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European inventory of validation of informal and non-formal learning 2023

OVERVIEW REPORT



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Foreword

The new 8th edition of the Inventory is timely, published during the European Year of Skills at a time when skills have never been higher on the European Union's political agenda. The Year highlights the crucial importance of enabling all adults to take part in regular upskilling and reskilling over their working lives and the need to better value their skills. Validation has a key role to play in this. Validation is about opening up opportunities: opportunities for people to get better recognition for what they know and can do – leading to better prospects in work, or in their private lives; opportunities for employers or potential employers to tap into a wider pool of skills; and opportunities for us all to see people for who they really are and can be, and the contribution they can make to our society.

Over the past 20 years validation has moved from being at the margins to becoming a central topic of skills and employment policies and strategies. This trend, accelerated after the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, is likely to continue in a context of increasingly dynamic European labour markets with growing labour and skills shortages. The Green and Digital transitions require individuals to develop new skills, often in non-formal and informal contexts. Organisations are designing new and agile ways to take stock of and deploy the skills that their workers have. This ensures that everyone can make productive and gainful use of their full set of skills, including skills that may be less visible because they have been acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

During the last two decades, the European Commission, together with Cedefop, has supported the development of validation arrangements and strategies through the European Guidelines and the European Inventory for validation. Both have been updated at regular intervals. The European Guidelines were updated in May 2023 and provide advice on validation policy and practice. The European Inventory provides the evidence base on validation developments in Europe and we are proud to present its 8th edition. Together, they provide a comprehensive overview of European approaches to validation.

Validation of skills helps achieving the European Year of Skills objectives such as investing in skills, strengthening skills relevance and matching people's skills with job opportunities. Identification, documentation and assessment can make skills visible and lead to better decisions regarding recruitment and further skills development of workers.

Recent EU initiatives on micro-credentials and Individual Learning Accounts also embed the role of validation. Micro-credentials are designed and issued to support flexible learning pathways, including the possibility to validate learning outcomes as a way to obtain a micro-credential. Through Individual Learning Accounts individuals have the opportunity not only to embark on training courses, but also to validate their skills and competences which in turn is an incentive to engage in further learning.

The 2024 edition of the Inventory shows that implementation of comprehensive validation strategies has advanced well across Europe since the previous edition. However, a great deal of work remains to achieve across the board learner-centric approaches to validation, supported by policies and practices. Persisting challenges concern reaching out to wider audiences and consolidating connections between non-formal and informal learning and formal education and training. In this context, career guidance and counselling remain crucial,

helping individuals uncover learning and navigate the complex landscape of training offers, qualifications and micro-credentials.

Jürgen Siebel
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Executive summary

The European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is an overview of validation practices and arrangements of validation of non-formal and informal learning across Europe. Validation aims at making skills visible that are the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, so these can be used for further learning or employment purposes.

The Inventory is regularly updated based on the 20 December 2012 Council Recommendation on non-formal and informal learning principle and in line with the European guidelines for validation. The current 8th edition of the Inventory covers the validation systems of the 27 EU Member States and EFTA countries and ten ETF partner countries. This report presents findings in EU and EFTA countries. A second report covers the rest. The report describes trends observed in validation, focusing on the systematisation of validation approaches and its development in education and training, labour market and third sector contexts. It further addresses the extent of institutional coordination as well as the trends on validation processes and methods.

Systematisation of validation approaches

Existence and type of validation arrangements

There are possibilities for VNFIL in all EU-27 and EFTA countries under review in the 2023 European Inventory. As in previous editions, data shows that validation is prevalent in an education and training context. All countries have at least one sector of education and training in which validation is possible, normally connected to adult learning and continuous vocational training ⁽¹⁾. There has been a marked expansion on the number of countries with arrangements in other sectors.

Strategic policy and legal developments

Since the previous edition of the Inventory, in 2018, there have been significant strategic policy and legal developments to strengthen arrangements for validation. Across many countries, validation is increasingly linked to emerging national policy priorities, through the promotion and integration of validation into different strategies, related to skills and lifelong learning. Countries that have developed

⁽¹⁾ The Inventory differentiates between general education, initial and continuous vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning.

national skills strategies ⁽²⁾ include Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia ⁽³⁾ who have integrated a range of measures related to validation. Other countries are in the process of developing their national skills strategies and discussing the role of validation within them. For many other countries, validation is integrated into strategic documents to contribute towards meeting policy priorities. However, the extent to which validation is linked to other policy initiatives, tools and services is not always evident.

Legal developments adopted since 2018 have been most prominent in education and training and relate primarily to strengthening opportunities for validation and expanding the infrastructure and institutional framework for validation in education and training settings. Several countries are currently in the process of developing or revising their legal frameworks to strengthen arrangements for validation. Several countries have introduced measures to strengthen the link between education and training and the labour market, and in some countries, certain collective agreements include measures to strengthen the role and take up of validation in the labour market, albeit to a varying extent.

Outcomes of validation arrangements

Validation arrangements have different scopes, objectives and outcomes, but most validation arrangements in place across European countries allow for some form of certification (in the form of qualifications, partial qualifications, credits or modules). Exemptions from programmes are possible in around three quarters of instances where validation arrangements are in place. In around half of the validation arrangements reviewed, individuals can acquire a full formal qualification, and in a slightly lower share of cases it is possible to obtain a non-formal qualification (or other certificates), specific parts of a formal qualification, credits or modules. It is less common to have validation arrangements that allow for access to formal programmes, or that specify training needs for the individual to obtain a full certificate. This data suggests a tendency to have arrangements that are directed towards certification, and less emphasis on formative approaches that identify training needs or access to lifelong learning opportunities. Further research is needed to determine the role of validation in increasing access to jobs and employment opportunities.

⁽²⁾ Characterised by set of features based on: [Working Group on Adult Learning. Findings report PLA on National Skills Strategies, 20-21 October 2022, Brussels.](#)

⁽³⁾ These strategies are described in detail in [European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Thematic report: Evolution of validation as part of an integrated part of national skills policies and strategies.](#) (Luomi-Messerer, 2024).

Coverage and expansion of the validation offer

Expansion of the validation offer

The Inventory data clearly shows a trend in the expansion of validation arrangements over time. By 2023 all countries have either developed such arrangements or are in the process of (re)defining them. Moreover, while validation initiatives have traditionally been more widespread in education and training, there has been a marked increase in the number of countries with validation arrangements in the labour market between 2018 and 2023 (see figure 3.2 for the significant expansion of the validation offer in the labour market). As such, today, all countries covered by the 2023 Inventory have at least some validation arrangements in place in education and training, and two thirds have arrangements in place in the labour market and in the third sector. Expansion in the third sector since 2018 has been comparatively lesser.

There are still areas for improvement. The progress documented does not mean that validation provides opportunities for all skills and competencies that individuals have developed to be validated. For example, within the education and training sector, where validation arrangements are most common, arrangements may not exist in all subsectors (adult learning, CVET, higher education, IVET or general education) or may not cover all qualifications available in these subsectors, but only some. Finally, usage patterns of these validation arrangements remain fragmented, requiring further attention in going forward.

Trends in the take-up of validation

Available data shows an upward trend in the number of individuals participating in validation. However, the overall up-take of validation remains limited. The systematic collection of quality and comprehensive data continues to be an issue, which limits the validity of these findings. Data on flows of beneficiaries who have entered, proceeded, and succeeded in different stages of validation is often unavailable. This complicates the evaluation of the impact of validation initiatives.

Outreach measures for disadvantaged groups

Effective outreach continues to be a challenge regarding certain target groups, and lack of awareness of validation constitutes a major barrier to access. Although these patterns remain valid for several countries, visible progress in the overall expansion of 'general' outreach and awareness raising activities is evident. All countries have activities in place to raise awareness on validation across education and training systems, the labour market and the third sector – though the scope and range of these activities vary from being national, regional, local, or related to

individual projects. Despite this progress, the Inventory identified very few targeted measures aimed at reaching disadvantaged groups.

Institutional landscape

Institutional setup

The institutional framework for validation across countries remains fragmented, involving a mix of public and private bodies with diverse roles and regulations. Most countries lack a robust system for coordination, with Inventory reports emphasising the need for better sector-wide collaboration. Some nations have more centralised institutional set ups in place (e.g. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Portugal, and Romania) while others have taken steps in this direction (e.g. Estonia, France, Poland, Slovakia). However, many countries need improved coordination for coherent validation frameworks across sectors.

Funding arrangements and costs

Validation costs differ by sector and country, with some offering free or partially subsidised validation, while others require fees from applicants, albeit sometimes with exceptions for vulnerable groups. Some countries encounter challenges supporting specific individuals or sectors due to limited financial aid or employer hesitancy, while many lack systems to track validation-related costs beyond formal education, although some promising initiatives exist in certain countries. There is also an observed trend in the increased use of EU funding by several countries.

Relationship between validation, skills audits and individual learning accounts

Legislative frameworks for skills audits are lacking, and there is no common pattern for provision. There is also an absence of formalised and systematic linkages between skills audits⁴ and validation processes, except in a small minority of countries where audits are integral to IVET and CVET. In Belgium and France, skills audit users are commonly referred to a validation process despite no formal or systematic linkage.

(⁴) A skills audit is defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning as ‘a process aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and /or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes’.

The implementation of ILAs across Europe based on the 2022 Council Recommendation on Individual Learning Accounts is underway. Pilot programmes are on-going or under preparation in about half of the countries covered, with some schemes already operational (e.g., Compte Personnel de Formation in France). As suggested in the Council Recommendation, Member States are recommended to put in place individual learning accounts to be used to access validation, including skills assessment opportunities. Such validation opportunities should be offered within a public registry.

Validation provision elements

Links to National Qualifications Frameworks

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) can help promote and facilitate validation, and there has been further progress in the number of countries establishing such links between their NQFs and validation in recent years. These links have taken different forms. NQFs describe their levels in terms of learning outcomes, which is an enabler of validation. NQFs classify and order qualifications and thus can provide reference points for validation; some countries such as Estonia, Italy or Malta have developed guidelines on how NQF descriptors and standards can be used for this purpose. NQFs are also helping to increase the legitimacy of non-formal learning and validation, making it clear that even the highest qualification levels can be acquired through validation (for example in Ireland, Finland or France). A particularly strong link occurs when NQFs are used more proactively to promote validation opportunities. In France, for qualifications to be part of the NQF, education and training providers need to ensure that validation options are available, which creates strong incentives to ensure validation opportunities are available across qualifications. Finally, NQFs can provide strong quality assurance frameworks for qualifications obtained through validation.

Standards and reference points

Various sectors in multiple countries align their validation standards with formal education, using the same or equivalent reference points for validation and formal qualifications. Several countries make efforts to align their validation procedures and certifications with formal education standards, referenced to their respective NQFs. Croatia recently updated assessment guidelines for assessing occupational profiles with reference to the NQF. Estonia is reforming its professional qualifications system towards a skills-focused approach to improve alignment with

its NQF. Malta, Poland, and Slovakia also reference more occupational profiles to their respective NQFs.

Validation methods

Since the Inventory update of 2018, validation methods remain specific and heterogeneous across different countries and sectors overall. While many follow the four-stage validation approach, tools and templates used differ across stages and sectors. The same tools and approaches can be used rather consistently nationally or regionally, but not in those countries where validation services are offered in the context of individual initiatives or projects (e.g., Austria, Germany) or by institutions and organisations operating independently from central government (Scandinavian countries).

Use of digital technologies in validation

There is a lack of substantial integration of digital technologies within validation, despite the transformative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on study and work. The review of existing digital platforms, especially for documentation of learning, reveals fragmentation. Individual initiatives or projects drive this integration in most countries – e.g. Austria, Germany, Belgium, Finland, and Ireland. There is a lack of evidence on the interoperability of digital validation tools across countries, as highlighted in our research for Germany and Finland. Usage of digital technologies for assessments remains at the experimental level overall, with limited reported usage of Europass and Youthpass platforms for documenting non-formal and informal learning as part of the validation process.

Quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

Most countries continue to apply general quality assurance frameworks (those already used in education and training) in validation. Only ten countries reported quality assurance frameworks specifically applying to validation in at least one sector (Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Romania, and Switzerland).

There is a lack of regular monitoring systems covering service quality, usage trends, and outcomes, which persists in validation arrangements since the last Inventory update. Only a handful of countries have centralised monitoring systems for validation, but approaches vary significantly. For instance, Greece focuses on participation and success rates, lacking impact assessment. Estonia monitors ECTS credits, success rates, and conducts satisfaction surveys. Italy and Romania primarily ensure compliance with service standards. Denmark and Ireland prioritise evaluating service quality through dedicated bodies. In some countries (France,

Malta, Norway, and Sweden), stakeholders have expressed the need for improved monitoring.

Conclusions

The European Inventory documents clearly how, in recent years, Europe has witnessed a noticeable surge in the expansion and consolidation of validation arrangements, particularly within the labour market. Collaboration among stakeholders has strengthened, creating a more conducive environment for validation.

Despite this progress in the setting up of validation arrangements, disparities in their availability persist across countries and sectors, and validation is not available for all qualifications and connections between validation in different contexts remain limited. This leads to inequalities in individuals' opportunities to access validation, and to labour market inefficiencies. Moreover, the uptake of validation remains constrained, and the evidence base on the impact of validation arrangements remains limited by the paucity of comprehensive data on the flows of beneficiaries who enter, proceed and succeed in different stages of validation. Validation tends to be directed towards awarding full or parts of qualifications (in the form of credits, modules or exemptions) and is less common for accessing formal programs. This raises questions about the extent to which validation is fully contributing to its role in widening access to education and training. Its role in increasing increasing employability needs to be also further explored empirically.

A positive trend is that validation arrangements are increasingly intertwined with NQFs, which provide a structured framework for recognition and are enablers of validation. In most countries covered by the Inventory NQFs have now explicit links with validation, allowing the achievement of NQF qualifications through validation.

Institutional arrangements for validation vary widely across countries. While this diversity can have some advantages, it can also cause confusion, especially for individuals who move across sectors and countries. Calls for improved cross-sector coordination have grown, with some countries moving toward institutional centralisation, which they see as a response to this problem.

Funding arrangements remain diverse across countries and sectors, while there is a trend of increased use of EU funding to subsidise validation initiatives in some countries. The integration of validation into Individual Learning Accounts is still on-going, as their widespread introduction across European countries has not yet taken place. This is an area where future progress is expected, as is the

availability of validation opportunities connected to ILA schemes, as outlined in the 2022 Council Recommendation.

Building on the trends documented in the previous Inventories regarding validation methods, the most significant positive developments include the adoption of the four-stage validation approach and the use of formal education learning outcomes (in many instances within NQFs) as reference points for validation. However, the use of digital technologies for validation remains limited and quality assurance is still fragmented in many systems.

Evolving technological landscapes and changing education and work dynamics, as well as skills development pathways for European citizens require a continuous monitoring of trends to inform policy development and ensure inclusive lifelong learning, but also a re-examination of the way in which validation is approached and prioritised in European countries and individuals' biographies. Current trends reflect a growing commitment to enabling individuals to validate their skills and experiences, but continued efforts to bridge gaps, enhance coordination, and adapt to evolving landscapes will be key in shaping the future of validation in Europe.

CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

This report offers an overview of the validation landscape across Europe based on reports on 32 systems produced as part of the 2023 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽⁵⁾. The countries covered in this report include the EU-27 Member States ⁽⁶⁾ and the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). For Belgium, two country reports were produced.

Validation occurs in different contexts in different ways, and thus it is important to collect the information separately in each context. The information collected covers validation in the following sectors: education and training (divided into five subsectors - general education, initial VET (IVET), continuing VET (CVET), higher education, adult learning), the labour market and the third sector ⁽⁷⁾. A detailed note on the methodology used to produce the 2023 European Inventory is provided in Annex 1. It is advisable for readers to refer to this Annex to understand how to interpret the numerical data and charts presented in this report.

The report focuses on developments regarding:

- (a) the systematisation of validation approaches, including the type of validation arrangements in place, the outcomes of validation and the adoption of validation in policy strategies and legal developments.
- (b) the coverage and expansion of the validation offer within and across countries, including the diversity of groups reached and take-up trends.
- (c) institutional landscape of validation across different levels of governance and the way they are connected, or the extent to which validation is coherently coordinated across different bodies and levels of governance.

⁽⁵⁾ The synthesis is based on an analysis of the data collected through the country and thematic reports as well as 'country fiches' of the European Inventory on validation completed by country experts. All [reports are available online](#).

⁽⁶⁾ Two county reports were produced for Belgium: Belgium-FR (for Wallonia-Brussels) and Belgium-NL (for Flanders)

⁽⁷⁾ Arrangements within the labour market refer to initiatives in which private sector institutions play a central role (alone or in collaboration with public sector institutions). The third sector arrangements are initiatives that might be associated with youth work or volunteering or developed by third sector organisations such as charities or NGOs. Labour Market and Third Sector validation arrangements may or may not be connected to formal education activities.

- (d) the elements of the validation process and methods, in terms of the way they are coherent, harmonised and consistently applied within and across countries and sectors.

CHAPTER 2.

Systematisation of validation approaches

This chapter primarily examines the extent to which countries across Europe have developed systematic approaches to validation, based on the principles described in the [European guidelines for validation](#) and aligned with the [2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of formal and non-formal learning](#) (Council of the European Union, 2012).

2.1. Existence and type of validation arrangements

The European Inventory data shows that possibilities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are reported to exist in all 32 systems under study, in at least one of the three broad sectors reviewed (education and training, labour market or third sector) as shown in Figure 1. Overall, across most countries there have been significant legal and strategic policy developments to bring about new and strengthen existing arrangements for validation ⁽⁸⁾ since 2018. Several country experts reported an increasing emphasis on the development of validation in their countries. This is evident in the reference to validation within the national skills or lifelong learning strategies, as well as in the introduction of legislation that expands and reinforces opportunities for validation. Several countries, including Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland, have updated or developed guidelines or recommendations to support the use of validation and its expansion ⁽⁹⁾. In some other countries, actions have been comparatively modest, but discussions regarding the future development of validation arrangements are ongoing, as discussed in more detail in section 2.3.

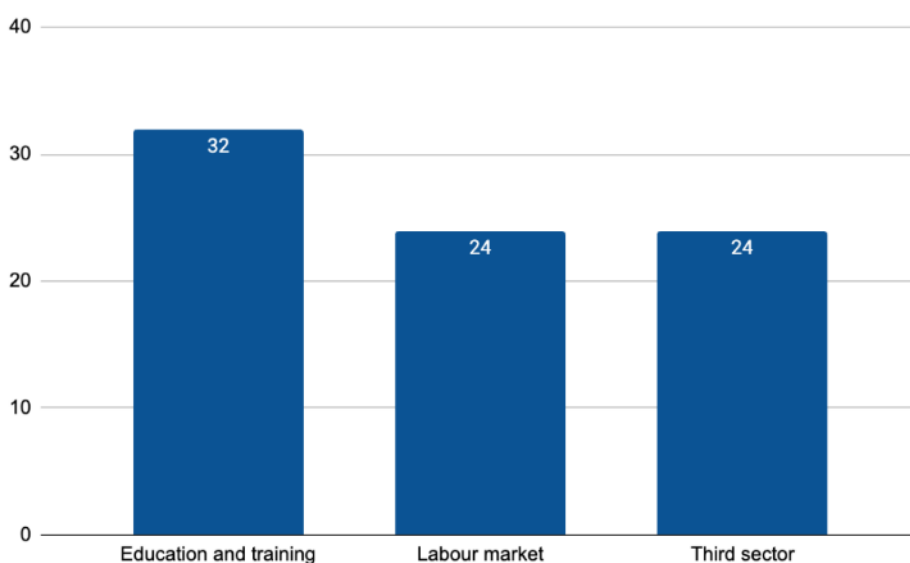
As in previous editions of the Inventory, data show that validation is mainly prevalent in the education and training area, although expansion has been significant in the last 5 years in the labour market (Chapter 3). The number of countries developing initiatives in the third sector has also increased, with some evidence of a more systematic approach emerging in certain countries, supported by legislation, such as in Austria (Volunteering Act 2023) or Croatia (Volunteering

⁽⁸⁾ Validation arrangements are referred in the report as legal frameworks, strategies or policies to facilitate the use of validation in the specific contexts under study (Education and training and its subsectors, labour market, third sector)

⁽⁹⁾ Further details are provided in the [Country Reports](#) and in the Thematic Report on National Skills Strategies (Luomi-Messerer, 2024).

Act of 2021) (Section 2.3). Nevertheless, while developments in labour market arrangements are linked to public employment services, governments, education and training institutions and social partners, third sector initiatives still tend to operate in relative isolation, lacking connections with formal education programmes.

Figure 1. **Number of countries that report having validation arrangement by broad sector**



Source: 2023 validation Inventory country fiches.

2.2. Outcomes of validation arrangements

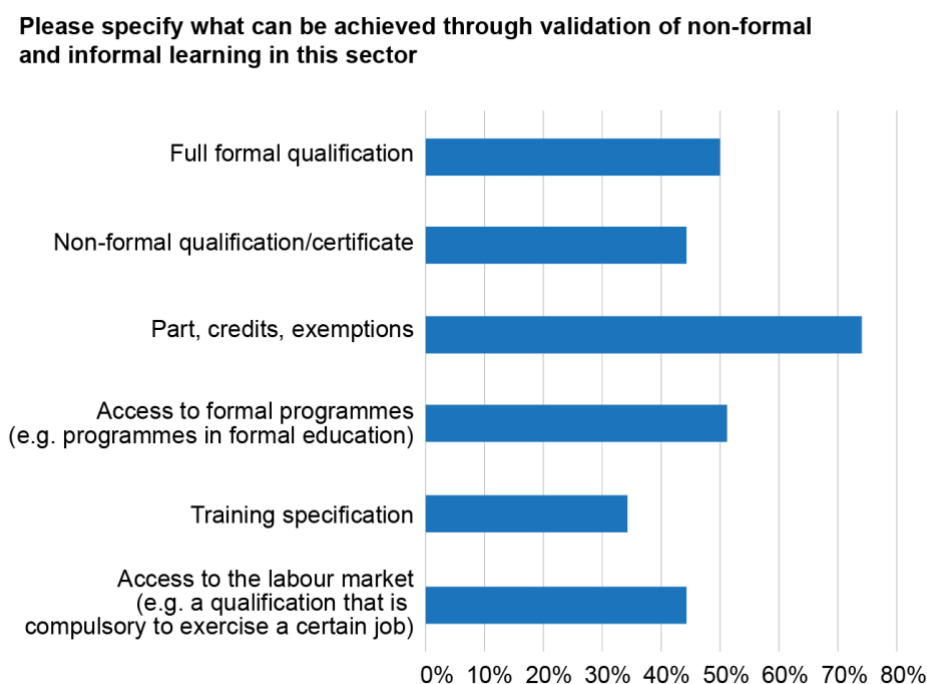
Each validation arrangement has a different scope, objectives and outcomes. Ideally, as noted by the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning and the principle of putting the individual at the centre (Cedefop, 2023b), these outcomes will be tailored to the specific needs of the individual and their circumstances. Figure 2 shows the share of existing arrangements for validation according to their possible outcomes – multiple outcomes are possible within each validation arrangement. Acquiring a full qualification is possible in 50% of the existing arrangements. Non-formal qualifications or other certificates, by which we refer to qualifications and certificates that are not awarded by formal education institutions, are a less frequent type of outcome, while obtaining parts of a formal qualification, credits, modules, or exemptions to programmes is possible in more than 70% of the validation arrangements in place. Overall (looking at these different possible outcomes together), in more than 90% of the cases validation

can be used to obtain some form of award (credits, modules, full or parts of a qualification or a non-formal qualification). This contrasts with a lesser reported use of validation for providing access to formal education and training programmes (which is an outcome in around 50% of arrangements) and for the specification of training needs ⁽¹⁰⁾, which is a possible outcome of the validation process in around a third of existing validation arrangements.

This data suggests a tendency to have arrangements that emphasise outcomes related to some form of award, and less emphasis on possibilities to provide access to formal education and training or the identification of training needs. This raises questions about the extent to which validation is fully contributing to its role in widening access to education and training and stimulating lifelong learning.

Concerning the potential of validation for increasing employability, data limitations do not allow to draw robust conclusions, but country experts reported that through validation it is possible to gain access to the labour market (e.g. by acquiring a qualification that is compulsory to exercise a certain job) in around 45% of existing validation arrangements.

Figure 2. **Share of validation arrangements by possible outcome**



Source: 2023 validation Inventory country fiches.

⁽¹⁰⁾ i.e. to map what training needs to be completed in order to achieve a (full) qualification.

2.3. Validation in national strategies and legal developments

Since 2018, and across most countries, there have been significant developments in the integration of validation in national strategies and policy developments to create new and strengthen existing arrangements for validation. Over the last decade we have observed a notable transition as countries have shifted from project-based initiatives to the establishment of formal frameworks, either through strategies or legislation related to the use of validation. While projects have been instrumental in establishing current frameworks and remain integral to the continued development of validation processes, it is crucial that strategic policy and legal developments continue to evolve to ensure a sustained and integrated approach to validation, in line with emerging priority areas, such as advances in technology and as labour market shifts.

This section begins with a focus on the integration of validation in national policy developments across Europe, followed by an overview of the main legal developments that have taken place since 2018.

2.3.1. Validation in strategic policy documents

The [European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning](#) provide a comprehensive overview of how validation processes differ according to the needs and characteristics of those involved and context in which they take place. It also outlines how a strategic approach to validation can improve coordination and coherence across these different contexts. Such an approach can be influential in connecting and integrating validation into various policy areas.

This section provides an overview of strategies implemented to enhance the use of validation. A key development since the 2018 Inventory update has been the adoption of National Skills Strategies in several countries, all of which make explicit reference to validation. In other countries, there is evidence of validation being integrated into broader strategic documents related to lifelong learning or other emerging policy areas as discussed in more detail below.

The Thematic report on National Skills Strategies explores the evolution of validation as an integrated part of national skills policies. Countries that have developed the current generation of national skills strategies ⁽¹¹⁾ include Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia ⁽¹²⁾. Analysis of these

⁽¹¹⁾ Characterised by set of features based on Working Group on Adult Learning (2021).

⁽¹²⁾ These strategies are described in more detail in the Thematic Report on National Skills Strategies (Luomi-Messerer, 2024).

overarching national skills strategies reveals the integration of key measures related to validation as briefly introduced below:

- (a) Finland: The Continuous Learning Reform (2019-23) published in 2020 refers to better recognition of individuals' existing competence. Digitalisation is seen to support for the expansion of validation and promote the development of practices and methods.
- (b) Germany: The National Skills Strategy ⁽¹³⁾ launched in 2019 contains references to validation schemes to make the competences of low-qualified people who have gained extensive experience during their working lives more visible.
- (c) Ireland: The National Skills Strategy 2025, approved in 2016, emphasises the role of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) and supports a multi-agency approach to the development of RPL in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Action 4.3 in the NSS is to increase recognition of workplace learning and to develop capacity for RPL.
- (d) Norway: The Norwegian Strategy for Skills Policy 2017–21 signed in 2017 includes objectives related to validation in the labour market and to support migrants. The focus is on simplifying and improving recognition and assessment procedures.
- (e) Poland: The Integrated Skills Strategy 2030 adopted in 2020, aims to improve procedures for the validation of learning outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The strategy outlines plans for the provision of guidance to support validation processes.
- (f) Slovakia: The Lifelong Learning and Counselling Strategy for 2021-30, approved in 2021 has paved the way for a pending Act on Lifelong Learning. The Strategy proposes 55 measures divided into fifteen thematic units. The emphasis in one of these units is on the integration of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Slovak qualification framework (SKKR).
- (g) Slovenia: The Slovenian Adult Education Master Plan 2022-30 contains five priority areas for development in education and professional training, and validation is closely linked to the Plan's priority areas.

Other countries are in the process of development of national skills strategies and discussing the role of validation in them. DG Reform and the OECD are supporting Bulgaria in the development of its national skills strategy (OECD, 2023).

⁽¹³⁾ The direct translation of the German term *Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie* is 'National Further or Continuing Education Strategy'; however, in the English publication the title 'National Skills Strategy' is used.

An important role of validation is highlighted in the development of the strategy. The OECD Skills Strategy Bulgaria report recommends a reform of the RPL system, emphasising greater collaboration between stakeholders, simplifying administrative process, aligning RPL certificates with other certificates, improve data collection, targeted services to vulnerable groups and subsidies for RPL to stimulate take-up.

Austria, Cyprus and Malta have integrated measures to support the expansion and integration of validation in their Lifelong Learning Strategies. In Austria, the strategy for Lifelong Learning (2020) jointly developed as an inter-ministerial strategy and supported by the social partners and all key stakeholders includes key measures to support validation. This supports the implementation of the Validation Strategy (2017) as a common, cross-sectoral reference document for the various validation initiatives and approaches that exist at institutional and regional levels. The Cyprus Lifelong Learning Strategy (CyLLLS) 2021-27 and subsequent action plan outlines the need to develop mechanisms to support validation (among other aspects). Malta's National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2020-2030) includes a strategic measure on the recognition and validation of prior learning. It emphasises the importance of collaboration with entities who are providing validation of prior learning to understand processes, provide support, streamline practices to develop a collective and practical approach to validation.

Some countries also have other strategies, including education strategies and strategies related to workforce development, where validation is included. In Czechia, for example, the strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+ covers education policy as a whole and has a specific objective (see objective 1.8 of the Czech strategy) focusing on the validation of non-formal learning. The Education Strategy for 2021-35 in Estonia outlines the development of RPL process to broaden learning opportunities. In Switzerland, Vision 2030 of the Vocational Training Strategy (2018) includes several projects on validation. In Latvia, the National Education Strategy for 2021-2027 foresees an increased emphasis on validation. Similar increased emphasis on enhancing validation opportunities across various national strategies in education can be seen in other countries, such as Belgium-FR, Lithuania and Croatia.

Importantly, in some countries, recent strategic documents make explicit reference to the link between validation and other emerging policy priorities. The National Strategy for the Employment of the Working Force 2021-2027 (*Strategia națională pentru ocuparea forței de muncă 2021-2027*) in Romania, draws connections between validation and employment, entrepreneurship, digitalisation, and developing work opportunities for the green transition. In Iceland, the National

Action Plan for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (2020) issued in 2020 refers to validation as a tool to reduce study time.

2.3.2. Legal developments

The type, degree of formality and orientation of legislation around validation varies. However, across many countries there have been significant legal developments – legislation encompassing decrees, laws and acts - to strengthen existing validation arrangements. In those countries where legal developments since 2018 have been reported, these have been used primarily with two aims: (1) strengthen and expand the infrastructure and institutional framework for validation and (2) support summative validation.

Legislation strengthening and expanding the infrastructure and institutional framework for validation has been adopted in certain countries. In Portugal, two pieces of legislation were adopted in 2022, namely Ordinance No. 61/2022 and Ordinance No. 62/2022 (Menitra, 2024) to strengthen the role of the national network of centres for the qualification of adults (*Centros Qualifica*). As the only entity authorised to conduct validation procedures, the primary emphasis is on enhancing access to validation and enabling increased flexibility within the centres to meet the diverse needs and circumstances of beneficiaries. In Latvia, the reform of the Vocational Education Law in 2022, has led to changes in terms of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of organisations involved in the validation system. Sweden adopted its Validation Regulation in 2022 (Sweden. Ministry of Education, 2022) which places an increased emphasis on coordination in validation.

Several countries are in the process of developing or revising their legal frameworks to strengthen arrangements for validation in the education and training area. For example, Croatia has introduced two recent pieces of legislation to clarify and strengthen the definition of validation. The Adult Education Act (2021) defines the approach to validation in adult education whereas the CROQF Act (2021) defines the approach to validation in higher education. Iceland is proactively widening access to validation through the ongoing revision of the Law on Adult Education (27/2010), signalling a commitment to an inclusive approach to validation.

Czechia is planning an amendment to Act No. 179/2006 Coll (Czech Republic. Parliament, 2006). Expected to take effect around 2025, this amendment primarily focuses on introducing an ICT system to reduce bureaucracy and enhance flexibility in the recognition of prior learning, experience, and certifications.

In Belgium-NL significant developments to validation arrangements in education and work have occurred due to the adoption of the new Decrees on

validation and on common quality framework (2019), which facilitate the acquisition of professional qualifications and promote an integrated policy on validation. In Italy, recent Decrees (Italia. Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2021, 2023), highlight the growing significance of validating competences gained in non-formal and informal settings. Lithuania's new legislative framework (Lithuania. Parliament, 2021; 2023b), provides a comprehensive basis for the recognition and assessment of competences gained through non-formal learning. Sweden published its Validation Regulation in 2022 (Sweden. Ministry of Education, 2022), which redefines validation as 'a structured process which includes an in-depth mapping and assessment aimed to recognise a person's knowledge (knowledge, skills, responsibilities and autonomy) independent of how they were acquired'. This definition is more closely aligned to the 2012 EU Council Recommendation on validation than the definitions previously used in the country. The Validation Regulation applies across all sectors. This new definition is now included, for example, in the Education Act.

Legal developments in the third sector are evident in several countries. In Croatia, the Volunteering Act of 2021 explicitly acknowledges a volunteer's right to have their skills, competences and experiences acquired through volunteering recognised. Similarly, in Austria, amendments to the Volunteering Act in September 2023 introduced the Austrian Volunteer Passport as a central proof of engagement in volunteering. This passport serves as evidence of engagement in volunteering, detailing activities undertaken, and the competences acquired. Spain, Organic Law 3/2022, recognises the value of non-formal and informal learning acquired through volunteering for the development of professional competencies. Finland has adopted legislation in 2020 and 2021 in relation to adult learning, to enhance the identification and recognition of skills and competences acquired in the third sector.

Legal developments in relation to validation in the labour market are evident in several countries. In Austria several types of validation arrangements closely linked to the labour market have a legal basis and are linked to CVET. In line with the Government Programme 2020-2024, higher VET ⁽¹⁴⁾ qualifications are to be geared to the needs of the labour market, and opportunities for validation in companies, using summative approaches, are intended to play an important role in this context. In Belgium-NL, since the implementation of the 2019 Decrees on validation and on a common quality framework, procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through Certificates of Work Experience have

⁽¹⁴⁾ Higher VET: this term is used for vocationally oriented programme and qualification types that are fully outside the QF-EHEA and are linked to EQF levels 5 to 8 via their inclusion in a national qualifications framework (NQF) (Cedefop, 2019:14).

been improved. Noteworthy is the empowerment of training providers in the labour market to assess and qualify candidates in a way that is equivalent to the public centres of adult education. In Bulgaria, under the 2022 amendment of the Employment Promotion Act, funding has been allocated to the PES to provide validation opportunities to economically inactive people. Meanwhile, Croatia is adopting a sectoral approach with different legal frameworks defining pre-requisites for specific job roles, and thereby promoting a diverse approach to sectoral validation. The Trades and Crafts Act (2020) builds on the process of validating non-formal and informal learning in craft occupations and stipulates that 'for the purpose of running some associated craft businesses for which adequate qualifications are required, an examination for evidencing necessary competences is taken'. The examination for evidencing necessary competences includes practical knowledge and, if successfully passed, leads to a certificate issued by the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts.

Collective agreements that include measures to strengthen the role and take up of validation are in place in several countries, albeit to a varying extent. This includes Austria, Belgium-NL, Belgium-FR, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden. For example, in Austria some, but not all, collective agreements include such measures; in Germany, in the context of collective labour agreements between the *Sozialpartners* (Unions and employers' associations), some -but not all- branches validate competences acquired through informal learning using qualifications in the formal education system as a reference point.

CHAPTER 3.

Coverage and expansion of the validation offer

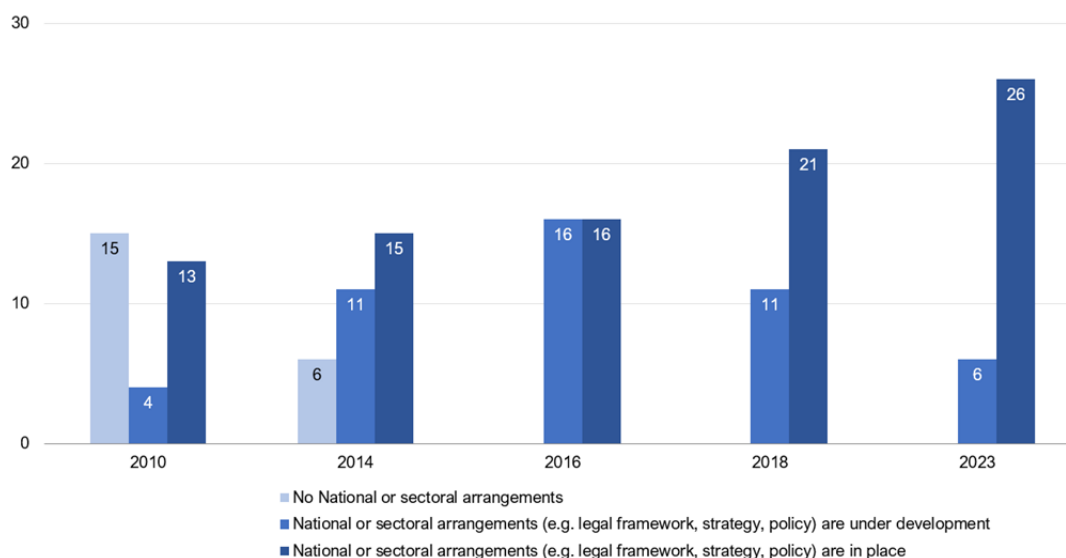
This chapter examines the extent to which the provision of validation services has expanded across various sectors in recent years and analyses the impact of these advancements on outreach to disadvantaged groups and the subsequent uptake rates.

3.1. The expansion of the validation offer

A key question in terms of policy progress is whether validation arrangements have been increasing or remain constant, or even withdraw, over time. The Inventory data provides a unique way of looking at the overall picture of validation developments in Europe. An important finding is that these data show a clear trend in the expansion of validation arrangements over time, including since 2018.

The country experts that participated in the production of the Inventory were asked 'What kind of approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning is prevalent in your country?' They reported if national arrangements or arrangements by area were in place or under development. There is a clear trend that countries are moving towards consolidating existing arrangements and establishing the legal basis for them. By 2023, 26 countries have developed validation arrangements, and six countries are in the process of (re)defining them (compared to 21 and 11 respectively in 2018), as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Number of countries by prevalent approach and year



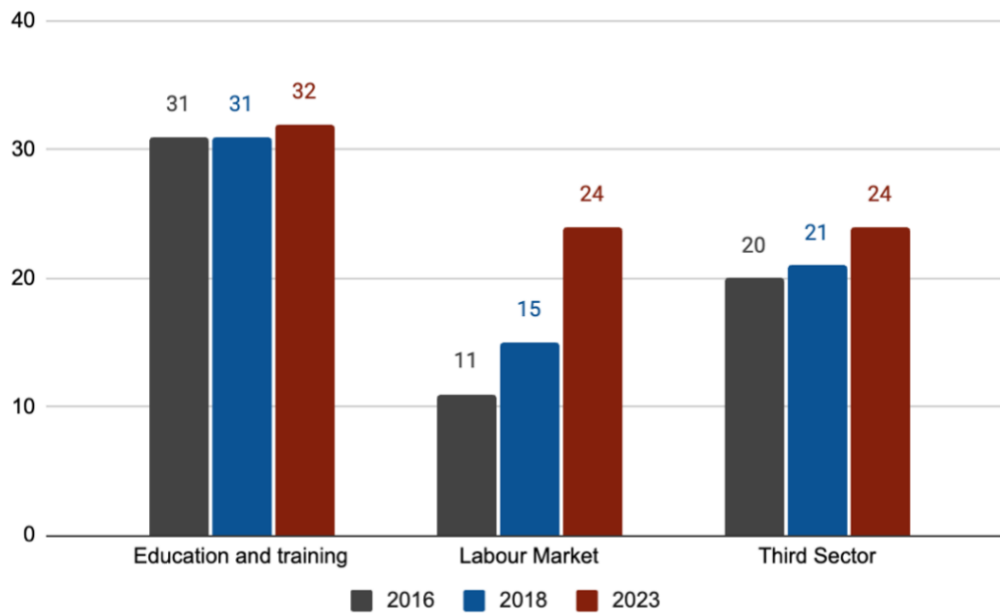
Source: 2023 validation Inventory country fiches.

The Inventory has collected data across three broad sectors (education and training, labour market and third sector). For education and training, data were collected for the following subsectors: general education, IVET, CVET, higher education and adult learning. Each of these can be considered as a possible context in which it is possible to have validation arrangements in place ⁽¹⁵⁾.

When examining the situation by sector, as illustrated in Figure 4, validation initiatives were extensively reported in education and training in 2018, but not in the labour market or third sector. The availability of validation initiatives was particularly limited in the labour market in 2018. However, there has been a notable increase in the number of countries with validation arrangements, with significant expansion observed in the labour market between 2018 and 2023. Currently, three-quarters of the countries in the Inventory have validation arrangements in both the labour market and the third sector, while all of them have validation arrangements in place in at least one education and training subsector.

⁽¹⁵⁾ There are 7 possible contexts in which validation is possible: general education, initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training, higher education, adult learning, in education and training, labour market or third sector per each country. This results in 224 possible contexts in which validation might be a possibility within the countries under study (7 times 32 countries). The data shows validation arrangements present in 174 instances of the 224 possible – See the Annex for a detailed overview of the study’s methodology. It should also be noted that these contexts are not equally clearly separated in all countries. See also Cedefop, 2023a.

Figure 4. Evolution in the number of countries with validation arrangements



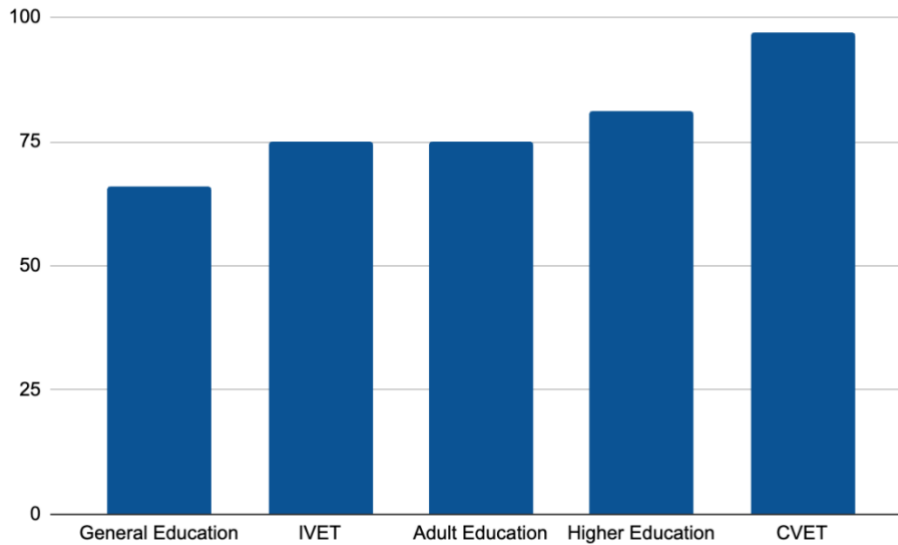
Source: European Inventory Reports (2023, 2018, 2016).

Nb: Data broken down by sector were collected for the first time in the 2016 Inventory.

These data provide a very good initial overview of the expansion in validation arrangements over the last seven years in the different sectors. However, to obtain a more nuanced view of the expansion of validation it is important to examine trends at the level of validation arrangements. This is because within education and training validation arrangements may (or may not) exist in various subsectors. If these subsectors are considered separately, this results in 160 possible subsectors within education and training in the countries covered by the Inventory (32 countries by five education subsectors), in which there could be validation arrangements in place.

Figure 5 shows that the subsector with a greater share of validation arrangements in place across all Inventory countries is CVET (where validation arrangements are in place in 31 out of the 32 Inventory countries, this is, in 97% of the Inventory countries). This is followed by higher education, adult education and IVET, whereas arrangements at the general secondary education level are less frequent.

Figure 5. **Existence of validation arrangements by subsector of education (% of countries)**

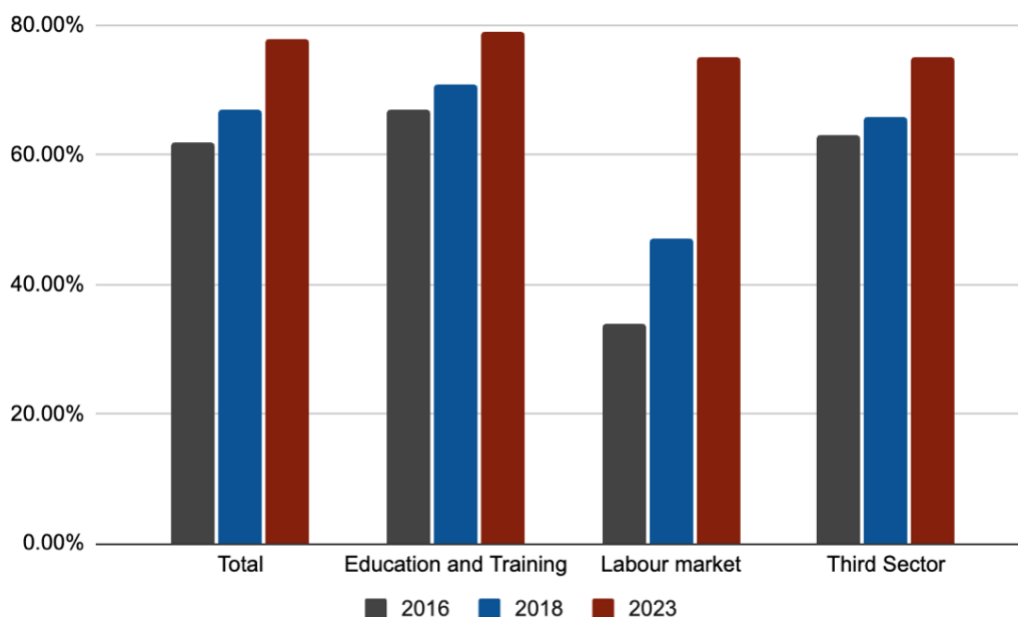


Source: European Inventory Reports (2023). For each subsector, the figure shows the share of subsectors across all Inventory countries (32) with validation arrangements in place.

Figure 6 presents trends in the share of validation arrangements in place in the Inventory countries for the 2018-2023 period. It specifically illustrates the evolution of coverage across the education and training subsectors. A 100% share would mean that there are arrangements in place in all 160 education and training subsectors in the 32 countries. Data on the share of arrangements for the labour market and the third sector (32 arrangements each, reflecting the 32 countries covered by the Inventory), are also included in the graph for comparison.

The figure therefore shows that there has been a clear increase over time in the share of sectors with validation arrangements in place. While in 2018 validation arrangements were in place in just over 60%, this share has increased to almost 80% in 2023. This means that there are validation arrangements in place in 126 in out of a possible 160 subsectors in education and training. The data on the labour market and the third sector reflects the increases already noted in Figure 5. Thus, validation arrangements are in place in a large majority of countries, across a good spread of subsectors of education and training. This shows the increasing profile of validation in policy - as discussed earlier in this report-, but also new trends towards validation in the private and third sector – see, for example, the 2023 Inventory case study on Internal Talent Markets.

Figure 6. Evolution in the share of validation arrangements in place



Source: European Inventory Reports (2023, 2018, 2016). The Figure notes the percentage of validation arrangements in place by sector. For the labour market and third sector this equals the share of countries covered by the Inventory with some validation arrangements in place in this area. For education and training, this represents the share of arrangements in place out of 160 possible sub-sector arrangements (32 countries multiplied by 5 subsectors).

Nb: Data broken down by sector were collected for the first time in the 2016 Inventory.

The data, thus, shows a clear trend towards the expansion of validation arrangements in education and training and the third sector and, above all, in the labour market.

It should be noted that there are still areas for improvement: first, there is still scope for further expansion of validation arrangements in the labour market and the third sector; second, there is scope for further expansion at the subsector level within education and training, as no validation arrangements were documented in some subsectors in some countries – in around 20% of the cases.

Finally, it is also important to note that the progress the figures show in different contexts does not mean that validation provides opportunities for all relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to be validated. Validation arrangements may be partial and not, for example, cover all qualifications available in an education subsector, but only some. Thus, further progress is still likely to be needed.

Moreover, the country reports produced by our network of country experts and insights from interviews with relevant stakeholders reveal that the spread, activation, awareness, and usage of these validation arrangements can remain

fragmented and limited, necessitating further attention in going forward (see Section 3.2 and 3.3).

3.2. Trends in the take-up of validation

While challenges in the systematic collection and monitoring of data on validation trends persist hindering measurement of the impact of validation (see also section 5.6), available data reveals varying patterns in the number of individuals undergoing validation processes, as some countries revealed increases in participation, whereas others note a decline. Overall, a higher number of countries are reported as experiencing an upward trend in participation, than a declining trend, but the uptake of validation remains generally limited.

Countries where an increase in the take-up of validation within education and training is reported include Belgium (FR and NL), Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany (in higher education only), Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, and Spain. For some countries (e.g. Belgium-NL, Bulgaria and Latvia), this originates from a baseline of relatively low numbers of people undergoing validation, and sometimes the introduction of new legislation: Decrees on validation in Belgium and amendments to the Education Law in 2022 in Latvia to facilitate and simplify validation opportunities for young people.

In Bulgaria, the expansion of validation certificates to include new professions such as paramedics, coupled with salary benefits for those who hold a validation certificate, has contributed to a growing number of individuals participating in validation. In Iceland, an increase in validation numbers is attributed to the new validation pathway for assistant nurses. In Luxembourg, an increase in the number of individuals participating in validation in general education has been reported, associated to participation in the Diploma+ scheme for NEETs, that serves as a training programme designed to bridge transition between school and employment or higher levels of education. In other countries where an increase in take up is observed, this is mainly reported to be in higher education and CVET.

Another channel to increase participation is through increased activity and availability at the provider level. In Ireland, though data on trends is not available, it is reported that the ongoing increase in provider implementation of validation, is expected to be matched by a corresponding increase in take-up in the future.

By contrast, Italy and Slovenia were reported to have experienced a general decline in the overall number of individuals undergoing validation. Nevertheless, in the specific case of Italy, validation is gaining significance in policy and legal terms. Cyprus, Czechia, Germany (except for HE), Finland, Liechtenstein, Romania,

Sweden, and Switzerland were reported to have maintained relatively constant levels of participation in validation.

In the labour market an upward trend in the take up of validation was reported in the case of Belgium-FR, Cyprus, Czechia, and the Netherlands. In Belgium-FR, the *Consortium de Validation des Compétences* (CDVC) plays an active role in promoting validation to companies, evident in an increase in the number of onsite validation procedures being undertaken in company settings.

In the third sector, an upward trend in validation is reported in the case of Finland, France and the Netherlands. In Finland, in addition to a growing number of initiatives and stakeholders involved in validation, changes to the Act on liberal education (2020 and 2021) ensure that competence-based learning acquired in liberal adult education can be accredited and recognised in formal education and in the labour market – signalling further efforts toward an integrated approach to validation. In the Netherlands, there has been a growing emphasis on the validation of non-formal and informal learning activities related to volunteering and youth work.

Challenges in the uptake of validation have been reported and are largely attributed to the overall lack of outreach, awareness and information on validation opportunities – often linked to fragmented provision of validation services, complexity of the validation procedure, project discontinuations and, in part of the period covered by this Inventory, the impact of COVID-19. These reported challenges pose significant barriers for certain target groups. In Switzerland, a stable percentage of adults obtain IVET qualifications through validation, with opportunities for validation available across several cantons. However, the lengthy, costly, and complex nature of validation procedures is noted. Moreover, opportunities for validation vary across cantons: validation procedures for certain qualifications may only be offered in some cantons, although they are open to candidates from all cantons.

Overall, enhanced stakeholder engagement in establishing procedures for validation has contributed to expanding the scope and range of validation opportunities and increase in the overall awareness of validation. However, as noted, the availability of precise and comprehensive data on take-up at the national level remains limited.

3.3. Outreach measures for disadvantaged groups

Previous editions of the European Inventory have reported an overall lack of outreach and awareness raising activities related to validation and its value. The 2020 study supporting the evaluation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the

validation of non-formal and informal learning highlighted the need for improvements in providing information, advice, and guidance. The study concluded that effective outreach continues to be a challenge regarding certain target groups, and that lack of awareness of validation constitutes a major barrier to access (European Commission, 2020a. 2020b).

Although these key challenges remain valid for several countries, visible progress in the overall expansion of 'general' outreach and awareness raising activities is evident. All countries have activities in place to raise awareness on validation across the education and training, labour market and third sector – though the scope and range of these activities vary from being national, regional, local, or related to individual projects.

As highlighted in the Thematic Report on Validation initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees produced as part of this Inventory, information and awareness raising activities are in place across many countries. Moreover, project-based initiatives aimed specifically at Ukrainian refugees were identified in six countries (Germany, France, Ireland, Austria, Romania, Finland). In Denmark, targeted outreach efforts to support Ukrainian refugees have been strengthened by recent legislation. The Special Law passed in 2021 entitles Ukrainian refugees to undergo an assessment of skills and competences for education and/or employment purposes.

The extent to which outreach and awareness raising activities are aimed at other disadvantaged groups remains more limited. However, notable examples can be highlighted in the case of Belgium (BE and FR), Malta and Finland. In Belgium-NL, AHOVOKS (the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education Qualifications and Grants) is currently developing online information for key stakeholders who play a key role in targeting hard to reach groups. In Belgium-FR, the Brussels-Wallonia project 'SPOC and support' represents an example of validation centres partnering up with local employment offices to offer validation opportunities to vulnerable groups. Finland stands out as a country that has a series of targeted outreach and awareness raising activities to reach disadvantaged groups. One notable initiative is the Reveal Your Skills campaign (*Osaaminen näkyviin*) as outlined in the box below. The success of this initiative, which achieved a high degree of visibility in Finland, is centred around an inclusive and integrated approach to validation and its value and benefits to a range of different beneficiaries, in differing circumstances (seeking employment, continuous learning, wellbeing). In Malta, the 2021 Validate your Experience campaign was partly aimed at migrants more broadly, to help to increase their chances of employment.

The Thematic Report on Outreach also produced as part of the 2023 Inventory revealed that although outreach measures and promotional activities are part of overarching national skills strategies, the extent to which validation is explicitly addressed in these strategies is variable. In Germany, for example, the national skills strategy includes outreach measures, without specific reference to validation. Instead, outreach measures tend to be included in the respective design of individual measures, as in the case of ValiKom and MYSKILLS. In Slovakia, media campaigns have been used to promote validation. Outreach activities and raising awareness activities are linked to the national skills policy and strategy in Slovenia by promoting education and training, equal opportunities and equal access to education and training, and validation opportunities. As noted above, in Finland, outreach measures and awareness raising activities initiated by the skills strategy is closely linked to validation. As part of this measure, 'outreach pilots' will be conducted in 1 200 companies and will also provide research data on the impact of the measures.

Box 1. Reveal Your Skills campaign, a validation-related outreach measure initiated by the Finnish Continuous Learning Reform

The first two-week 'Reveal Your Skills' campaign was organised in autumn 2021 (30.8.-12.9.2021) by the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL and Sivis Study Centre (SITRA, nd). In line with the goals of the Finnish Continuous Learning Reform, its primary goal was to encourage working age adults and other key target groups to identify their diverse competences in a positive light and to spark discussion about the importance of identifying competences for well-being, employment, competitiveness and inclusion. The campaign engaged a wide range of actors: the programme was implemented by more than 350 different companies, working life and leisure organizations, educational institutions, liberal adult education institutions, occupational pension companies, public administration organizations and projects, employment pension companies and guidance professionals.

Each organisation worked with their own target groups – customers, personnel, students and members – in different ways (coaching, workshops, storytelling etc.) to help people identify their competences. In addition to working age adults, other target groups include young people, job seekers and immigrants. Events and communication reached hundreds of thousands of people who saw their own and others' competences in a positive light.

The focus was on identifying and documenting acquired competence, rather than skills that are missing. The event helped develop an understanding that everyone accumulates valuable skills and competences in different environments – education, work, hobbies and relationships – at all stages of life.

Since 2022, the annual Reveal Your Skills event has been coordinated by JOTPA (Jatkuvan oppimisen ja työllisyyden palvelukeskus). A dedicated website contains tools and exercises produced by various operators for identifying own competences. A total of 23 exercises have been collected to help individuals identify and articulate their own skills. The tools and exercises are free of charge. In September 2022, as part of the Reveal Your Skills week, JOTPA organised an event where experiences and good

practices from the outreach work (hakeva toiminta) were shared. The event was attended by 200 people.

Source: Puukka, 2024.

A different policy approach to outreach can be highlighted in the case of France. The national skills investment plan (France. Ministry of Employment, 2018) and the *France Relance* post-COVID recovery plan specify enhanced investment for upskilling, reskilling and certification, including through VAE, for particularly disadvantaged areas and rural revitalisation areas ⁽¹⁶⁾, both of which have a disproportionate population of low-skilled or unskilled jobseekers, including NEETs.

Despite some general and targeted outreach and awareness raising activities aimed at disadvantaged groups, there is considerable room for improvement. Challenges relate to an overall lack of awareness of validation opportunities and fragmentation of activities. Inadequate coordination, lack of recognition of validation as a policy priority, insufficient resources necessary to reach disadvantaged groups are common challenges reported. More broadly, this calls for continued efforts to coordinate and integrate outreach and awareness raising activities on validation between key stakeholders in cooperation with career guidance services, social services, and employment services – as evident in the case of the Netherlands, France, and Iceland (see the Thematic Report on Outreach). Collecting and monitoring data on the impact of outreach and awareness-raising activities is an aspect in need of development.

⁽¹⁶⁾ *Quartiers prioritaires des politiques de la ville (QPV)* and *Zones rurales de revitalisation – ZRR*.

CHAPTER 4.

Institutional landscape

This chapter examines the progress made in institutional coordination and streamlining the provision and financing of validation. It explores the level of integration of skills audits ⁽¹⁷⁾ and individual learning accounts (ILAs) into validation procedures.

4.1. Institutional setup and stakeholder involvement

In most countries, the institutional set-up for validation has not changed substantially since the 2018 Inventory update. Institutions involved in validation include public and private organisations, with different types of roles, responsibilities and regulations. Whilst this diversity may reflect different country situations and varying needs many country reports emphasised the need to improve coordination and cooperation across sectors and underlined the lack of national institutions responsible for the overall coordination of validation arrangements. Better and more frequent involvement of certain stakeholders such as trade unions and the business sector were also identified as mechanisms to help improve validation services. For example, in Iceland, although the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) continues to centrally coordinate validation efforts, there has been a more direct engagement of employers in shaping and generating job profiles and learning outcomes since 2018. This increased involvement aims to enhance the relevance of competence assessments within the validation process.

A few countries – most of them small - such as Iceland, Malta, Portugal and Romania do have a centralised validation management system in place, which often involves a designated overarching institution. For example, in Malta, the system of governance and administration is also relatively centralised and primarily overseen by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA). A noteworthy recent initiative involves the publication of the Validation Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Policy in September 2022. It also entails the creation of Sector Skills Units and mandates the MFHEA to establish a Sector Skills

⁽¹⁷⁾ See Section 4.2 for a definition of 'skills audits' and Section 4.4 for a definition of 'individual learning accounts'.

Committee responsible for formulating and developing, among other tasks, criteria and standards for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In Czechia, France, Ireland and Sweden, there has been an observable trend towards institutional centralisation and streamlining. For example, France Compétences was established in 2019 to maintain and update the National Register of Professional Qualifications (RNCP) used in validation, coordinating the work of central government, regional authorities and social partners and replacing the multitude of training bodies and authorities with different governance remits. In Sweden, efforts at the national level have been undertaken since 2020 to improve the coordination of validation provision at the regional level with the creation of a working group with members from the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education.

New institutions have also emerged in some countries, such as in Poland and Slovakia. In Slovakia, these institutions have arisen as part of the 2019-2023 System of verifying qualifications (SOK) national project funded by the ESF and aimed at piloting new validation methods that align with the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The State Institute of VET (SIOV) is currently the authorising body. However, the new draft Act on Lifelong learning suggests a shift of this authority to the Ministry of Education.

Other developments have taken place such as in Estonia, for instance, where some responsibilities have been transferred to the Education and Youth Board since 2021. In Croatia, since the revision of the Croatian Qualifications Framework act in 2021, clearer roles and more responsibility have been given to the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Agency for VET and Adult Education, and Agency for Teacher Training. In Latvia, the reform of the Vocational Education Law in 2022, has led to changes in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the organisations involved in the validation system, whereby validation at LQF levels 1-4 is now more decentralised. With the 2022 Amendment to the Employment Promotion Act, Bulgaria strengthened the role of the PES in the field of validation, particularly in relation to economically inactive people.

Overall, the institutional set-up often remains fragmented, with a variety of stakeholders and institutions involved in validation arrangements, that are not always well connected with each other. It can be noted that the labour market involves more institutions and has a higher degree of connection to the education and training than the third sector, where initiatives are more disconnected from other institutions. Some countries are starting to establish new institutions or implement other changes to ensure clearer responsibilities and a better

coordination. However, there is still room for improvement to ensure more coherent validation arrangements in European countries.

4.2. Availability of skills audits

A skills audit is defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning as ‘a process aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and / or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes’ (Council of the European Union, 2012). Skills audits are particularly related to the identification phase of the validation process in which individuals aim to define the learning outcomes acquired in different contexts and through different experiences (at work, volunteering, during leisure time, etc.)⁽¹⁸⁾. Skills audits can be particularly relevant for low-skilled individuals, to foster self-confidence and stimulate them in having their skills certified through validation.

Overall, substantial progress is yet to be made in most countries to connect skills audits with overall validation processes leading to certification. Most countries lack a legislative framework for skills audits, and there is no common pattern in terms of the settings in which they are provided, and the groups targeted. For example, in Austria, skills audit initiatives are often coordinated or financed by PES, but implemented by adult learning centres or further education and training providers. The outcomes of skills audits are usually not linked to specific entitlements. In most cases they are used for providing orientation on future career or learning pathways and in some cases the documentation can be used in job applications. A new initiative of the Chamber of Commerce Austria Competence Checks aims at developing competence checks of all individual skills for visualising informal and non-formally acquired competences and ensuring appropriate validation. In Bulgaria, the PES oversees the informal skills assessment of unemployed citizens. In Iceland, PES provide job search plans and career guidance to jobseekers with a focus on skills audits. In Finland, skills audits are regulated under collective agreements. In Belgium-NL and Denmark, PES administer and conduct skills audits of refugees and migrants -in Denmark, skills

⁽¹⁸⁾ The validation process encompasses four stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification (see Cedefop, 2023).

audits are an integral part of the Integration Basic Education programme for refugees and migrants (IGU) administered by the PES; a Special Law' passed in 2021 enables Ukrainian refugees to undertake a skills audit as part of validation procedure.

There is also an absence of common criteria and procedures to conduct skills audits across countries or formalised and systematic linkages between audits and other validation processes. Switzerland, however, provides an example of a country where skills audits were reported to frequently be a central part of the validation process in IVET and CVET. In Belgium (FR and NL) and in France, skills audits are offered separately from validation but can be a steppingstone towards a validation process (e.g. *Bilan de compétences* users may be referred to a VAE process in these countries).

4.3. Funding arrangements and costs

In general, the main sources of funding for validation are co-funding between national public funds and other sources (e.g. EU funding, regional or local public funding, funding from individuals or private organisations). Funding arrangements as such vary from one context to another but have not changed substantially since 2018, apart from the fact that there is a tendency to make more use of EU public funding (i.e. European Social Fund). Several countries report not having a national framework for funding of validation activities available.

The main trend in the education training sector is the use of national public funding, including tax rebates, combined with funding from individuals, but the use of European public funding, regional or local public funding or funding from private organisations is also common. In most countries the sources of funding are diverse. Some countries however were reported to have one main source of funding, as is the case for instance for Bulgaria and Croatia (funding from individuals) and for Cyprus and Lithuania (national public funding – including tax rebates).

As far as the labour market is concerned, national public funding and funding from private organisations are used the most. Here again, a combination of funds is the most used model, with some exceptions, such as for instance for Bulgaria and Lithuania, where national public funding was mentioned as the main source of funding. When there is no national public funding in place, funding from private organisations is usually combined with funding from individuals or other regional or local public funding, and EU funding.

For the third sector the main sources of funding are EU funding and national public funding. These sources are usually combined between them and with

additional regional or local public funding or, less often, funding from private organisations or individuals. A few countries reported to rely very significantly on EU funding as their main source of funding in the third sector (Slovakia and Lithuania).

Overall, based on the 2023 country reports – and as already mentioned earlier – changes in funding arrangements since 2018 seem to be minimal. Only a few countries have implemented changes in their funding arrangements. Spain for instance, in 2020, increased funding for Autonomous Communities to support activities related to the assessment and accreditation of professional competences. Various initiatives occurred in 2020 and 2021, including organised training, promotion, continuous process availability, digital app and database development, and the establishment of open and permanent offices for information and individual registration. In Finland, since 2019, the higher education institutions' performance-based funding system has guided the institutions towards validation. Iceland has gradually increased the overall budget for adult learning and is exploring ways of financing validation activities in upper secondary schools and in universities, although for the later pilot projects are already ongoing. The country also highlights the effort made to make skills visible and to have them recognised as a basis for salary decisions as part of the collective labour agreements. In Sweden, although direct financial support for the new validation regulation is absent, targeted efforts have been made in recent years to support validation processes. Several initiatives received a state grant to support the development of validation, the development of sector-specific validation models linked with the SeQF, and validation in municipal adult education. A new form of financial support is also available for adults seeking to reskill or upskill. Sector-specific transition organisations have been established to provide support in validation without costs to these adults.

There has also been a reported increase in the use of EU public funding (in particular ESF funding) by a number of countries (e.g., Cyprus, Latvia, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Sweden). In Portugal, for instance, funding from the ESF allows adult learners not to pay a fee for validation. ESF has also been used to finance the development of Regional Centres of Competence in different sectors in Croatia or to cover validation costs in Romania to ensure users can access validation free-of-charge. Latvia also makes use of the ESF to cover validation fees of certain groups (e.g., employed persons aged 25+, jobseekers and people with a lower-income status).

In several countries, validation costs or part of the costs have to be covered by the applicants themselves (e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Finland). But in other cases, they

receive support from the government or the employer, or the public employment service (e.g., Croatia, Finland, Slovenia, Spain). Sometimes support is targeted. In some other countries, individuals do not have to pay a fee or the fee is very low. For instance, in Hungary and in Slovenia, in the adult education, validation is free for the user. In Luxembourg, most of the real costs linked to a validation procedure are not borne by validation users. Candidates are only required to pay a flat-rate administrative fee. In Germany, the validation costs for users depend on the specific scheme being considered. Participants can benefit from ValiKom free of charge until October 2024, thanks to funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Several countries have exceptions in place to exempt certain groups from the payment of fees, for instance people with lower qualification levels, people with fewer opportunities or job seekers. For example, Denmark covers the fees of individuals with a former educational background for EQF levels 1-5. In Sweden, validation is usually free of charge to the beneficiaries (individuals) and if validation is done via a PES programme, financial compensation can be provided by the Social Insurance Agency. In some communities of Spain certain groups, such as unemployed individuals and victims of terrorism, individuals with disabilities, those from large families, victims of gender-based violence and vulnerable individuals, are exempt from paying fees. In Romania, a significant development since 2018 has been the implementation of a national policy aimed at ensuring the free validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings for Ukrainian refugees lacking a professional certificate. Nonetheless, as of the time of writing the national report, no Ukrainian individuals have utilised this service, likely attributable to language barriers.

In the case of validation in the labour market, some countries such as Estonia and Liechtenstein report not having tax incentives for companies to become involved in validation. In contrast to the Netherlands, which implemented tax incentives for employers investing in a VPL procedure since 2007 and has transitioned to the STAP budget (*Stimulans ArbeidsmarktPositie*, in Dutch – or Incentive for improvement of labour market position, in English) since 2022, and to be replaced by another mechanism as from 2024.

Several countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Finland, Iceland, Italy) highlight the lack of financial support preventing some individuals from entering the validation procedures (e.g., for the most vulnerable groups, unemployed people or other people outside the main target group that want to reskill for example). Malta also acknowledges that there are instances where employers might hesitate to cover the costs of their employees' participation in validation, as they may not perceive an immediate advantage to their business. Additionally, there could be concerns

that obtaining a new qualification might prompt employees to change jobs or pursue higher salary opportunities. Finland also highlights challenges in providing adequate guidance and opportunities for skills identification. The 2020 Lifelong Guidance Strategy highlights limited skill development and career planning options for entrepreneurs and small company employees, in particular.

Finally, several countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, Austria, Finland) reported a lack of systems to collect information on the costs of validation-related services that are provided outside of formal education systems.

4.4. The relationship between Individual Learning Accounts and validation

The 2022 Council Recommendation defines Individual Learning Accounts as 'a personal account that allows individuals to accumulate and preserve their entitlements over time, for whichever eligible training, guidance or validation opportunity they deem most useful and whenever they want to, in line with national rules. It grants the individual full ownership of the entitlements, irrespective of the funding source' (Council of the European Union, 2022). Individual learning accounts (ILAs) are a means for enabling and empowering individuals to participate in training and facilitate their access to or retention in employment. The 2022 Council Recommendation encourages the connection between ILAs and validation and career guidance services. In this regard, validation opportunities should be offered as part of the recommended enabling framework of the ILA implementation, while at the same time, ILAs can help in the promotion and take-up of validation.

The *Compte Personnel de Formation* (CPF), an ILA currently in use in France, enables employees (excluding civil servants) to have a personal account credited in EUR (Cedefop, 2023c). The account is entirely transferable from one occupation to another and preserved when changing or losing one's job. A yearly entitlement of EUR 500 is added to the account, which can be accumulated over years, up to a ceiling of EUR 5000. The entitlement is higher for low-skilled workers (EUR 800 per year, up to a ceiling of EUR 8000). Employers contribute to the account under certain conditions. The CPF budget may be used towards a validation procedure ⁽¹⁹⁾.

The Individual Skills Accounts were introduced in Greece in September 2022, through Law 4921/2022. Validation features in the key aims of this scheme. Beneficiaries must redeem their monetary/credit units exclusively for guidance

⁽¹⁹⁾ Cedefop study on Individual Learning Accounts (Cedefop, [forthcoming](#)).

counselling and/or training and/or validation/certification services from providers belonging to the Register of Eligible Providers of Continuing Professional Training of the PES. A digital portal is also under preparation for individuals to manage their Individual Skills Account.

Some other Member States were reported to have taken steps towards the development of ILAs or instruments similar to ILAs. It is too early to see how validation opportunities will be integrated into the enabling framework of these schemes:

- (a) In Bulgaria, plans will be introduced to develop ILA schemes under ESF for the 2021-2027 programming period.
- (b) In Romania, the Ministry of Labour intends to pilot in 2024 individual learning accounts for workers in the field of construction.
- (c) Latvia is currently piloting individual learning accounts with a project involving up to 3,500 participants. Data are being collected on participation and achievement levels. The introduction of the ILA scheme, which is based on the principles of the 2022 Council Recommendation, is scheduled for early 2024. The introduction of ILAs, as defined under the 2022 Council Recommendation, are part of Latvia's Recovery and Resilience Plan.
- (d) Croatia, under the new ESF+ programme, is implementing a new financing model for adult education. Croatia plans to set up its ILA scheme that would fulfil all the requirements of the Council Recommendation on ILA by the end of 2027. This will be done by transitioning from an already existing voucher scheme (implemented since April 2022) towards a fully developed ILA. to further develop this into an ILA scheme.
- (e) Poland is launching a pilot of Individual Development Accounts (IDA), which is an ILA scheme with just the name of the measure tailored to the already existing tools in Poland – e.g., the provision of development services, including training, within the Entity Financing System through the Database of Development Services (DDS). The pilot is going to be administered by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PAED) under the European Funds for Social Development 2021-2027 programme.

Most countries could not report enough on the connection of ILA to validation, because the development of ILAs is still at an early stage in many countries. A future edition of the Validation Inventory could revisit and reflect on how the picture has evolved.

CHAPTER 5.

Validation processes and methods

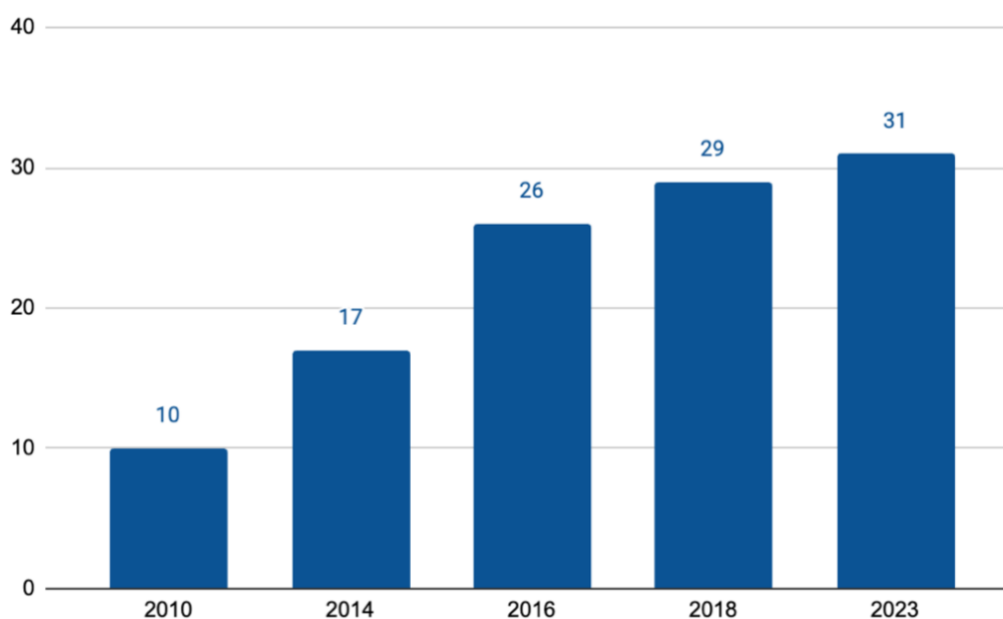
This chapter reviews the evolution in the linkage between validation and NQFs, micro-credentials, and examines the reference points and methods used for validation, as well as the use of digital technologies. The final sections of the chapter explore quality assurance and monitoring systems.

5.1. [Link to national qualifications frameworks](#)

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) can help promote and facilitate validation in different ways, as discussed in this section. There was a marked increase in the number of countries establishing links between their National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and validation during the period 2010-18, as more countries covered by the Inventory established NQFs and referenced these to the European Qualification Framework (EQF). This referencing process has ten criteria, including one explicitly related to links between the NQF and arrangements for validation ⁽²⁰⁾. The situation has been rather stable since 2018, as by that time most countries had already established an NQF linked to the EQF, and links between their NQF and validation (Figure 7).

⁽²⁰⁾ The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems. (Annex III, [Council of the European Union, 2017](#))

Figure 7. Evolution in the number of countries where NQF have explicit links to validation



Source: European Inventory Reports (2010, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2023).

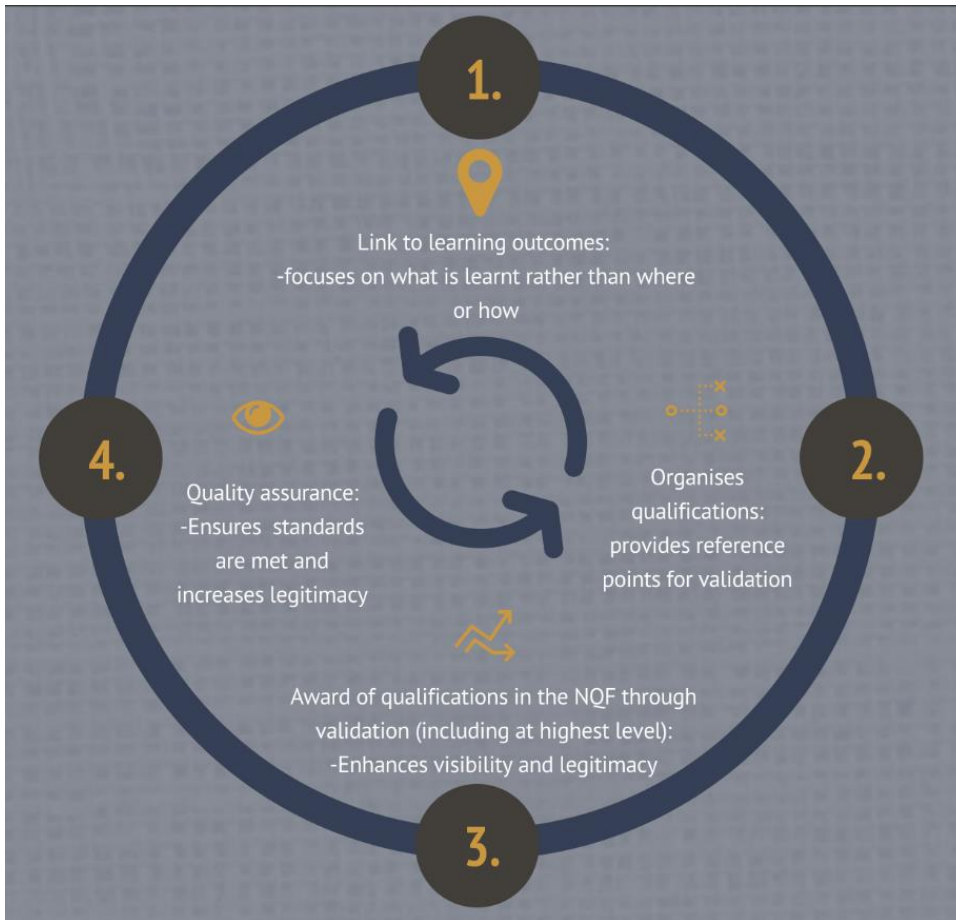
NQFs are linked to validation in various ways. The main ways in which this linkage takes place, based on the information provided in the reports produced for the European Inventory on validation, are discussed below.

- (a) NQFs support validation by articulating levels in terms of learning outcomes. This places the focus on what is learnt (i.e. on learning outcomes, which are an enabler for validation), rather than where or how it is learnt. This makes it possible for qualifications included in the NQF to be awarded through validation.
- (b) Second, NQFs provide a framework for organising and classifying qualifications. NQF level descriptors, expressed as learning outcomes, can be used as reference points for validation (regardless of whether this aims to lead to the award of a qualification or not). Mapping non-formal and informal learning against NQF level can increase the visibility and value of that learning for learners and other stakeholders. NQFs can thus help individuals and institutions to understand what a particular learning experience (including non-formal and informal learning) represents in terms of the development of skills and competencies. This requires that the learning outcomes achieved through non-formal and informal learning are sufficiently aligned with existing qualification standards. Some countries have developed specific regulations

- and guidelines on how NQF descriptors and standards can be used for validation (e.g. Estonia, Italy or Malta).
- (c) Third, validation can lead to the award of qualifications in the NQF (or other outcomes such as access to programmes that result in the award of a qualification included in the NQF) and this can make clear that even the highest qualification level can be achieved through validation. This can help to increase the visibility and legitimacy of validation. In Ireland or Finland (or France, discussed in more detail below), for example, the NQF legislative framework facilitates the validation of prior learning at all NQF levels.
 - (d) NQFs can include quality assurance mechanisms that ensure that qualifications, whether obtained after formal or non-formal/ informal learning (following a validation procedure) meet specific standards. This can help to increase the legitimacy of qualifications obtained through validation. In Malta, the occupational standards used in validation are being updated to ensure that they are aligned with the NQF level descriptors, while an overarching principle of the validation system in the country is that validation should always involve the use of the NQF in determining the level, volume and depth of evidence required. This helps maintain the credibility and consistency of qualifications obtained through validation.

The above links provide a value (currency) to the skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning that otherwise would be difficult to obtain.

Figure 8. Links between validation and NQFs



Source: Authors.

It should be noted that even though qualifications frameworks increasingly establish explicit links to validation, there are variations between countries in the strength of such links. The development of the Finnish NQF, for example, explicitly includes references to validation – through the nationally preferred term recognition of prior learning, and notes that learners have the right to have their prior learning assessed and recognised at all levels and subsectors of the education system – for access to education and to obtain qualifications. However, an external assessment of the referencing report of the Finnish NQF to the European Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (Louka & Blomqvist, 2018, p. 57) concluded that its general weakness is that ‘while the referencing report gives a very good insight into the formal education system, it remains rather open when it comes to qualifications from other (non-state) education providers. Also, the approach to grasp informal learning could be deepened in the report’. By contrast, a stronger link occurs when NQFs are used more proactively to promote validation

opportunities. In France, to be part of the NQF, qualifications' providers need to give assurances that there are validation options in place. This provides strong incentives to ensure the availability of possibilities for validation across qualifications.

5.2. Validation of non-formal learning in micro-credentials

Micro-credentials open new opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by acknowledging smaller units of learning. In this way micro-credentials are expected to foster lifelong learning and bridge the gap between education and real-world applications, enhancing workforce adaptability to changing skill requirements by the labour market (Cedefop, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2022b; ETF, 2022). The [Recommendation of 2022 on micro-credentials](#) (Council of the European Union, 2022b) calls Member States to consider 'adapting procedures for the recognition of prior learning and the validation of non-formal and informal learning to allow for the awarding of micro-credentials' and includes validation among the principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials. The Recommendation establishes key building blocks including a common definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the definition and regulatory context of micro-credentials varies across countries. Cedefop analysis indicates that there is considerable uncertainty linked to the naming and function of micro-credentials, as in most countries no official definition is used, even when there is a longstanding practice to offer shorter learning experiences (Cedefop, 2022). Developments in micro-credentials and their incorporation into national qualification systems vary substantially between European countries although the term is seldom used as such (Cedefop, 2024; OECD, 2023). 13 countries have reported that at least a type of micro-credential is part of their framework. In most cases, some NQF levelled qualifications can be considered as micro-credentials, such as partial qualifications (e.g. in the Flemish-speaking community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus), awards in Malta and vocational qualifications in Czechia.

Micro-credentials can be used to support flexible learning pathways. While the extent to which this happens is difficult to monitor, some providers allow for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in their micro-credentials (see also Cedefop, 2023d). For example:

- (a) In Austria, the WIFI ([wifi Zertifizierungstelle](#)) certification body assesses and certifies specific competences acquired through previous experience. One

- case is the E-commerce & social media expert certification which provides a certificate to individuals with at least two years of experience in this field, after they pass an examination (see also Cedefop, 2023e).
- (b) In Czechia, the Ministry of Industry and Trade validates skills acquired through previous experience in 3D printer operation for industrial application. The certificate that validates this experience attests that the individual adheres to relevant safety regulations and possesses knowledge and skills for the operation of 3D printing technologies (see also Cedefop, 2023e).
 - (c) In the Netherlands a central success factor for increasing opportunities for validation was the introduction of policies that allow smaller bits of learning to be assessed (ETF, 2022).
 - (d) In Norway, VET is undergoing modularisation whereby micro-credentials acquired through non-formal and informal learning will be referenced to the NQF ⁽²¹⁾.

Box 2. **Micro-credentials in Ireland**

In Ireland, micro-credentials - records of learning outcomes from small volumes of learning - can be offered in formal, non-formal and informal settings. They are seen as a flexible, responsive way to meet the skills needs of individuals and employers in the country's rapidly evolving labour market. In the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) different types of qualifications can be classed as micro-credentials, such as minor awards (which recognise that a learner has attained part of a major award such as the Leaving Certificate, Honours Bachelor Degree or Masters Degree) and special purpose awards (which are always significantly smaller in volume than a major award, have a distinct identity and a clearly defined purpose, such as legislative, regulatory, economic, social or personal learning requirements). These types of awards have been in place for some time, which means that providers and learners are likely to be more familiar with these terms for small units of learning than with some of the more recently introduced terminology such as micro-credentials and micro-qualifications. But in addition to minor awards and special purposes awards there are also other types of micro-credentials - some of which are aligned to the NQF and others are not - which can either be accessed or obtained through validation.

For example, the Skills to Advance initiative aims to provide targeted support to vulnerable groups, offering various routes to a qualification. One of these is a pilot micro-qualifications scheme at levels 5 and 6 in certain skill areas (such as aqua farming, green skills and digital skills). These qualifications can be combined to obtain a special purpose award. Most are based on 25-30 hours of tutor learning with the remainder self-directed learning such as work-based assignments and projects. The assignments are project-based and involve practical learning in the workplace, which could be prior learning from the individual's work experience. In addition, a recently introduced micro-qualification specifically allows for validation to be used to acquire

⁽²¹⁾ In Norway, micro-topics (mikroemner) and microcredentials (minikvalifikasjoner which translates as mini-qualifications) are similar in concept to the broad definition of microcredentials (see Cedefop, 2023d).

part of the award. The Level 5 Certificate in Lean Practice for Sustainable Business, worth 15 FET Credits, is made up of two modules: Lean Principles (5 credits) and Lean Tools (10 credits). Learners can enrol directly onto the second module if they can show that they already have the necessary skills and knowledge in Lean principles. The process for this includes an interview and/or submission of evidence from previous qualifications and/or work experience.

Readers interested in more in-depth information on the different micro-credential examples and use of RPL are invited to read the 2023 Inventory Case Study on Micro-credentials (Ireland).

Source: Hawley Woodall, 2024.

There is also an ongoing discussion in various countries on micro-credentials, which may have consequences for the relation between micro-credentials and validation in those countries (see also Cedefop, 2023d; 2023e). When micro-credentials can be obtained through a validation procedure, it is important to balance the time required to undergo the validation process compared to the time that it would take to complete the micro-credential in other ways.

5.3. Standards and reference points

There is considerable variation across countries and sectors as to the use of standards and reference points in validation. The [2012 Council Recommendation on validation](#) asks Member States that ‘qualifications or, where applicable, parts of qualifications obtained by means of the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences comply with agreed standards that are either the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes’. Standards which serve as reference points for validation are reported to be the same as or equivalent to those used in formal education in:

- (a) General education: (in 14 countries) Austria, Belgium-NL, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden;
- (b) IVET: (in 21 countries) Austria, Belgium-NL, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland;
- (c) CVET: (in 15 countries) Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, and Switzerland;
- (d) Higher education: (in 20 countries) Austria, Belgium-NL, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein,

- Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland;
- (e) Adult learning: (in 15 countries) Belgium-NL, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden;
 - (f) the labour market: (in 17 countries) validation certificates are the same as formal education and training certificates in Belgium-NL, Bulgaria, Iceland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia; and
 - (g) the third sector: (seven countries) validation certificates are the same as formal education and training certificates in Belgium-NL, Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway and Portugal.

The use of the same or equivalent standards to those used in formal education is not reported in CVET across any of the countries.

In Belgium-FR, the standards used for validation are reported to be developed separately from those in formal education and training. Occupational standards are set by a dedicated body, the COREF (Commission for Skills Unit Indicators) in consultation with social partners. Some countries report continued efforts in aligning validation procedures to formal standards as referenced to their respective NQF:

- (a) In Croatia, guidelines defining procedures for assessing occupational profiles with reference to the NQF were updated in 2021.
- (b) In Estonia, a reform is in progress to transition the professional qualifications system from one that is primarily reliant on occupational standards to a more skills-based or learning outcome-centred approach. Expected to conclude by 2025, this reform seeks to enhance the system's alignment with the NQF while also establishing clearer connections between skills and their applicability in the labour market.
- (c) In Malta, Poland and Slovakia, an increasing number of occupational profiles are being referenced to the respective NQFs.

5.4. Validation methods

The four phases of validation set out in the 2012 Council Recommendation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) are widely accepted as the cornerstones of validation in the countries covered by the Inventory. The presence and importance of these different phases is, naturally, adapted according to the aims of specific validation initiatives. Across various countries and sectors,

the prevalent four-stage validation approach commonly involves the provision of tools and templates for validation users to assemble a portfolio of evidence during the identification and documentation stages.

However, there is considerable variation in the extent to which common tools and templates are used within a specific country or sector. As in previous editions of the Inventory, the current data reveals a complex landscape in this regard. The use of standardised tools and templates is reported at the national level in:

- (a) General education: in Belgium (FR and NL), France, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Portugal;
- (b) IVET: in Belgium (FR and NL), Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia;
- (c) CVET: in Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain;
- (d) Higher education: in Finland, France, Italy, and Luxembourg;
- (e) Adult learning: in Belgium-NL, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Slovenia;
- (f) the labour market: in Belgium (FR and NL), Czechia, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain;
- (g) the third sector: in Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.

This suggests that the countries with a more consistent application of validation templates and tools in the above sectors are Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal, Belgium (FR and NL), France and Finland. Typically, these countries have established legal frameworks that regulate validation methods and tools at least to some extent. In other countries validation templates and tools were reported to be applied consistently at the regional level. This is the case of the Netherlands across all sectors, in Poland in the IVET/CVET and labour market arrangements, in Spain in the CVET and labour market, in Switzerland and Liechtenstein in IVET, and in Germany and Finland in higher education.

In other countries a greater degree of variation and differentiation in the use of templates and tools were reported. This included Austria, Germany, Lithuania, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In the case of Austria and Germany, methods tend to be project or initiative-based while in Lithuania, Denmark and Sweden, institutions and organisations in different areas tend to develop their own methods, while national methodological guidelines do exist (in the case of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden).

Assessment and certification in the context of validation typically vary according to the skills or competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning. In most countries, thus, a mixed approach involving different tools and

methods are used – theoretical and practical tests are combined with other forms of assessments (i.e. interviews with an assessor) for certification and the award of qualifications.

In the labour market, practical demonstrations or simulations and observations are more prevalent while theoretical assessments (written and oral examinations) are more frequent across education and training.

There is, generally, a high degree of flexibility in the selection of assessment methods by validation centres and practitioners, even within the framework of national regulations and guidelines, as illustrated in the two cases provided below:

- (a) In Romania, the legal framework sets out the validation methods to apply in the evaluation and certification procedure for professional competences gained in non-formal or informal contexts. While this legal framework makes it mandatory for the evaluation and certification procedures to include a written test, validation centre can then choose various methods to apply depending on the specific occupational profile for which validation is sought. These may include direct observations, simulations, oral tests, self-evaluations, project-based evaluations.
- (b) In Sweden, industry or sector stakeholders have the freedom to develop their own validation methods. In CVET, the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education regularly publishes Standards and Guidelines for sector-specific validation of vocational competence which advise validation practitioners on methods that may be applied to the process, either alone or in combination. Validation practitioners in each occupational sector nevertheless ultimately decide on the methods to use.

5.5. Use of digital technologies in validation

Evidence suggests limited integration of digital technologies within validation methods overall, exhibiting a lack of significant advancement post-2018. Remarkably, despite the transformative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on study and work habits from 2020, substantial progress in leveraging ICT within validation mechanisms was not reported.

Another salient point is that the integration of digital technologies with validation does not necessarily take place at the national-a level, but often takes place at the level of individual initiatives or projects. This is the case in Austria and in Germany, where digitally-based initiatives support competences through self-assessment tools in career orientation. The situation is similar in Belgium, Finland and Ireland where different agencies offer digital validation tools, often centred on the documentation of evidence and self-assessments.

There are therefore numerous digital platforms – especially focused on the identification and documentation stages of validation – differing in terms of functionalities and data collected, and limited interoperability both technically and methodologically. There is, indeed, no evidence suggesting interoperability of different digital validation tools or platforms within a country or within contexts for validation, this issue was explicitly mentioned for Germany and Finland.

Digital technology is primarily utilised for identifying and documenting the skills profiles of validation candidates. In certain countries, digital platforms also facilitate the issuance of certificates acquired through validation processes (e.g. Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Switzerland). The use of digital technologies as a methodological support tool for assessments, extending beyond self-assessments, has been reported in only a few countries (Germany, Iceland, Malta, Netherlands). In most other countries, however, the application of online assessment methods remains largely experimental, existing mainly within specific validation projects.

There is, overall, limited reported usage of the Europass and Youthpass platforms for documenting evidence of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. portfolio building) as part of validation processes. While their use is reported to be generally accepted by employers and educational institutions in several countries, reports were able to offer few details as to how they are used in practice.

5.6. Quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

5.6.1. Quality Assurance

There is a complex landscape across European countries and validation contexts regarding the types of quality assurance processes applying to validation. Similar to the 2018 Inventory update, the majority of countries in the 2023 Inventory update present general quality assurance frameworks (those already used in education and training), rather than use distinctive frameworks for validation.

The 2023 Inventory reports 11 countries where general quality assurance frameworks predominantly apply regardless of the specific arrangement. These include Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, and Slovenia. In these countries, validation services are typically closely intertwined with formal education and training systems, hence subject to the same quality assurance procedures.

In six other countries, general quality assurance frameworks are reported to only apply in specific sectors:

- (a) Austria: general education, IVET, higher education ⁽²²⁾;
- (b) Luxembourg: CVET, higher education, labour market, third sector;
- (c) Netherlands: IVET, CVET, higher education, adult learning;
- (d) Portugal: IVET, CVET, third sector;
- (e) Finland: IVET, CVET, higher education;
- (f) Switzerland: CVET.

Ten countries reported quality assurance frameworks specifically applying to validation processes in at least one sector: Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Romania, and Switzerland. Such validation-specific quality assurance processes are more frequent in the labour market (Spain, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden), adult learning (Greece, Spain, Iceland, Portugal, Romania) and in CVET (Greece, Spain, Germany, Romania). In Belgium-NL and Italy, only the third sector has a specific quality assurance framework.

In nine countries, no quality assurance frameworks were reported, but quality assurance responsibilities were reported to be devolved to institutions responsible for awarding certificates:

- (a) Latvia: IVET, CVET, higher education, adult learning;
- (b) Luxembourg: general education, IVET, labour market;
- (c) Slovakia: CVET, adult learning, labour market;
- (d) Finland: adult learning, third sector;
- (e) Germany: higher education;
- (f) Czechia: labour market;
- (g) Bulgaria: CVET;
- (h) Norway: CVET;
- (i) Switzerland: third sector.

As part of quality assurance, the professionalisation of validation practitioners was reviewed across the 32 countries of the Inventory, from the perspective of mandatory requirements that must be met in terms of specific qualifications and relevant work experience. Only nine countries report such mandatory requirements in at least one sector (Czechia, Greece, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia). In Czechia and Greece such requirements are limited to validation in the labour market sector. This situation suggests limited progress

⁽²²⁾ General quality assurance frameworks (those already used in education and training) are used also for validation in these subsectors – but there are different quality assurance frameworks for school-based education (GE and IVET), apprenticeship training and higher education in place.

made since the 2018 Inventory regarding professionalisation. Nevertheless, recent developments in this regard were reported in some countries:

- (a) Romanian validation assessors, as of 2021, must hold a higher education degree and possess two to five years of occupation-specific work experience to be included in the REAC (Register of Experts in Assessment and Certification).
- (b) As of 2023 in Spain, there are several requirements concerning teaching or professional experience to become an evaluator and/ or counsellor in the context of validation ([Royal decree 659/2023, Spanish Government, 2023](#)). These include at least four years of teaching or professional experience –or at least two years of experience in each- in the competence unit or qualification that will be evaluated. Evaluation commissions must include both teachers and professionals with a background in the qualification to which the evaluation refers. Evaluators with professional experience but no teaching experience also need to complete training.
- (c) In Slovakia, validation practitioners' requirements are outlined by the 2019-2023 National ESF project System of Verifying Qualifications (SOK), defining roles for National Guarantors – i.e., senior experts in specific activity fields – and Authorised Persons – i.e., entitled to assess portfolios of evidence in accordance with the SOK evaluation manual and to act as a members of validation examination committees.
- (d) Slovenia's 2020 regulations for adult education counsellors include requirements for second-cycle study qualifications, pedagogical training, a professional exam, and ongoing skill development with supervision.

5.6.2. Monitoring arrangements

Most countries commonly report the lack of regular monitoring systems that cover service quality, usage trends, and user outcomes, mostly unchanged since 2018 regarding monitoring arrangements in validation. These systems could offer valuable insights for service improvement.

Several countries report no centralised policy related to data collection and monitoring: Belgium (FR and NL), Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Austria, Finland and Sweden. In the case of Austria and Germany, this can be explained by the fact that validation is provided in the context of individual initiatives. Each initiative takes on the responsibility of monitoring.

Centralised monitoring systems are reported to be in place only in a few countries, including Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Estonia, Italy, Luxembourg and Romania. However, these instances also reveal that monitoring approaches remain very differentiated across countries. For example, in Greece regular

monitoring primarily focuses on tracking participation levels and success rates, lacking an assessment of the impact of validation on users' trajectories. Monitoring arrangements in Luxembourg are similar; however, monitoring data is reported as not accessible to the public. In Estonia, the EHIS (Estonian Education Infosystem) collects data on ECTS awarded through validation in Higher Education, and monitors success rates in IVET and CVET. Satisfaction surveys are also conducted with users and within the network of validation assessors and advisors. In Italy and Romania, the primary purpose of centralised monitoring arrangements is to verify compliance with minimum service standards. In the case of Romania, the process serves to update lists of accredited assessment centres and certified assessors.

Denmark and Ireland prioritise evaluating the quality of validation services, each having dedicated bodies for this purpose:

- (a) The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) carries out such evaluations for associations, municipalities and national ministries involved in validation on specific aspects of validation.
- (b) Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) carries out external institutional reviews as part of the oversight of the effectiveness of quality assurance processes: annual dialogue meetings, cyclical reviews and reporting processes assure the reliability of the entire validation system.

The need for improvements in data collection and monitoring was reported for several countries, including France, Malta, Norway, and Sweden. In France, a new streamlined monitoring system for the VAE (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*) was introduced in 2021 whereby the Ministry of Education's new Directorate for evaluation, forecasting and performance (DEPP) now collects, aggregates, and analyses all data related to validation processes on an annual basis (e.g. applicant profiles, participation trends by level and success rates). In Sweden, efforts are underway to improve the monitoring and reporting of data on validation following an assessment of the quality of validation in 2022 by the National Agency for Education.

CHAPTER 6.

Conclusions

Overall, there is a discernible trend toward expanding and consolidating existing arrangements for validation. Since the last inventory in 2018, there has been a notable increase in the prevalence of validation arrangements, particularly in the labour market. Progress is also evident in the development and consolidation of new and existing legislation and strategies aimed at strengthening and expanding opportunities for validation. This includes introducing greater flexibility in validation procedures, simplifying, and streamlining administrative processes, improving the quality of practices and experiences for beneficiaries, and strengthening collaboration between key stakeholders.

Validation arrangements are increasingly linked to NQFs, in a variety of ways and with various benefits, including the facilitation of validation thanks to the definition of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes (rather than inputs), the provision of reference points for validation processes, the possibility to obtain qualifications in the NQF through validation, and the clarification of specific quality assurance processes associated with the award of qualifications in the NQF, which also contribute to the legitimacy of validation and stakeholders' trust.

The Inventory data also shows that existing arrangements, are more geared toward validation that formalises and certifies achieved learning outcomes ⁽²³⁾, than to the identification of skills gaps and training needs or the provision of access to formal education programmes. This can, to some extent, limit the function that validation could have in stimulating lifelong learning and competitiveness in Europe. It should be noted, however, that there is a paucity of data on the actual use of these different types of arrangements by individuals.

However, gaps remain, and progress continues to be uneven across countries. Possibilities for validation, although increasingly common, are still constrained to specific qualifications in many countries as validation systems are not always fully functional. Moreover, coordination and coherence across validation arrangements remain an issue, and while there is some evidence of closer links between education and the labour market, there is also a notable lack of strategies to support connections between validation in the third sector and other contexts.

⁽²³⁾ Summative approaches are linked to, and integrated into, institutions and bodies authorised to award qualifications', see [European guidelines](#) (Cedefop, 2023b: 48-49).

In addition, and despite an increase in the number of countries reporting an upward trend in validation arrangements and in participation, overall, the uptake of validation remains limited, according to available (limited) evidence. All countries are reported to have some form of awareness raising activities related to validation in place, but these initiatives have not, at least yet, translated into large increases in the take-up of validation.

Institutional setups across countries remain relatively fragmented, as it was the case in 2018. Various public and private institutions are involved in validation, and have varying roles and responsibilities, often according to sector specific regulatory frameworks, which can be confusing for users – in particular those from other European countries. Various country reports referred to a necessity for improved institutional coordination across arrangements. For example, public employment services continue to play a key role in implementing skills audits, especially for refugees and migrants, but its connection with validation processes is often weak in most countries and, overall, there continues to be a lack of consistent definitions and coherent legislative frameworks across countries regarding skills audits.

Funding for validation, combining national, EU, local public, and private sources, remains largely unchanged since 2018. However, there is an observed trend in the increased use of EU funding by several countries. Validation costs differ by sector and country, with some offering free or partially subsidised validation, while others require fees from applicants, albeit sometimes with exceptions for vulnerable groups. Some countries encounter challenges supporting specific individuals or sectors due to limited financial aid or employer hesitancy, while many lack systems to track validation-related costs beyond formal education, although some promising initiatives have been documented in this respect, for example in France. The broader adoption of ILAs, as per the 2022 Council Recommendation, is still work in progress. If implemented properly, ILAs could have a positive impact on the use of validation overall.

Validation processes remain specific and heterogeneous across different sectors and subsectors. This diversity may be required to adapt to the individual circumstances of individuals undergoing validation. On the other hand, validation processes have a clear structure and have in most cases adopted the four-stage methodological approach of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Progress remains limited overall in the use of interoperable digital tools for all stages of the validation process and quality assurance for validation is still fragmented in many countries. Finally, a growing number of countries report recent initiatives to develop micro-credentials and to incorporate them within national qualification systems. More frequent use of micro-

credentials could lead to a greater demand for validation services to obtain such credentials by demonstrating existing skills. However, possibilities to obtain micro-credentials following a validation process remain so far limited overall.

The 2012 Council Recommendation was a crucial milestone in establishing a framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. Developments show that it has guided countries in developing and expanding their offer of validation according to principles such as transparency, flexibility, accessibility, and inclusivity, which remain relevant today. Some more recent developments such as advances in digital technology and the changing nature of work and skills, which will bring in new forms of learning credentials and require new mechanisms for their validation, are not addressed by the Recommendation, but by the latest edition of the European Guidelines on validating non-formal and informal learning. Ongoing technological progress is poised to amplify learner and worker mobility. This may require further rethinking of validation approaches across countries, adapted to this evolving landscape. This also raises questions about how to monitor the evolving landscape of validation. Given recent progress in the expansion of the validation offer across the three sectors (Education and training, labour market and third sector), a need emerges to delve deeper into specific, topics or themes, to inspire policy development.

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Abbreviations

CVET	Continuous vocational education and training
DG	Directorate General
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ESF	European Social Fund
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILA	Individual learning account
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NQF	National qualifications frameworks
OECD	Organisation of economic and cultural development
PES	Public employment service
RPL	Recognition of prior and non-formal and informal learning
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Annex I: Note on methodology

The 2023 update of the European Inventory on validation provides an overview of This report is part of the 2023 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

This report offers an overview of the validation landscape in 31 countries (EU-27 plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). For Belgium, two country reports were produced ⁽²⁴⁾. As such, the total number of country reports produced was 32. In addition to the country reports, four thematic reports ⁽²⁵⁾ and five case studies ⁽²⁶⁾ were also produced as part of the 2023 Inventory. A separate synthesis report has been produced for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Tunisia.

The information collected covers three sectors separately, to differentiate the broad range of practices available. We refer to the education and training sector (divided into five subsectors - general education, IVET, CVET, higher education, adult learning), the labour market and the third sector.

The synthesis is based on an analysis of the data collected through the country reports and the 'country fiche', which was completed by country experts alongside the country reports. The fiche mapped the situation in each country according to standardised indicators. Data was collected in these different sections:

- (a) country situation as a whole;
- (b) education and training:
 - (i) General education;
 - (ii) Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET);
 - (iii) Higher education;
 - (iv) Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET);
 - (v) Adult learning;
- (c) labour market (LM); and

⁽²⁴⁾ Two county reports were produced for Belgium: Belgium-FR (for Wallonia-Brussels) and Belgium-NL (for Flanders)

⁽²⁵⁾ Evolution of validation as an integrated part of national skills policies and strategies; Validation initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees; Validation in the green and sustainable economy; Systems to increase awareness of opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning – Outreach.

⁽²⁶⁾ New Hampshire (US), HVE-flex (SE), Novartis (CH), Micro-credentials (IE), 'Du kannst was!' (AT)

(d) third sector (TS).

By labour market, we refer to initiatives in which private sector institutions play a central role (alone or in collaboration with public sector institutions.). These initiatives might be promoted, for example, by employers or employers' associations. In the third sector, validation initiatives might be associated with youth work or volunteering or might be validation arrangements developed by third sector organisations such as charities or NGOs to support a variety of target groups (e.g. third country nationals, unemployed people, young people at risk of exclusion, people with a disability, etc.). In these two contexts – LM and TS – validation arrangements may or may not be connected to formal education activities.

It should be mentioned that national experts were asked to follow national definitions of the above sectors. Such national definitions vary. In addition, there is some overlap and synergies between the activities in these contexts and in some countries the distinction between some sectors and subsectors (e.g. CVET and LM or IVET and CVET) is blurred. In general, it was possible for country experts to differentiate between them during the data collection, but some country experts reported some difficulties in this respect – for example in Austria.

The data collection in the fiches, distinguished between seven possible contexts in which validation is possible (or not): general education, IVET, CVET, higher education, adult learning, in the education and training area, labour market or third sector per each country. This results in a maximum of 224 possible contexts in which validation might be a possibility within the countries under study (7 times, 32 countries).

Questions within the country fiche were a mix of multiple choice and single response options, with some allowing for free-text entries. The presence of multiple-choice questions means that the totals can come to more than the total number of countries with validation arrangements in place in some questions. The questionnaire was standardised in a way that the same information was collected across the different sectors systematically. For the education and training subsectors, listed above, the questions were also the same across all five subsectors. The responses to the questions included within the 'general', labour market and third sector parts of the country fiche database were answered once only for each country. This allows for certain disaggregated analysis by area, which is useful to understand more accurately the European situation in relation to specific aspects. However, the Overview Report mainly focuses on the overall situation in Europe and cross-check information from the country reports with country fiches.

The analysis is normally presented by country 'count' and for this reason it is useful for the reader to understand how to interpret the numbers and charts presented in this report. Where the 'number of countries' is presented, this refers to the number of countries which gave an answer to the question. In the case of education and training, when presenting the 'count of countries', the data figure represents the number of countries where the indicator applies in at least one subsector of education and training where there are validation arrangements (but may not apply to all subsectors in that country). Each country is counted once, regardless of the number of subsectors where the category applies. Where we present percentages, these refer to the percentage of the total possible existing validation arrangements (a total of 174 arrangements).

The Overview Report also provides some comparison with the 2018 Inventory data and, to the extent possible, with 2016, 2014 and 2010 data to present key trends and developments overtime. The comparison presented was done using the information from the countries under review in the 2023 edition (this means that certain countries were excluded from previous versions, e.g. the UK, which was part of some of the previous versions of the Inventory) ⁽²⁷⁾. Comparability of data is not always possible due to the changes in the way data has been collected over time.

It is important to keep in mind that validation is a complex issue, which is approached in very different ways across the countries of Europe and with different characteristics in each specific context. While it is difficult to apply standardised indicators to such a complex topic, this study tries to find some common ground for comparison at European level and across contexts. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the analytical work give a good indication of the landscape of validation across Europe in 2023 and how this has changed since the previous Inventories.

⁽²⁷⁾ The 2018 Inventory update covered 33 countries covered in 36 reports, the 2016 and 2014 Inventory updates covered 36 countries covered in 33 country reports. The 2010 Inventory update covered 32 countries described in 34 reports.

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

This report is part of the 2023 update of the [European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#) provides a comprehensive overview of validation practices across Europe, covering 32 systems in EU-27 Member States and EFTA countries.

The European inventory is compiled in cooperation with the European Commission and ETF. The inventory was endorsed by the [Council recommendation of 2012](#) on validation and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.

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