of which have been rendered modular, or broken down into units so that certification may be obtained either progressively through examinations over a number of years or through validation of experience.

VAE...

…officially recognizes that everyone learns outside training paths or formal learning situations

(*French Labor Code*)

... admits that experiential knowledge can be checked in a way similar to learning outcomes

(*French Education code*)

"Any person engaged in working life is entitled to validate the achievements of his experience, ... to acquire a diploma, professional title, ..., registered in the national directory of professional certifications. "

(*Article L.900-1 of the Labor Code*)

VAE functioning process in practice

The implementation decrees outlined the basic principles of the VAE functioning process in practice through four main consecutive stages, namely:

1. Information, guidance
2. Withdrawal of the application's admissibility file
3. Building of the admissibility file
4. Making the experience presentation and guidance options file/ guidance and counseling
5. Validation by the panel
6. The panel's decision
7. Follow up of the applicant after the panel's decision

Information, guidance

People wishing to have non-formal or informal learning evaluated may be informed and guide in specific centers or by certification bodies.

Two types of structure are responsible for analyzing individual projects and for the provision of advice concerning qualification paths and certification through validation of experience:

- structures reporting directly to ministries and bodies responsible for qualifications and the associated training, such as information and advice centers connected to schools, school and university information centers, chamber of commerce and industry information centers, jointly-managed institutions specializing in the provision of advice to companies, etc.
- structures reporting to local or territorial multi-institutional bodies or organizations such as institutional skills-assessment centers or (*centres interinstitutionnels* de *bilans de compétences*) helping people who wish to have their skills assessed.

They help the candidate:

- analyze the relevance of his/her VAE plan: if necessary, they redirect the candidate to other procedures
- find his/her way among the certification offers (national and regional)
- direct the candidate towards the appropriate certifying body
- find the financial aid options

The options for financial aid

The candidate may have to pay for the Validation of Experiential Learning process (registration fees, guidance). Its cost varies according to the intended certifications and concerned certifying and validating bodies.

He/she can finance the VAE procedure himself/herself. Possibilities of full or partial funding exist. Expenses arising out of validation of experience may be covered:

- for employees, by the employer or through mutual funds set up to finance employee professional training;
- for jobseekers, through unemployment-benefit funds, regional councils or the Ministry with responsibility for employment;
- for persons other than employees, by joint bodies with responsibility for their professional training.

Building of the admissibility file

For a given certification, only one VAE application can be filled within the year.

For different certifications, one can fill three applications within the year.

The admissibility criteria

A - Proof must be given of at least three years of salaried, non-salaried or voluntary activities in direct relation with the intended certification.

Are taken into account:

- Activities practiced in a continuous or a discontinuous way, full or part time, in France or abroad

Are not taken into account:

- Initial or continuous training periods, whatever the person's statute was, as well as internships and training in a professional environment

periods, when they were carried out for the preparation of a diploma or a vocational education, certificate.

Examples of material proofs
- Salaried activities: a pay slip or an employer attestation
- Non-salaried activities: by a tax-return, an URSAFF declaration of existence, an extract of K bis (an official document delivered by the Clerk's Office of the Commercial Court which justifies that a commercial company is regularly registered in the trade and firms register) or an extract of the D1 (the proof of your personal company or firm registration by the Trade Index)
- Unpaid voluntary activities: attestations signed by two association or union members holding the power or delegation to sign.

B – Establishment of the relation between the practiced activities and the intended certification

Practiced activities must be related to the activities defined in the corresponding certification system of reference and/or activities system of reference. All systems of reference are available upon request to the certifying or validating body.

C - Hand in the completed file to the certifying or validating body which conducts its examination and declares itself on the application's admissibility within a period inferior to two months, starting from the date of the application handing in. Silence means rejection.

The admissibility decision

The admissibility decision prejudges by no means on the extent of the validation, which can only be pronounced by the validation panel.

The impact of **the admissibility decision** is that it allows the **candidate to continue the VAE procedure**. Then he/she can build his/her experience

Making the experience presentation and guidance options file

The candidate receives an application file to be completed (the same nationwide for each Ministry)

Guidance and counselling

A guidance is proposed, which is highly recommended, to help the candidate make his/her experience presentation file: it increases his/her chances of success in the procedure. It provides methodological aid.

The guidance begins when the applicant is declared admissible.

Certifying or validating bodies, public or private capacitated service providers can offer the guidance service.

It concerns:
- analysis of the candidate's professional activity
- writing aid
- preparation for the interview with the jury
- …

Validation

The experience presentation file is submitted to a validation panel.
The panel members are :
- At least quarter of the members must be skilled representatives of the intended profession
- Among these representatives, parity must exist between the employers representatives and the salaried employees representatives; and the balance regarding the presentation of men and women on the entire panel must be a concern.

The panel's training

Obligations of stakeholders: all those working on traditional examining boards receive preparatory training.
The same applies for trainers and professionals working on validation boards and for advisors working in experience-validation information / advice centres.

The assessment modalities:

The file validation: the assessment is based on the examination of the experience presentation file and may be complemented by an interview, when necessary. This interview can be requested by the panel or the candidate.
- Sometimes, additionally to the file, the validation by a practical examination in a real or re-enacted professional situation can be organized by the certifying or validating body. It may also be complemented by an interview.

The panel's decision
- A full validation of the certification: the certification obtained through VAE is the same as the one obtained by other ways (continuing training, initial training or apprenticeship)
- A partial validation: the panel specifies the skills, knowledge and aptitudes to acquire and recommends acquisition ways. The candidate may also be offered guidance to go on with the process (training or later other VAE)
- The units or parts of a diploma earned remain valid 5 years.
- A validation refusal: some certifying or validating bodies give an advice to guide the candidate in the new procedures he/she may start

The follow up of the applicant after the panel decision

In some cases, certifying and validating bodies can offer you a individualized follow up, if you have obtained a partial validation (invitation to meet the service, proposal of individual support, etc).

The VAE outcomes and impacts

The VAE outcomes and impacts can be assessed in terms of two interrelated categories of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators[9]:
  • VAE contribution to the achievement of its intermediary objectives in terms of input-output flow of beneficiaries;
  • VAE contribution to the achievement of some of its ultimate objectives such as :
      - development of professionalization and learning-path fluidity and complementarity between formal, informal and non-formal learning;
      - promotion of the VAE beneficiaries' LLL, employability, flexibility and mobility in particular, and their socio-professional promotion in general.

However, since 2002 the VAE has gradually gained an increasing real interest, particularly in terms of public opinion and interested individuals. Since its creation in 2002, there has been a considerable increase in demand from less qualified individuals seeking to take up a 'second chance' through VAE and to progress towards a higher level of qualifications. A total of over 167.000 certifications have been awarded since 2002.

In addition, the VAE has been observed to have ultimately an increasing qualitative impact on individuals, organisations and the whole educational and training system.
Concerning its impact on the educational and training system in general and higher education in particular, VAE contributed to its professionalisation through bridging the link between formal, informal and non-formal learning. This has been achieved through its following interdependent fundamental roles:
  • Widening the scope of diploma delivery modes within a unique formal qualification and certification framework, whereby the traditional initial educational and training activity is no longer the unique way of accessing qualifications and related certifications. The validation of experiential learning is also considered as another mode of access to any type of certification delivery within the national qualification framework.
  • Establishing, as a consequence, a new dynamic and more coherent relationship between occupational activity and formal modes of certification.
  • Facilitating the creation of a real self-initiated and directed matching between vocational education and training, employment requirements and the individual's needs for vocational identity and carrier development.
  • Development of a learning path-fluidity and complementarity within and between different components of the educational and training system as a whole.

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[9] Cfr.: M'Hamed DIF, Jean-Alain HERAUD and Paul NKENG University of Strasbourg, Case study on "VAE" implementation procedure and practice in higher education - Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Vienna, Vienna, 28-30 September 2009 (EERA/VETNET)

ITALY

Italian state of the art: a work in progress

In Italy, although there is agreement on the importance of validation principles and aims there is a delay in the adoption of the provisions necessary for the development and institutionalisation of a national system of validation and certification of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning[10].

The lack of a National System of Standards breaks the development of a National Qualifications Framework[11]. The highly fragmented approaches in the field of certification and acknowledgement of acquired skills adopted by the Regions are an obstacle to the creation of a unitary policy, which can meet the European principles of Lifelong Learning.

The absence of an explicit and adequately regulated National System of Qualifications, despite the Regional Qualification Systems existing, is the first barrier to the institutionalization of a national system of validation of prior learning together with the formal and legal value of qualifications and diplomas obtained through formal education and training pathways, the traditional weakness of short-term and adult education and training, which in Italy is not widespread as in other European countries and the diversity of institutions involved in this matter at national, regional and local level.

However national and regional institutions, for example the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, social partners and employers' associations at national level and representatives of the Regions have tried to establish a set of professional standards of reference for the promotion of initiatives of validation of non formal and informal learning. The Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers (ISFOL) is supporting the Ministry of Labour in creating a national database of job descriptions which are clustered into 24 economic and professional areas. In addition, there have been initiatives to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning in the form of credits within University courses. For example, in 2007 a Working Group organised by the Ministry of Universities and Research prepared "The University for Lifelong Learning", a set of Guidelines for the accreditation of prior learning.

Until now, the implementation of institutional systems and devices aimed at validation of non-formal and informal learning has only been developed at a regional level. The most prominent experiences in this field have been worked out by Emilia Romagna and Tuscany regions, but every regional system is trying its own way of development.

Every region has taken different approaches to the implementation of validation:

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[10] Cfr European Inventory on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning 2010 Country Report: Italy By Elisabetta Perulli and Gabriella di Francesco A project of the European Commission, DG Education and Culture in co-operation with The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). Project management by GHK Consulting (Manuel Souto Otero and Jo Hawley).

[11] Steps in the direction of a NQF The Agreement of State-Regions of 5th February 2009 regarding the Vocational training system led to the development of the first national repertory of professional profiles, establishing the minimum standards of technical competences. The repertory includes 19 professional profiles: 14 that were introduced with the previous Agreement of 5th October 2006 have been updated; five are new. Their usability is guaranteed at national level. In the same direction is the the construction of occupational standards/repertories (set up by ISFOL on behalf of the Ministry of Labour) though embedded in the more general process of setting up a national system of professional standards, training standards and certification standards, as stated by ESF-PON, 2007-2013. It takes into account and enhances the available methodological and informative resources and involves social partners, with the technical and scientific support of ISFOL. Recent results (2010) in this fields is the completion of repertories for Chemical, Textiles and Food production intended as professional competence standards.

• in some cases, the validation process has been shaped within specific VET pathways (IFTS, EdA);
• in other cases, the regional administrations have designed and implemented validation systems for the recognition of credits or official titles (national civil service, specific industrial sectors);
• in some cases validation devices were activated and made operational in all sectors of the regional vocational training system.
During 2009 national policy and institutions further encouraged the recognition of learning acquired outside the formal education and training context (non-formal and informal learning). This was partly due to the economic crisis and to the necessity of improving and updating the competences of individuals who faced the uncertainty of the labour market.
The economic crisis sharpened the disparity between skills demand and supply and made the issue of updating competences a priority for policy makers.

A validation system in Italy: the Government initiatives

Below are some of the most recent Government initiatives towards the introduction of a validation system in Italy:
1. the White Paper of the Ministry of Labour, published in 2009, aimed at giving value to "workplace learning" and informal learning and is an important statement about the need to build and implement a national system of validation of competences;
2. the document "Italy 2020 - Action plan for the employability of
young people through the integration of jobs and learning", an action plan for the employability of young people through the integration of jobs and learning, signed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policies and the Minister of Education, Universities and Research identifying strategic policies for the coming years in the field of Vocational Education and Training and identifies an urgent need to develop suitable approaches and instruments to ensure a match between workers knowledge and labour market needs, with priority focusing on "assessment and validation" of learning and the updating of the training processes;
3. the Guidelines for Education in 2010 of the Italian Ministry of Labour.
On 17 February 2010 an agreement between the Ministry of Labour, the Regions and Social Partners was signed, concerning training and general policies to be jointly implemented through the year. The agreement envisages the national qualifications system as the fundamental basis for efficiency and transferability of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is mentioned as an important aspect to develop in relation to competitiveness and lifelong learning.
More generally, decision makers' commitment to strengthening tools for validating non-formal learning has been highlighted at the Central, Regional and Autonomous levels of government and within the Social Partners organisations. At national level, the tool "Citizen's Training Portfolio" is considered strategic for the development of a national validation system, following the EU indications and policies for lifelong learning. In fact, the Libretto was defined in 2003 as a document for the individual "to register the competences acquired during apprenticeship training, training in contract placement, specialized training and continuing education taking place during the working life (…), as well as the competences acquired in a non-formal and informal way within the indications of the European Union about lifelong learning, as long as they are recognized and certified."

The whole Libretto device (process and tools) was tested between 2006 and 2009 in 13 Regions, involving 250 operators and 600 beneficiaries (including young people, immigrants, the unemployed, apprenticeship trainees and workers) and it is still in operation in the Veneto Region for the unemployed and in the Lazio Region for a group of voluntary military workers who are leaving the army.

A validation system: the regional initiatives

In recent years, some Italian regions have introduced tools for the validation of informal and non-formal learning, adopting at least three different approaches. In the first case, the regions have assumed that their regional qualifications system must include the opportunity
to see learning validated and recognised if competences were acquired non formally or informally and have stated that as an individual right (eg. Emilia Romagna and Toscana).
In the second case, the process of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been seen as linked to the recognition of credits for the access to formal training or education (Valle D'Aosta, Lombardy, Marche, Umbria).
In the third case the process of validation is seen as instrumental in promoting and enhancing the professionalism of individuals facing integration and re-entry into employment (Veneto and Lombardy).
As an example of a regional approach to validation, is described in more details below.

The Emilia Romagna Certification System

The Qualification and Certification System of Emilia Romagna, is based on the principle that *"everyone is entitled to obtain formal recognition and certification, however the skills were acquired."*
Certification can be awarded to qualifications and competences acquired by people both in formal contexts (education and vocational training) and non-formal/informal contexts (workplace, social and private life).
The system involves validation and certification of informal and non-formally gained skills. Thus, from the Regional point of view, the certification system becomes a powerful tool to integrate education, vocational training and the labour market.
The certification and validation process is technically based on the presence of "professional standards of reference" (adopted in the Regional Qualification System) organised into Qualification profiles and Units of Competence.
At the end of the validation process the candidate can achieve:
• A Certificate of Qualification (when all Competence Units that make up the Qualification are awarded)
• A Certificate of Competence (refers to one or more Competence Units included in a Qualification but not all of them)
• A "Card of knowledge and capacity" (when just one part of a Competence Unit has been completed).
The first two certificates can be acquired only after a formal assessment session. The "Card of knowledge and capacity" can be issued after the collection and analysis of evidence of skills.
The Certification System of Emilia Romagna is currently in a phase of implementation. Whilst developing the validation system tests were carried out on a group of Socio-welfare Operators (OAS) with excellent results.

On an experimental basis, in 2010 an accreditation system has been introduced at regional level, according to the national standards of the "assessors/certifiers", who are capable of acknowledging, assessing and certifying workers' real competences.[12]

It is also worthwhile mentioning the project "Impact, Integration Fund Community Action 2007", Euroqualità Torino for its culturally based approach to the question of integrating migrants. The project was aimed at validation of the experiences and competences of immigrants acquired prior to their arrival in the EU, in order to support the social and vocational integration of migrants. The primary objective of the IMPACT project was to produce a training resource for public employment agencies and local/regional authorities, to enable their staff better to understand the needs of third-country nationals and to become familiar with helpful approaches that can be used to support third-country nationals.[13]

The present situation in the Veneto Region

At present in the Veneto Region a number of initiatives financed by EU funds is pursuing the definition of a regional model relying on EQF-KSC job description's criteria for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. A surveying activity on best practices at national and European level carried out by the Region itself has put in evidence the Swiss, French and Anglo-Saxon models as the main models of reference for the Italian experimentations in this field. The regional models of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany regions have also been considered.

THE NETHERLANDS

The Accreditation of prior learning (APL) in the Netherlands: background information[14]

The history of APL in the Netherlands starts in the nineties but there was no regulation or guidelines. At that time, the Dutch government felt that regular education should be made more accessible for adults. This led to the establishment of the Commission on the "Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills" (EVK) in 1993. The Commission published its report "Recognizing Informal Skills" in March 1994. This marked the launch of EVK: the recognition of informally acquired skills, and emphasized the need to increase accessibility to education traditionally based on formal qualifications or the award of certificates.

An important landmark is the National Action Plan "A lifelong of learning" (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 1998*). The national government put life long learning on the agenda, with a central place for APL in the context of accrediting competences acquired in the working place or elsewhere outside of the formal educational system. APL had gained a place in national policy, which paved the way for

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[12] More information can be found at the following website:

http://www.regione.emiliaromagna.it/wcm/ERMES/Canali/istruzione/certificazione_delle_competenze.htm.

[13] Further information can be found on the project website: http://www.euroqualita.it/sviluppo.html

[14] Cfr. Information APL in the Netherlands ETF study visit 28 Sept - 2 Oct 2009 © Dutch Knowledge Centre for APL downloadable at www.kenniscentrumevc.nl

the publication of a clear vision on the system for APL to be used in education and companies alike (Werkgroep EVC, 2000).

In 2000, Dutch government, together with social partners, decided to stimulate the broader concept of accreditation of prior learning (APL).

Since 2005 the broad experiences have led to regulation of APL, especially regulation of the transparency of results and the quality of procedures.

Currently, APL is a broad stimulated instrument in HRM and Labour market services. A national infrastructure is build and on stream for a year now. There are a lot of lessons learned, but the result is that APL grows to a steady and permanent instrument to make a bridge between education and labour market.

The APL procedures

An APL procedure in the Netherlands contains the following steps:
1. Information and advice for the candidate, the employer or other organisation, etc.
2. Intake of the individual and making individual arrangements. The candidate makes the decision to start the APL procedure or not.
3. Recognition of competences: portfolio (supported by the coach)
4. Validation of competences: assessment (by the assessors)
5. APL report: Description of results and accreditation (by the assessor). The APL report is an important part of the APL procedure. The Dutch quality code for APL dedicates the use of a uniformed fixed format. The purpose of this format is that de APL report has an independent value to the individual and can result in improvement of the labour market position, exemptions for parts of public or private training programmes or obtaining a diploma accredited by national government or a relevant sector.

The basic assumption is that the accreditation is made for the candidate with a suitable nationally recognised competency profile and is conducted properly and independently.

The APL candidates always need an assessor who can judge the experience and skills separate of the educational process.

Therefore, the work of the supervisor and assessors is crucial in this perspective. A lot of attention is paid to the competences of the independent supervisors and assessors, training and certification programmes for assessors and internal, regional or even sectoral assessment procedures.

The quality of assessment is raised when the right mix of assessment methods is used taking into account the aim, the characteristics of the target group and the competences to be assessed. Usually, a mix of methods is used in APL procedures because every situation and every individual is different. The model below describes some examples of methods in a mix of methods that can be used in APL procedures.

APL procedures
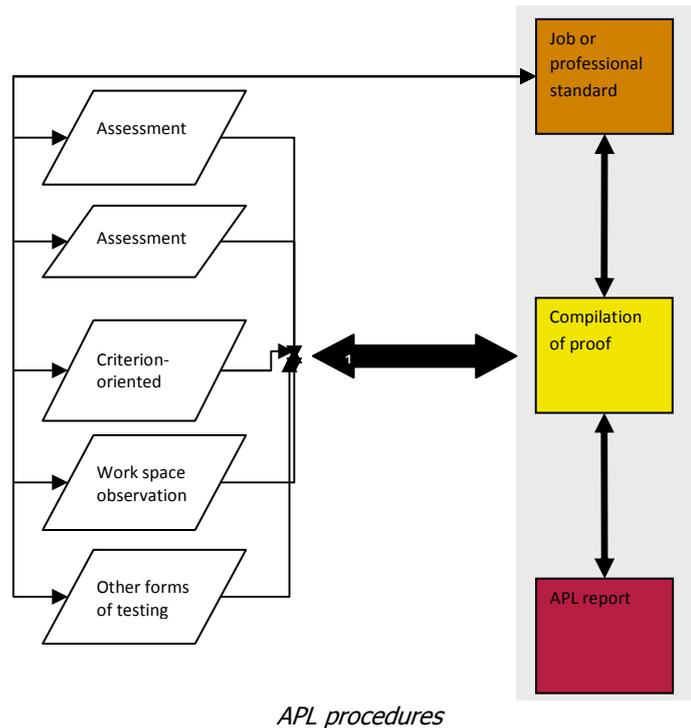
The various contexts and use of APL

APL is an instrument to make the potential of the individual development visible and to improve the human capital management in companies. This vision laid the foundations for the way the accreditation of prior learning nowadays is seen in various contexts:

- to increase the employability of individuals and employees;
- to get more insight in employees' capacities to create an optimal match with function profiles, as used in competence management or human resource management in companies;
- to accredit prior experience and shorten the duration of continuing training programmes to attain nationally recognised qualifications;
- to increase the chances of (potentially) unemployed on the labour market.

In these situations, the most important result is the increased employability gained by accrediting acquired competences and the focus on ways for further development of these competences. APL experiments in companies show that employees are better motivated, the team spirit is better and employees feel themselves valued for their knowledge and experience. From individual perspective, all citizens are encouraged to keep learning and make full use of their potential. National government, branch organisations, companies or re-integration organisations promote to keep competences up to date and have them accredited from time to time to ensure a better work security.

The effort of the covenant to create more unity in the quality of APL has also found its way to the finance mechanisms and subsidy schemes. National government has implemented a tax scheme to support the financing of an APL procedure if it is provided by an accredited APL provider. Companies get a reduction on their taxes of

300 euro per person per year. Individuals who pay the procedure themselves, can deduct the total costs from their income tax. In collective labour agreements, paragraphs on personal development sometimes include APL as one of the possible instruments to be used and refunded. Some sectoral training and development funds[15] have started promotion campaigns for APL offering subsidies for APL procedures.

APL providers and customers

Most of the APL providers are organisations for vocational education or for higher professional education, and also private schools. However, there is a growing number of APL providers with different backgrounds, such as reintegration offices and intermediate organisations between local government or employers and the education field. In the Dutch APL system, every organisation can become an APL provider, as long as they work according to the APL quality code and have themselves evaluated by an evaluating organisation. After the first year that every provider is evaluated, it became clear however that working according to the APL quality code is not very simple and requires adjustments on organisation level. Consequently APL providers most of the time have some link with developing people and assessing in there core business.

APL can be bought by an employer and by the employment office or local government. APL can be bought by individuals too, but as the average price is 1000 euro, not much individuals will finance this themselves. At the moment however there are a lot of governmental and sectoral financial arrangements.

Knowledge centre for APL

As said in the introduction APL started in the nineties in the Netherlands, but there was no regulation or any direction of all the initiatives. One of the recommendations was to create a Knowledge Centre for the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) to make full use of all existing practices and experiences and to bring the use of APL forward in the contexts of education, branches and companies. The Knowledge Centre APL has been created in 2001 with the aim to collect and share knowledge and good practices on accreditation of prior learning in the Netherlands.
It stimulates the use of APL practices by developing a sustainable infrastructure for the application of APL in education and the labour market, in regions and in sectors. To bring all practices together, the Knowledge Centre APL developed a quality framework in co-operation with national stakeholders, which aims to enhance the quality of the APL procedures.

Quality code

The framework of APL Quality Code is among others inspired by the 'Common European Principles for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning' (European Commission, 2004) and can be used to assess procedures, create more transparency and set a minimum standard for APL procedures.

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[15] These funds were created in the 1980s by the sectoral social partners to ensure a highly qualified labour force at the short and longer term. In the framework of collective labour agreements, employers pay a levy of their gross wage bill to the funds. The funds, among others, start up training programmes or research for the whole sector and refund employers and employees for training costs or APL procedures at individual basis.

In November 2006, a covenant was signed by all parties involved. These parties agreed on the following arrangements:

- The use of the code is voluntary, but the signing parties are dedicating themselves to promote the use of APL. Making its use mandatory would detract from the motivation to work with the APL code.
- Everyone who starts with an APL procedure agrees on the reasons for doing so. APL is not a standard process but an individualized series of arrangements customised to the goal and use of APL. Custom work is the standard.
- Every APL procedure ends with an APL report. This report states that the individual has documentation of the competences he possesses. This makes APL something independent of the educational provider.
- Accredited APL providers are listed in a directory.
- The competences of the people supervising these procedures and performing the assessments are documented. Only professionals can be supervisors or assessors.
- The quality of APL procedures is always being improved, both at the level of the providers of APL and at the level of the code itself.

POLAND

In 2008 systemic projects supported from the European Social Fund resources were launched, coordinated by the Ministry of National Education (MNE), concerning development of the National Qualification Framework (NQF)[16].These were undertaken in furtherance of the European Parliament and Council recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Network (EQF) for lifelong learning.

By the same a process of "sorting out" of the system of qualifications was started, in which system validation of competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal qualifications is one of the key elements. So far the acquiring, development, confirmation and recognition of vocational qualifications and securing quality of the processes and procedures (being the essence of the validation process) has been achieved in Poland in many ways.

The most elaborated, though badly needing modernization, is the system of confirmation of learning outcomes under formal education schemes[17]. As opposed to it, qualifications and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts do not fall within the framework of a systemic scheme that would be followed on a nationwide scale. In addition, there have emerged terminological problems concerning the meaning of the "validation" of non-formal and informal education which, in Polish realities, has not been commonly used so far in any context regarding permanent improvement of lifelong learning at various places and in various forms. Most often the notion was identified with that of "certification of qualifications", being in fact the final result of the validation. Similar problems concern the notion of "competences" (within the meaning ascribed to it by EQF, as one of qualifications'descriptors), which has not been commonly applied to denote learning results until now. The notion of competences points out to practical dimension of the qualifications held, an example of

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[16] The systemic project of the Ministry of national Education - "Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of the National Qualifications Framework model" (for more information cf.http://www.krk.org.pl/pl).

[17] *Założenia projektowanych zmian. Kształcenie zawodowe i ustawiczne. Informator* [Assumptions for the Contemplated Changes. Vocational and Lifelong Training. A Guide], MNE, Warsaw 2010.

it being reference lists of competences, as developed by employers well-established in the market[18].

Mapcom project also subscribes to that approach. Looking at the issue from the perspective of labour pedagogy, a pedagogical sub-discipline developed in Poland, *inter alia*, by the Institute for Sustainable Technologies – National Research Institute, looking on the employee from the angle of vocational competences sets, in fact, a new paradigm of thinking about modern labour market's features. Within that paradigm stress is laid on subjectivity of the human being and his/her ability to adapt to the changing employment conditions. It is, at the same time, the very core of the notion of "vocational competences". The paradigm stems, first of all, from a strategy of companies aimed at securing their competitive advantage in the market thanks to ever better use made of their employees' potential of competences[19].

Non-formal and informal education in Poland

As far as non-formal education is concerned, there does not exist a homogenous source of law whereby activities in that respect would be provided for. It must be stated instead that operations of that kind are provided for by the legislation on:
- continuing education within the educational system;
- educational activities carried out by higher training institutes (postgraduate training programmes, advanced training courses, and - in future – other forms);
- professional improvement in all areas managed by relevant ministers within sectors of public administration;
- all kind of training courses providing the student with qualifications to perform specific jobs, including regulated professions not covered, under the continuing education scheme, by the educational system, higher training education system nor scientific activity);
- training whereby employment of specific groups (disabled people, unemployed, jobseekers, socially excluded persons) is supported;
- training organized within the framework of business activity;
- training organized by organizations of various kind (civil society organisations, NGOs, churches etc.);
- training organized under sectorally defined common education (e.g. education in health, economics, traffic safety, environment etc.);
- training organized under sectoral education schemes (e.g. in agriculture, administration, healthcare, banking industry).

Non-formal education is run by institutions rendering services in that respect and leads towards the student being granted certificates of various kinds whereby qualifications and competences are confirmed.

As far as education run in Poland under informal training schemes is concerned, it is currently not provided for by law. That sort of education includes forms which differ both from formal (i.e. school) education and non-formal training, in particular:

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[18] S.M. Kwiatkowski, K. Symela (eds.), *Standardy kwalifikacji zawodowych. Teoria. Metodologia. Projekty* [Standards of Vocational Qualifications. Theory. Methodology. Projects], Institute for Educational Research, Warsaw, 2001.
[19] Mazurkiewicz A., Freitag-Mika E. (eds.): *Innowacyjność I konkurencyjność mikroprzedsiębiorstw* [Innovativeness and Competitive Advantage of Microenterprises], Institute for Sustainable Technologies – National Research Institute, Radom 2008.

- independent, non-institutionalized, deliberate or non-deliberate learning, as performed by all citizens of various age;
- learning related to everyday life situations (e.g. how to operate household appliances, hobby-related activities);
- learning at work by gaining professional experience (not covering training planned by employers or employees);
- all forms of self-teaching (e.g. learning foreign languages, using information techniques etc.).

Informal education is not conducted at education-providing institutions and, as a rule (exceptions to be mentioned further on) does not lead to the learning person being granted any
certificate confirming his/her professional qualifications and competences.

Practical dimension of validation of competences acquired outside the formal education system in Poland

In Poland, validation activities carried out by the Polish Craft Association (PCA)[20] are situated on the borderline of formal and non-formal education.
The crafts have an independent system of its own, whereby qualification titles of the "master" and "apprentice" are conferred, as provided for in the Act on Crafts. The Act provides for powers and responsibilities of the craft chambers, vests them in the right to conduct exams and confirm, on that basis, professional qualifications by means of apprentice certificates and master craftsman diplomas. The professional apprentice and master exams are regulated by the Act on Crafts and an ordinance of the Minister of National Education on exams for the titles of apprentice and master craftsman in the profession. Characteristic of the exams is the fact that they are open and available to candidates being:
- young graduates of apprenticeship attended at a craftsman's;
- adult persons willing to get a confirmation of their qualifications gained via doing
a professional job and theoretical preparation.

The Polish Craft Association is also entitled to authenticate apprentice certificates and master craftsman diplomas to be used by their holders abroad.
For the needs of recognition and corroboration of learning outcomes achieved outside of the system of formal education there exist various sectoral schemes in Poland.
Examples concerning organization of training, examination and conferral of certificates include, *inter alia*, the long-existing schemes present in the area of the welding profession (with professional qualifications being confirmed by the Polish Welding Centre of Excellence of Gliwice) or in the electric/power generating sector (qualifications conferred by the Association of Polish Electrical Engineers - SEP). Validation of qualifications and competences in that respect is provided for by sectoral

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[20] Chmielecka E. (ed.): *Od Europejskich do Krajowych Ram Kwalifikacji* [From European to National Qualifications Framework], a report drawn up under the ESF OP-HC project "Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of the National Qualifications Framework model", Cooperation Fund Foundation, Warsaw 2009.

legislation, examples being the Building Law, Surveying and Cartographic Act or the Power Engineering Act. The Acts in question specify the type of school/course that has to be completed, and the documents confirming the fact of learning, passing of exams and completion of relevant
internships/employment/professional experience that have to be submitted when seeking the conferral of specific qualifications.

An example of the growing demand for validation of informal competences acquired through experience gained on the job is the "Budujmy Razem" [Let's Build Together] project implemented in 2008 by the Warmia-Mazury Vocational Training Centre, together with its partners, under EQUAL Community Initiative[21]. In the framework of the project, validation of competences concerned selected jobs from the construction sector and meant a process of formalized confirmation of knowledge and skills gained through experience at work, as well as assessment of performance (demonstration) of certain professional tasks in a working environment close to that natural. The validation was assumed to be "grassroots-based" (as currently there are no legal solutions whereby that sphere of activity would be provided for in this country). It was founded on the competences being confirmed by institutions and organizations taking interest in certification of such qualifications. The latter were entities recognized in the market and included, as far as the discussed example is concerned, a training institute, business self-administration entity and labour office.

An important part of validation and quality-assuring activities beyond the area of formal education is competence-certification systems encountered in the most innovative business sectors. These can be broken down into two categories: business systems, launched and controlled by commercial companies, and independent systems of certification implemented and controlled by organizations enjoying public trust. Certificates confirming qualifications to service products of specific enterprises have become ones commonly identified and recognized by employers. A certificate like that usually concerns a relatively narrow fragment of knowledge and skills useful at specific work-stands to operate specific products (devices, machinery, facilities). Recently also certificates concerning qualifications combining technology and business are ever more frequently mentioned in the offers, the fact pointing out to the interdisciplinary nature of such competences required in the working environment.

Numerous certificates issued by manufacturing and service companies from various spheres of business have a well-established market position. These include, for example, certificates issued by transnational corporations operating in the IT market, such as IBM, Microsoft, Cisco, or – in other areas – FESTO, Bosch, or manufacturers of cars of well-known brands. The institutions launch training programmes of their own, carried out directly by themselves or entrusted to authorized business partners; they are also offered under e- learning schemes. Results of the training are then verified by means of examinations held at authorized centres.

The multitude and variety of approaches to validation of learning outcomes in non-formal and informal training in Poland points out, on the one hand, to high dynamics of their development while, on the other hand, reveals lack of systematic mechanisms leading to the assuring of validation process quality.

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[21] Narwojsz H., Krawczyński C, Symela K., Zwiefka K.: *Walidacja kompetencji nieformalnych uzyskanych poprzez doświadczenie w pracy. Metodyka. Procedury. Dokumentacja* [Validation of Informal Competences Acquired throughExperience at Work. Methodology. Procedures. Documentation], "Let Us Build Together" EQUAL Project. Warmia-Mazury Vocational Training Centre, Olsztyn 2008.

A further development of the system of validation of competences acquired in non formal and informal learning contexts in Poland is related to the European Social Fund Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013 (ESF OP-HC "Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and National Register of Qualifications for Lifelong Learning" project.

The systemic beneficiary of the project is the Ministry of National Education, the project being implemented by the Institute for Educational Research. Tasks concerning validation will tackle, among others, the following problems[22]:

- a model of a system of validation of competences for labour market and civil society acquired through non formal and informal learning;
- procedures of identification and validation of competences acquired beyond formal education system;
- description of institutions in which elements of validation are applied;
- description of examples of good practices regarding procedures and institutions;
- analysis of complementarity of the validation system and systems of learning outcomes assessment in formal education, in the light of approach to qualifications based on learning outcomes;
- development of models of validation system, taking into account specific features of the national qualifications system (together with drafted legal solutions).

SLOVENIA[23]

Since 2007 (*National Strategy for Lifelong Learning*) Slovenia has a clear policy for validation of non-formal and informal learning even though a national system of validation covering all sectors/levels of learning currently does not exist.

[Slovenian legal framework on recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)

Regarding Slovenian legal framework on validation, the National Vocational Qualification Act (NVQA), adopted in 2000 and revised in 2009 represents a national legal framework for validation. The Act enables the assessment and verification of vocation-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired outside of formal education - it makes it possible for individuals to obtain a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in recognition of prior learning and experiences.

The NVQA established a certification system and regulates the procedures, bodies and organisations for approving standards for different vocational qualifications which are

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[22] The tasks are included in the MNE document Working Plan for the Year 2010. Operational Programme Human Capital.

[23] **Veronika Tašner,** European Inventory on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning 2010 Country Report: Slovenia – A project of the European Commission, DG Education and Culture in co-operation with The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). Project management by GHK Consulting (Manuel Souto Otero and Jo Hawley).

approved by selected committees as the basis for assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning.

The legislative framework for the validation of non-formal learning is established at national level by the ministries. A quality management system for validation of non-formal learning will be developed at national level and carried out by two national bodies, the NIVET (National Institute for Vocational Education and Training) and the NEC. In the system for the recognition and assessment of national vocational qualifications, the occupational standards and criteria for assessors, assessing agencies, and standards for assessment are set at the national level (approved by the Council of Experts for Vocational and Technical Education, published by the ministries and put in practice by the NIVET and the NEC (National Examination Centre). Providers are responsible for the execution of assessment and recognition and the issuing of certificates. In the system of validation of non-formal learning in vocational education, learning outcomes and curriculum and assessment standards are set at national level, again by the Council of Experts for Vocational and Technical Education, the ministries and carried through by the NIVET and the NEC. Schools and other providers are responsible for setting up the rules, procedures and criteria for the actual validation of non-formal learning and also for issuing the appropriate certificates.

Methods for the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning

For the time being, the following methods for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning leading to publicly recognised qualifications are available in VET in Slovenia:
- The certification system for recognition of vocational qualifications. This system for obtaining qualifications through assessment and recognition of NVQ is governed by the National Vocational Qualifications Act. The Act states that the certification system for NVQ assessment and recognition does not provide for a title awarded after the completion of a vocational or

professional education programme, or a professional title awarded after the completion of publicly established education or study programmes.
- Formal education programmes in which work practice is organized as practical work with an external provider;
- ·Formal education programmes in which non-formal and informal learning is recognised as a part of performed obligations. This category primarily deals with individual examples of secondary school students/higher education students enjoying individual treatment by every higher education institution; people's universities offer similar tailor-made treatment for adults.
   In addition to that in 2007 the legislation in VET introduced the possibility to use validation processes in schools for youth and also for adults.
   The practice shows that assessment of non-formal and informal learning is significantly less present in the formal education system, although appropriate legal basis is already in place (e.g. Articles 10 and 31 of the Vocational and Technical Education; Articles 14, 16 and 21 of the Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act; Article 6 of the Higher Education Act). Legislation states that it is possible to fulfil a part of study obligations through practical work and non-formal learning in post-secondary vocational and higher education programmes. Vocational education and training programmes incorporate on-the-job learning as an integral part of educational programmes, one of the examples being an individual and collective learning contract (Article 33 of the Vocational and

Technical Education Act of 2006). These educational programmes include work practice based on NIL which takes the form of practical work with an external provider.

The mechanisms for the assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning are still quite rigid, since the types of appropriate documents issued by educational institutions and which can be considered are prescribed in detail. (Overview, 2008, 48)

Assessment and validation of knowledge and skills in the vocational qualification system is provided by a relevant commission, which examines the documents submitted and other evidence or the candidate's portfolio and determines whether the candidate meets all the requirements defined by the catalogue of professional knowledge and skills.

The most commonly used methods are:
- interview with the candidate
- debate with the candidate
- the portfolio method
- written projects
- discussion about prepared project
- assessment of demonstration, simulations, role playing, demonstrations.

The methods and measures of assessment of knowledge and skills are defined in the catalogues of knowledge standards for the vocational qualification.

Validation practitioners are teachers, guidance staff, employers, etc. They should be professionals with knowledge of vocational competences, educational and training programmes and they should know processes of verification and validation of knowledge and skills. These are the experts who fulfil certain criteria and are trained to work in accordance with prescribed regulations and law, to assess the document portfolio and other documents.

SPAIN

In Spain, some limited forms of validation of non-formal and informal learning have been recognised in the national legal framework for decades and today there are some opportunities for validation in relation to Higher Education (HE) and now also professional competences (up to a certain level). Some Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autónomas* – CCAAs) have also established procedures for validation. In other areas more work remains to be done.

There is a number of Acts which make up the legal Framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Spain.

The Organic Law 5/2002 of 19th June gives birth to the National Catalogue of Qualifications which sanctions the regulations of the system of recognition and certification of professional competencies acquired through non-formal and informal training processes.

With the following 2006 Organic Law on Education (LOE) with particular reference to chapter V on vocational training and chapter IX on adult education, the

need to recognise and validate the work experience acquired in the work and/or social context is further stressed and insisted upon.

National institutional framework[24]

Spain is a strongly decentralised country. However, the central government has structured validation routes of professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. As a result, the State Public Employment Service (Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal), Ministry of Labour and Immigration, and the General Directorate of Professional Education (Dirección General de Formación Profesional), Ministry of Education; have put in place a joint Committee to guarantee the development of the validation process.

Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The national government manages the national system of validation. For that purpose, the central government has designed the procedures on validation of non-formal and informal learning mentioned above. However, the CCAA's Education Authorities are responsible for undertaking assessment and setting up Evaluation Committees which will carry out the actual process of validation.

The Committees are made up of five evaluators, among which there must be teachers or trainers and professionals specialised in the competence to be evaluated. The Committees control the application form and the information provided by the candidate and decide on the evaluation method to be used.

Operational instruments and procedures for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Spain

Spain is currently implementing the procedural instruments of Project ERA (*Proyecto ERA 03, Evaluación, Reconocimiento y Acreditación de las Competencias Profesionales*, 2003) on validation, recognition and certification of vocational competencies which has set up a validation process born in the professional context but applicable to all contexts at various formative levels.

The ERA 03 project highlights some of the instruments that the CC.AA. are in the process of applying. To this day, they can be regrouped according to three instrumental procedures, which recognise, certify and validate non-formal and informal learning:

- Competence exams and open exams, tested against programmes corresponding to the type of titles "University access exams" destined to over-25s, in order to gain access to vocational training cycles and to obtain the title of specific vocational training technician and higher technician (Royal Decree 942/2003 of 18th July);
- The procedure of validation and recognition of competencies managed by the Vasca Agency for the Assessment of Competencies and the quality of the

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[24] Noel Alonso, European Inventory on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning 2010 Country Report: Spain - A project of the European Commission, DG Education and Culture in co-operation with The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). Project management by GHK Consulting (Manuel Souto Otero and Jo Hawley).

Vocational training set by decree 70/2004 of April 27th, re-examined and developed in September of the same year, by the Vice-Counsellor of Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning.

- The VIA (*Valoración Inicial del Alumno*) corresponding to the Initial Assessment of the Student and representing a two-way process: of consultation and of assessment, this process can last 2 or 3 weeks. The VIA is a model used in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands, in order to appraise the basic training of adult subjects.

Methods used

The methodology to be used to validate professional competence will be decided on a case by case basis. During the guidance phase practitioners outline the validation process to and also advise the Evaluation Committee on an appropriate evaluation method. Then the Evaluation Committee decides the method to be used, based on their knowledge of the benefits of each method. The evaluation methods can include:
• individual and group sessions;
• interviews;
• simulations;
• standard tests;
• observation at the work place.

Individuals willing to become validation practitioners (assessors and guidance practitioners) must attend specific training to understand the process and their responsibilities. In order to be eligible for the training individuals must be experienced professionals as follows:

- At least 4 years experience as secondary and/or VET teachers; specialised in the competence to be validated;
- At least 4 years as trainers specialised in the particular competence to be validated;
- At least 4 years as professional experts in the competence to be validated.

The practitioners can act as advisers or evaluators. The advisers have a very important role in the process as they are the first point of contact for applicants. The adviser prepares a report for each possible applicant and recommends the individuals to apply or not to have their professional competences validated.

Is a Pan-EU validation principle possible?

When considering the topic of accreditation, it's worthwhile mentioning that at the present stage, the situation is quite differentiated even within the partnership's domain of action, not only at a European level.

While countries as France and the Netherlands have been working according to standardised procedures for 10 years, in Spain, Italy, Poland and Slovenia the system of accreditation is in progress as the national framework has been created, but not implemented yet, or it is gaining significant results from experimentations, usually supported by ESF funds, as in the case of Poland.

In addition to the European Union, the OECD has sought to promote the recognition and validation competences based on learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning; outlined it on the basis of the EQF level descriptions, which focus on what the learner knows, understands and is able to do.

Nevertheless a pan-EU validation principle is particularly needed when confronting the issue of migrants. The European Commission has recently adopted a "European Agenda for the integration of Third-Country Nationals", a measure it is necessary to put into action for a full participation of migrants into their new communities, to be no longer treated as an emergency but as a strategy to economically and culturally enhance EU.

Dealing with migrants, and usually in the partner countries migrants are prevailingly Third-Country National, and considering the migrants' issue as to recognition and validation of prior learning is quite difficult because most of them have reached EU after complex circumstances and facing a differentiated system, peculiar to each member state, would make it more difficult to start this process of integration. Therefore the strong call for a pan-EU system validation principle can be the only approach to pave the way for the successful involvement of migrants into all aspects of collective life, starting from the research of a job. Indeed access to employment is central to successful integration. The MATCH attempt at creating a procedure capable of welcoming migrants, analysing their entry level of competence, recognising and assessing non formal and informal learning, matching possible job offers consistent with their profile is in this sense a cross-national measure in maximising the benefits of immigration[25] through acknowledging civil rights to migrants, starting from the right to work.

The objective of granting comparable rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all is at the core of European cooperation in integration, taking into account the necessity of balancing migrants' rights and duties.[26]
Indeed as the Polish experience in the Leonardo da Vinci "Let's Build Together" shows through data analysis, the competence validation:
- increased the candidates' employability
- had a positive impact on self-esteem and motivation to continue taking actions
- opened up new possibilities for further education, even if they failed to have their skills validated
- increased employees' reliability and mobility

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[25] - Stockholm Programme - Section 6.1.5 "The successful integration of legally resident third-country nationals remains the key to maximising the benefits of immigration" The Stockholm Programme provides a roadmap for European Union (EU) work in the area of justice, freedom and security for the period 2010-14.
[26] *Ibidem*

- increased the level of transparency of qualifications in the sector as employees' participation in the process gave the employers a clear image of the actual skills and any possible gap.

The MATCH partner countries will commit themselves to the common objective of granting migrants measures to recognise non-formal and informal learning. Therefore a coordination mechanism will be triggered involving the partner countries using a common reference framework as shown in details in the following chapters, relying on common modules, approaches and procedure that will be adapted to local situations taking into account local legal system and integration policies.

Integration is understood as the process of inclusion of immigrants in the institutions and relationships of the host society. [27]

Now wondering whether a Pan-EU validation system is possible, is a daring question that could confuse and misinterpret integration with assimilation, in its meaning of unidirectional, brutal process of suppressing the peculiarity of each culture[28]. This would be true not only of migrants coming from the Third Country but also of the European citizens themselves. On the contrary integration should mean the lessening of social difference between groups in order to promote their equal access to the civil rights.

Successful integration (participation in the institutions of the host society) requires acculturation and adaptation on the part of migrants. Migrants in most European societies at present tend to show poor levels of education, quality of housing and size of income. Migrants want to improve their lives: that is why they emigrated in the first place. If they are to succeed in the host society they have to acquire the competencies demanded[29] by it or if they already possess them, they should be given the opportunity to get proper recognition.

This is a further reason why the application of a Pan-EU recognition and validation principle must be pursued, provided that each nation state has formulated policies, created legal and administrative frameworks. In these specific local contexts a Pan-EU validation principle relying on key-concepts such as guidance, counselling, competence balancing, complementary training, differentiated assessment tools will prove efficacious and lead to successful experiences.

[27] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Condition, 2006 *Integration of migrants: Contribution of local and regional authorities* http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/22/en/1/ef0622en.pdf.
28 Ibidem, pag. 5.
29 Ibidem, pag. 8.