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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Accompanying document to the

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Leading Service: DG Education and Culture (EAC)

Other involved services: DGs Communication (COMM), Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (EMPL), Enterprise (ENTR), Eurostat (ESTAT), Information society (INFSO), Home Affairs (HOME), Research (RTD), Legal Service (SJ), Secretariat-General (SG), Cedefop.

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Definitions

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

Non-formal learning concerns learning that takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships). It may cover programmes to impart work-skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers. Very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured online learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public.

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

A *qualification* means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

Learning outcomes means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.

A *national qualification framework* is a coherent and comprehensive description of qualification levels based on learning outcomes.

Validation is a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. It consists of four distinct phases: (1) identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual, (2) documentation – to make visible the individual's experiences – (3) a formal assessment of these experiences and (4) recognition leading to a certification for example a partial or full qualification.

1. PROCEDURAL ISSUES, CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

1.1. Organisation and timing

The Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning is included in the Commission's work programme under the reference 2011/EAC/009. It is foreseen to launch the inter-service consultation in March 2012 and to adopt the proposal for a Recommendation in June 2012.

The work on the impact assessment started in July 2010. A group of Commission Directorates General and Services was set up, supported by Cedefop, to monitor the work on the impact assessment (IA) and to comment on the draft IA report. Apart from DG EAC and Cedefop the following Directorates General participated in the group: COMM, EMPL, ENTR, ESTAT, INFSO, HOME, RTD, SJ and SG. A first meeting of this Steering group was convened on 13 July 2010 and two further meetings were held on 10 November 2010 and on 9 September 2011.

A first draft of this Impact Assessment was submitted to the Impact Assessment Board on 21 September 2011 and discussed during its meeting of 19 October 2011.

1.2. Integration of the Impact Assessment Board' recommendations

Following the first opinion and recommendations of the Impact Assessment Board the following main changes have been made to the report:

- The report contains more information on the situation of validation in the Member States, including the underlying causes explaining validation situations; the information has been provided both in the text and in Annex 3 which contains detailed country overviews on validation;
- The problems to be addressed and their EU dimension have been better explained and described;
- The objectives have been fine tuned, in particular by highlighting how the proposed initiative builds upon the implementation of the Recommendation on the European Qualification Framework and the use of existing European instruments such as Europass, as well as stakeholders' instruments;
- The baseline scenario has been further detailed;
- Option 3 on a separate Open Method of Coordination on validation has been further detailed, and is now closely related to the development of a European Quality Charter on validation;
- The sections on the assessment of impacts and on the comparison between the options have been adapted to the strengthened intervention logic;
- The analysis of cost and benefits has been strengthened (in the main text, in the country tables of Annex 3 and in a separate Annex 4);
- More information has been provided on the consultation process and its results, which are better reflected throughout the text.

Following the second opinion of the Impact Assessment Board in addition the following main changes have been made to the report:

– Section 2 concerning the problem definition has been revised to give it a clearer structure;
– The problem drivers are presented in a more structured way;
– The role of European instruments and stakeholder instruments has been further detailed.

1.3. Consultation and other sources of evidence

Consultation has taken the following forms:

– An open consultation, through an online survey open from December 2010 to February 2011. Invitations to participate in the online survey and to submit a position paper had been sent to members of the most relevant groups and other stakeholders in the areas of education and training, employment, youth, sport[1].
– Discussion within meetings of policy bodies, in particular the Advisory Group for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) ;
– Specialist meetings and peer learning activities organised by the Learning Outcomes Group operating under the EQF Advisory Group ;
– Peer learning activities in the fields of higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning.

The minimum standards of consultation have been met.

The social partners, both employers and trade union representatives, have been consulted on a regular basis through their participation in the EQF Advisory Group and through their participation in several peer learning activities. They have also been consulted through a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training. The European sectoral social dialogue committees have not been consulted and the first European Sector Skills Council was only set up in December 2011[2].

The online survey resulted in 469 responses to the closed and open questions, complemented by 24 position papers. Responses were fairly evenly balanced between individuals (53%) and organisations (47%).

Among the organisations, around half of the responses came from public sector organisations (e.g. ministries, implementation bodies, employment services), and a third from the third sector (e.g. NGO/volunteer organisations). The private sector (employers, employer organisations, and private employment services) was less represented, with a sixth of the replies. The education/training perspective was better represented than the labour market perspective. Regarding the individuals who replied, almost two thirds of the contributors were female and the provider perspective (teachers/trainers) was better represented than the user perspective.

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[1] Permanent Representations to the EU, the Education Committee, European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group, Recognition of Learning Outcomes Group, Lifelong Learning Stakeholder Forum, Advisory Committee for Vocational Education and Training, European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training User Group, Adult Learning Working Group, Modernisation of Higher Education Working Group, Bologna Follow-up Group, Europass and Euroguidance centres, European Lifelong Guidance Policy network, Youthpass Advisory Board, National Academic Recognition Information Centres network, Higher Education Recognition of Prior Learning Network, Expert Group on The mobility of young volunteers

[2] Sector Skills Council on Textiles, Clothing and Leather, launched on 6 December 2011, http://www.etuf-tcl.org/index.php?s=5&rs=home&uid=664&lg=en.

More than half of the replies came from 6 countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The largest country participation concerned Portugal, which can be explained by the comprehensive system on validation of non-formal and informal learning that was set up as part of the policy to increase the general education level of the population. The high participation of Belgian respondents relates to the high number of European/international bodies replying to the questionnaire that reside in Belgium.

The results showed a lack of overall coherent approaches towards validation within and between Member States, as well as a large number of constraints for the effective implementation of validation in practice. Responses showed overwhelming consensus on the importance of making the skills gained through life and work experience visible. They showed broad support for a European initiative in order to enhance validation policy and practice in the EU Member States. More detailed results can be found in Annex 1 and on http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/consult/vnfil/report_en.pdf.

The consultation of the EQF Advisory Group and the different peer learning activities also generated positive support for a European initiative on the validation (for more details, see Annex 2).

In addition to the consultation, the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning was the main source of information on validation practices in EU countries. It was for the first time published in 2004[3] and updated in 2005[4], 2007[5] and 2010[6].

There exists no external evaluation of EU action in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

2. PROBLEM DEFINITION

2.1. Providing some context: changes in the labour market and the benefits of validating non-formal and informal learning

The level of qualifications required to succeed on the labour market is increasing. According to a Cedefop report the demand for highly-qualified people is projected to rise by almost 16 million by 2020. The demand for people with medium-level qualifications is projected to rise by more than 3.5 million by the same year.[7]

Rapid economic and technological changes make it more likely for individuals to have several job transitions during their working life, with the following challenges:

– Employers are increasingly looking for such competences as problem-solving and analytical skills, self-management and communication skills, linguistic skills and more

[3] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5164_en.pdf.
[4] http://www2.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/EuropeanInventory/publications/inventory/european_inventory_2005_final_report.pdf.
[5] http://www2.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/EuropeanInventory/publications/inventory/EuropeanInventory.pdf.
[6] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/bibliographies/18212.aspx.
[7] Cedefop (2010), *Skills Supply and Demand in Europe: medium-term forecast up to 2020*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p.13, internet: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/15540.aspx.

generally "non-routine" skills[8];

- In a situation of a higher number of job transitions during a career, individuals have to demonstrate and transfer their skills to new settings and organisations, thus establishing their value on the labour market.

Initial education and training of young people is consequently no longer enough to cope with labour market requirements. People need steady upskilling and re-skilling and this cannot be the exclusive responsibility of education and training institutions through formal learning. Other learning experiences, such as the workplace, or volunteer work are crucial for skills development and renewal.

In this context education, training and qualifications systems need to recognise the full range of learning experiences (formal, non-formal, informal) under a learning outcomes approach. This can be done through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This principle was adopted by the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework of 2008 to which this initiative is complementary.

Validation of learning outcomes resulting from non-formal and informal learning has multiple benefits:

Benefits of validation for individuals[9]:

- Economic benefits: e.g. enhanced employability, enhanced career prospects, increased wages;
- Educational /personal benefits: e.g. second chances for dropouts, improved access to formal education and training, higher motivation to learn, increased self-confidence;

Benefits of validation for the economy :

- A better skilled population and a better skills match both on the labour market at large and in individual companies (allowing better decisions on recruitment, on staff allocation and on skills development needs), leading to a better use of human capital;
- Transferability of skills, aiding the movement between companies and sectors (e.g. in the case of restructuring);
- Facilitation of mobility on the European labour market offering more opportunities for job seekers;
- Overall a more competitive European economy resulting in higher economic growth[10];

Benefits of validation for the society at large:

- A better qualified population and workforce, a better access to further learning for disadvantaged groups, a more inclusive labour market, more active citizenship and civic values.

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[8] Cedefop (2010), *Changing Qualifications. A review of qualification policies and practices*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p.29, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3059_en.pdf.

[9] European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2010 update, P. Werquin (2010), *Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Outcomes, policies and practices*, Paris: OECD.

[10] European Commission (2010), *Twelve levers to boost growth and confidence – Working together to create new growth*, COM(2011) 206 final, internet: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/smact/docs/20110413-communication_en.pdf.

Europe is also facing important demographic changes: its population will grow very slowly until 2025 and will then start to decrease[11]. For the purpose of economic growth policies focusing on getting people into jobs, the full potential of the skills of Europe's ageing population needs to be known and developed. Demographic developments will also increase the pressure on labour migration from outside Europe in order to cope with labour shortages. Migrants often come with skills that are not usually valued and therefore not put to good use. Validation of informal and non-formal learning provides an opportunity to recognise migrants' learning experiences.

2.2. Problems to be addressed by the initiative

2.2.1. Validation opportunities are limited and underused in the majority of Member States

The 2010 Update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning revealed that throughout Europe there is now recognition of the role validation has to play, but that "the overall take up rate of validation, meaning its implementation on the ground, remains on the whole relatively small in scale with the exception of a small number of countries and initiatives"[12]. Progress in validation has thus been uneven, irregular and slow at times where a lack of skills is becoming a bottleneck for economic growth and job creation.

Only four EU Member States have a high level of development in validation (Finland, France, the Netherlands and Portugal), while further seven (Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) have either a national system in its initial phase or a well-established, but partial, system of validation in one or more sectors[13].

The countries with a well-developed system have a mainstreamed approach on validation within their lifelong learning system (e.g. legally anchored), an infrastructure supportive to validation, a strong involvement of stakeholders (in particular social partners) and accessibility of validation for applicants in financial terms. Situations in individual countries are further specified in the next paragraphs.[14]

In France the national approach called "*validation des acquis de l'expérience*" has its legal base in both the labour and education codes. In Portugal validation is part of a national strategy, called the New Opportunities initiative, for education and training aiming at raising the general qualification level of the population. Also in Finland validation is legally backed: education laws have created individual rights to validation of prior experiences in many education fields (upper secondary education, VET and higher education) and people can be directly admitted to the matriculation exam.

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[11] European Commission (2005), Green Paper "*Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations*", COM(2005) 94 final, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0094:FIN:EN:PDF.

[12] Jo Hawley, Manuel Souto Otero and Claire Duchemin (2010), Executive Summary, in: *European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010, op. cit.,* p.5, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/F/?func=direct&local_base=CED01&doc_number=000077641.

[13] More details on the validation systems of EU Member States can be found in Annex 3.

[14] The information is based on the respective country chapters of the *European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010*, op. cit., http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=((wjr=european+and+wjr=inventory+and+wjr=validation)+and+(wti=country+and+wti=report))&local_base=ced01..

The French and Portuguese validation systems are linked to the national qualification system. In France all qualifications, except regulated professions, can also be obtained on the basis of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In Portugal a specific infrastructure for validation was set up, namely the New Opportunities Centres (454 in total) where people could apply for validation and receive guidance and the National Agency for Qualifications (in 2007) as the responsible body responsible for both the coordination of the national validation system and for vocational training reform. The New Opportunity Initiative has had an important outreach: more than one million low qualified adults were encouraged to improve their educational attainment[15].

In France individuals can apply for validation by submitting a portfolio of experiences including detailed descriptions of skills and competences to the ministry responsible for awarding qualifications. An established jury appointed by the responsible ministry decides upon the award of a full or partial qualification based on the application.

Under the Dutch system of validation, individuals can apply for validation of experiences by submitting a portfolio of experiences to a recognised provider of "experience certificates". Assessors within these providers can deliver an experience certificate to be used either for job search or for official recognition by an examination board of a formal education and training provider. The Dutch validation system is further supported by an expertise centre which set up a quality code for validation that has to be respected by the providers of experience certificates. In 2009 the government provided funding for validation as a means to cope with collective redundancies, allowing dismissed employees to obtain an experience certificate facilitating their recruitment by other employers.

A comprehensive evaluation study on the Dutch experiences, in which more than one thousand individuals, stakeholders and employers participated, made it clear that the Dutch system of validation has been successful as instrument for enhancing the qualification level of individuals. The same study showed that the impact of the validation system for invidual career development is more mixed, but that validation of non-formal and informal learning is an important catalyst in situations where individuals invest in the management of their own career and where employers invest in the careers of their staff[16].

In a large number of countries social partners play an active role in setting up national validation systems and in defining standards as is the case in e.g. Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, France and Luxembourg. In Germany chambers of industry and commerce play an important role in awarding VET qualifications.

The characteristics of the most developed countries in validation do not exist in countries with a lower level of development where validation is not mainstreamed.

In Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia validation systems exist in one or more but not in all sectors. E.g. in Belgium (Flanders) and Slovenia it is mainly related to VET qualifications.

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[15] Roberto Carneiro (ed.) (2011), *Accreditation of prior learning as a lever for lifelong learning: lessons learnt from the New Opportunities Initiative, Portugal*, UNESCO, MENON Network, CEPCEP, http://www.ucp.pt/site/resources/documents/CEPCEP/Accreditation_final.pdf.

[16] Diederick Stoel & Eveline Wentzel (2011), *Beloften, feiten en ongekende mogelijkheden: Onderzoek naar de effecten van EVC*, Amsterdam: ProfitWise Onderzoek en Advies.

Some of the countries falling within the group of the lowest level of development have recently taken validation initiatives as part of the development of a national qualification framework (e.g. Bulgaria, Latvia, Malta and Poland), but the validation system itself is still in its initial stage. Yet in some other countries, e.g. Cyprus, Greece and Hungary, hardly any possibilities for validating non-formal and informal learning exist.

In a large number of countries, even if some validation opportunities exist, their take up is lower than it could be. Underused validation possibilities also appear in countries with a more developed validation system such as Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The limited and underused validation opportunities make skills remain invisible and are not used to their full potential for the benefit of, the economy and the society at large.

2.2.2. A lack of comparability and coherence between the validation approaches of Member States

The current uneven availability national validation policies and practices as well as existing disparities between Member States reduce the comparability and transparency of validation systems. They make it difficult for citizens to combine learning outcomes acquired in different settings, on different levels and in different countries. They create the following obstacles for the transnational mobility of learners and workers at times where such mobility is needed for creating more economic growth:

For workers:

- If a worker can have his/her skills validated in his/her home country, he/she will be less inclined to move to another country if he/she faces less favourable working conditions because non-formal and informal learning is not recognised by that country;
- If a worker has developed skills in a country where these skills cannot be validated, when moving to another country he/she may face working conditions that are worse than what would normally be expected for his/her level of skills because they could not be validated in his/her home country;

For learners:

- If prior learning can be validated in country A to obtain formal credits, but country B does not accept such credits, learners risk not to move from country A to country B for this reason;

For learners and workers:

- If a country has not related its qualifications obtained on the basis of non-formal and informal learning to the EQF levels, people holding such qualifications will be hindered in their mobility to other countries.

2.2.3. Problem drivers

The problem drivers relate in particular to the first problem addressed by this initiative, namely limited validation opportunities in some and underused validation opportunities in the majority of Member States. The second problem, namely the lack of comparability and coherence between validation systems, is an important consequence of the first problem.

The drivers can be summarised as follows:

– a lack of trust in validation systems, processes and outcomes, which is also the concern of 74 % of respondents to the public consultation; low trust reflects the fact that qualifications obtained on the basis of non-formal and informal learning are not perceived as having the same currency value as qualifications on obtained after formal learning;

– low awareness of validation possibilities in countries where validation opportunities exist, in particular among disadvantaged groups, as revealed by the 2010 European Inventory on validation[17] and as confirmed by the results of the public consultation to which 77% of respondents replied that they lacked information on validation;

– cultural and attitudinal barriers towards validation of non-formal and informal learning (in e.g. Greece validation is not yet developed because formal educational attainment, especially at university level, is held in high esteem, while non-formal and informal learning are not valued); the last driver is not directly addressed in this initiative, but it is expected that the initiative's objectives and proposed actions will be conducive to create a more positive attitude to validation in all Member States.

2.3. Existing policies and instruments on the European level relating to the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The limited and uneven availability and use of opportunities for validation of non-formal and informal learning at Member State, as well as the lack of comparability and coherence of validation approaches between Member States exist despite the existence of European policies and instruments promoting the transparency and comparability of competences, qualifications and credits including the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been part of the European policy agenda since 2001 when the Commission defined lifelong learning as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective"[18].

In 2004 Common European principles on validation were adopted. These relate to individual entitlements, obligations of stakeholders, confidence and trust and credibility and legitimacy[19].

Also in 2004 the Europass framework was established[20]. It includes the Europass CV and a portfolio of documents which citizens can use to better communicate and present their qualifications and competences throughout Europe. Under this framework the European Commission is currently preparing the Europass Experience Module to help individuals record and present the skills acquired throughout their life.[21] In addition the Youthpass is a

[17] Claire Duchemin and Jo Hawley (2010), "Thematic Report: Validation for Specific Target Groups", in: *European Inventory 2010*, op cit, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77651.pdf.
[18] COM(2001) 678 final, Brussels, 21.11.2001, p.9, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF.
[19] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/informal/validation2004_en.pdf.
[20] Decision Nr 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass), OJ L 390, 2004, p.6, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:390:0006:0020:EN:PDF.
[21] Announced under the Communication on the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, COM(2010) 682 final, p.13, .

European tool for participants in the Youth in Action Programme describing what they have done and showing what they have learnt[22].

In 2008 the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. The EQF is a reference framework of qualification levels defined through learning outcomes[23]. To implement the EQF, all Member States are setting up their National Qualification Framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes and reference their qualifications to the European levels. Through this process qualifications will become better comparable and will be easier to understand for employers, educational establishments, workers and learners. By the end of 2011, 16 countries had adopted their National Qualification Framework and 12 countries had referenced their national qualifications to the European qualifications reference framework as defined by the EQF Recommendation. In 2012 another 13 countries are expected to conclude the referencing of national qualifications to European levels.[24]

The EQF and NQFs are overarching tools, which, by defining qualifications through learning outcomes, have laid the ground for validation of non-formal and informal learning as a valid pathway towards qualifications.

Credit systems based on learning outcomes facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning by possibilities to award credits for relevant learning experiences which can lead to exemptions to parts of a curriculum:

- The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)[25], developed within the European Higher Education Area, facilitates mobility between higher education institutions. ECTS is moving towards learning outcomes and this provides opportunities to further links to the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), of 2009[26], associates a certain number of ECVET points to units of learning outcomes, based on common standards and on agreed procedures for assessment, transfer, accumulation and recognition between vocational training institutions.

The 2009 European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning from Cedefop provide technical advice to civil servants and practitioners relate to different perspectives on validation, such as the European, the national, the organisational and the individual perspective[27]. They further deal with validation processes and methods and with the inputs of validation practitioners (counsellors, assessors, process administrators). They were developed through a process of peer learning under the open method of coordination. They form a practical tool to be applied on a voluntary basis.

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[22] http://www.youthpass.eu.

[23] Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, OJ L, 111, 6.5.2008, p.1, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF.

[24] Cedefop (2011), "National qualifications frameworks developments in Europe", *Working Paper No 12*, October 2011, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/files/6112_en.pdf.

[25] European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, cf. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm.

[26] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), OJ C 155, 2009, p. 11, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF.

[27] Cedefop (2009), *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4054_en.pdf.

In addition to the European initiatives, the following developments are relevant:

- Several sectoral skills and qualification passports have developed through the European sectoral social dialogue[28], such as the AgriPass[29], the sport and fitness competence frameworks[30], the European Qualification and Skills Passport (QSP) in the Hospitality Sector [31] and the EMU pass in the metal sector[32]. These passes promote the recognition of skills, experiences and qualifications, facilitating transnational mobility within the same sector and can play a role in the phase of identification and documentation of citizens' skills.
- Some multinational enterprises have developed internal policies on validation of non-formal and informal learning which can have positive effects on the skills levels of workers and facilitate their redeployment within or outside the company[33].

The above mentioned tools and instruments represent a number of shortcomings in addressing the problems identified in section 2.2 which are summarised as follows for each of them:

- The EQF Recommendation's main focus has been on formal qualifications and although it promotes the validation of non-formal and informal learning, it does not provide further guidance on how to implement validation.

- The common European principles on validation from 2004 are relevant for the setting up of validation systems, however, valuable as they are, they do not provide sufficient detailed guidance for the building and running of validation systems, especially in countries where validation hardly exists.

- The European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning are focused on the implementation of validation by providing technical advice, but they lack the status of a policy-framework adopted by a law-making body.

- Skills and Qualification passports developed by the social partners through the European Sectoral Social Dialogue are useful for the identification and documentation of skills and qualifications, thus making skills and qualifications better comparable between Member States. However, there value is limited to the sector on which they focus and they are not with all validation stages (e.g. they do not cover assessments eventually leading to a full or partial qualification).

- Also the Europass (in particular the Europass Experiece module, currently under development) and Youthpass are useful for identification and documentation of learning experiences, but like the sectoral Skills and Qualifications passports they can only provide inputs into the validation process, but are no validation instruments in themselves.

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[28] European Commission (2010), *European Sectoral Social Dialogue: Recent developments*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=329&langId=en&pubId=570&type=2&furtherPubs=yes.

[29] Cf. http://www.agripass-online.eu/.

[30] Cf. http://www.eose.org/EQF/index.php, http://www.elearningfitness.eu/elf-project/project-summary-and-objectives.

[31] Cf. http://www.effat.eu/public/index.php?lang=3&menu=5.

[32] Cf. http://www.emu-pass.com/.

[33] Rasa Jucite (2010), "The Philips Vocational qualifications programme, the Netherlands", *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010*, Thessaloniki: Cedefop, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77484.pdf.

– Credit systems can facilitate validation, but are limited the function they perform in validation, namely the recognition of learning experiences through the award of credits for these.

Given the shortcomings of the different tools and instruments, individually, or taken together, one can speak of a "validation gap" within the existing tools/instruments for the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

2.4. Who else is affected?

In addition to the groups mentioned in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, this initiative affects:

– Certain groups in particular: disadvantaged groups (e.g. the young and old unemployed, low-qualified adults, disabled people, school drop-outs, migrants, ethnic minorities, older workers), individuals returning to work after having spent time taking care of children, mobile learners and workers;

– Employers of all sectors;

– Employment Services;

– Qualification authorities/bodies;

– Validation professionals: assessors of non-formal and informal learning experiences, guidance counsellors;

– Providers of formal education and training;

– Non-formal education and training providers.

2.5. EU added value

EU action has already proven to be of added value for the recognition of skills and qualifications acquired throughout Europe aiming at the free movement of citizens, a better access to Europe's labour markets and the mobility of workers and learners. Such EU added value has been recognised by all Member States in the context of the EQF and in the context of other European tools and instruments such as ECVET, ECTS, and Europass[34].

EU action on validation will fill the "gap" on validation which currently exists within the currently available European tools and instruments, related to implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning in practice. Filling this gap will bring existing tools and instruments to their full potential.

Whereas Member States' activities in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning are focussed on the national level, EU action on validation should relate to cooperation and coordination across Member States. EU action can facilitate mobility of workers and learners through a better mutual recognition of non-formally and informally acquired skills. By introducing more cooperation and stronger coordination between Member States, the transparency of validation systems will increase and the mutual trust by Member States in each other's validation systems enhanced. Especially Member States with low trust levels and weak traditions in validation of non-formal and informal learning can benefit from this. Mutual trust cannot be achieved with the same efficiency by Member States alone without action on the EU level.

[34] Cedefop (2011), op. cit.

The EU added value of the initiative is finally embedded in its support to Member States in their cooperation related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, in particular through the EU support in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination, Peer Learning Activities and projects supported by EU programmes.

2.6. EU right to act and subsidiarity

Right to act

Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) foresee that the Union will contribute to the development of quality education and implement a vocational training policy by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, where necessary supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and vocational training. Action at Union level to promote a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce is called for by Article 148 TFEU.

Subsidiarity

The current initiative recommends common lines of action to be implemented on the level of the Member States with some European support. It will propose actions that will need implementation at EU and Member State level. The EU level will provide coordination – including in particular coordination with the relevant European instruments – and support, for instance by organising peer learning activities. Member States will remain entirely responsible for the design, development and implementation of their arrangements (laws, regulations, collective agreements) for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes. Action on both levels is complementary and the prerogatives of Member States are safeguarded.

2.7. How the problem would evolve without additional EU intervention (baseline scenario)

Without additional EU intervention leading to a more coordinated approach towards validation across the European Union, taking advantage of existing European tools, the following is likely to happen:

- the existing "validation gap" within the existing European tools and instruments, in particular the implementation gap on validation of the EQF, as well as the weak status of the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, will persist and not contribute to addressing the problems described in section 2.2;
- current policies in education and training will continue to stress the importance of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Bruges Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training calls for validation procedures linked to national qualification systems to be put in place by 2015[35]. Like the EQF Recommendation it does not provide further guidance on the implementation and is expected to contribute only to a limited extend to dealing with the problems addressed by this initiative;

[35] *The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020*, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf.

- Without a stronger political framework there is a high probability that the funding for validation under the Lifelong Learning Programme, the future Erasmus for All programme and the European Social Fund will remain scattered as it has been in the past, and that the problems identified in section 2.2 will not be sufficiently addressed.
- based on current trends, the situation of validation will improve only slowly in most Member States; by 2020 a mainstreamed validation system might be available in ten countries. This is better than the current four countries, but represents still less than half of the Member States;
- validation opportunities will continue to be underused in a large number of Member States;
- validation systems will remain uncoordinated between Member States and thus hamper the mobility of learners and workers;
- the opportunities offered for the employability of individuals will not reach their full potential, as many skills in many countries will remain invisible and undervalued;
- on the level of the European social partners validation of non-formal and informal learning, as part of a broader focus on lifelong learning, will continue to be characterised by sectoral (e.g. sectoral skills passports) rather than transversal initiatives.

3. SECTION 3: OBJECTIVES

As seen in 2.3, access to the labour market and to further learning is hampered by limited and underused opportunities for validation, while mobility of workers and learners is hampered by a lack of comparability and coherence of national approaches to validation. The objectives of the initiative directly target the limited availability of validation opportunities at national level, the lack of a comparable and coherent approach in validation and the awareness of validation opportunities in Europe. Action towards the objectives is also expected to have a positive impact on the trust in validation of non-formal and informal learning as a pathway to obtain a qualification.

3.1. General objectives

The general objectives of this initiative are the following:

(1) To provide citizens in all Member States with the opportunity to validate their skills acquired outside formal education and training systems.

(2) To provide citizens with the opportunity to use their validated skills for working and learning purposes throughout Europe.

3.2. Specific and operational objectives

To pursue the two general objectives, two specific objectives and four operational objectives have been defined.

3.2.1. Specific objectives

To achieve the systematic provision of validation opportunities that now is available only in a few countries, there is a need to mainstreaming validation within the lifelong learning

strategies of all Member States. While the nature and form of validation systems will vary between countries, they should follow a coordinated approach, taking advantage of existing tools allowing citizens to move across countries without any loss of validated skills. The specific objectives are therefore the following;

(1) To put in place systems for the validation of non formal and informal learning at national level linked to the National Qualifications Framework.

(2) To establish an appropriate level of comparability and coherence between national validation systems linked to the European Qualifications Framework.

3.2.2. Operational objectives

The following operational objectives have been defined:

(1) To promote national qualification frameworks in a way that qualifications can be acquired through formal programmes as well as through the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

This contributes to both comprehensiveness at national level and coordination between national approaches, as national qualification frameworks concern all education and training subsystems, cover all subjects and are related to the EQF.

(2) To provide mechanisms for the identification, documentation, and quality assured assessment and validation of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, taking advantage of common European instruments such Europass, ECTS, ECVET.

The use of European tools will ensure a good level of coordination: skills can be documented in the common European format provided by the Europass framework. Following assessment they can be converted into formal credits recognised throughout Europe through the European credit systems ECTS and ECVET. The mechanisms should also take into account tools and initiatives developed by social partners and other stakeholders, including industry based tools as this reinforces the coverage and penetration of validation arrangements.

A quality assured assessment and validation will contribute to creating more trust in validation systems, processes and outcomes. All qualifications, whether obtained through formal learning or through validation of non-formal and informal learning should be issued against the same standards, ensuring that qualifications obtained on the basis of non-formal and informal learning have the same currency value as qualifications obtained on the basis of formal learning.

(3) To allow individuals to have their skills and competences identified and documented without resulting into a formal qualification.

Experiences of national validation systems show that the primary target of individuals entering into a validation procedure is not necessarily to obtain a higher qualification but to make their skills visible. This documentation should be presented in a format allowing an as wide as possible portability towards employers and education and training institutions.

(4) To extend and intensify the cooperation and exchange of good practice between Member States, supported by peer-learning activities and European reporting tools.

Both stronger coordination between national approaches and more effective results within countries can be achieved through peer learning and through an improved knowledge basis.

(5) To raise the awareness of validation opportunities.

As suggested by the 2010 country update of the European Inventory on validation, the actual take-up of validation could be increased by raising awareness of validation opportunities. A specific effort should be made towards disadvantaged groups who will otherwise be more difficult to reach.

3.3. Consistency of objectives with other EU policies and strategic objectives

3.3.1. Consistency with the EU 2020 strategic objectives

The general and specific objectives are in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth[36]. They match with the following EU 2020 flagships:

- Youth on the Move[37] and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs[38], which call for better employability, increased occupational and educational mobility, flexible learning pathways and for valuing learning outside formal systems; both announced the initiative for a Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- The Digital Agenda for Europe[39]: in particular its action areas to enhance digital literacy, skills and inclusion and to bring ICT-enabled benefits to the EU society;
- The European platform against poverty[40].

They contribute to the following Europe 2020 headline targets[41]:

- *Less than 10 % early school leavers*: the objectives can support individuals who dropped out from school to re-enter the formal system or obtain a qualification;
- Increasing the *proportion of 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education to 40%*: through the recognition of prior learning to get access to higher education;
- *75% overall employment rate*: validation can increase the employability of individuals and is therefore relevant for getting more people into work, especially women, the young, older and low-skilled people, legal migrants and people with disabilities;
- At least *20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion*: validation can enhance the employment prospects of e.g. the low qualified and individuals who

[36] European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM(2010) 2020 final, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF.

[37] European Commission (2010), *Youth on the Move, An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union*, COM(2010) 477 final, http://ec.europa.eu/education/yom/com_en.pdf.

[38] European Commission (2010), *An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment*, COM(2010) 682 final, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0682:FIN:EN:PDF.

[39] European Commission (2010), *A Digital Agenda for Europe*, COM(2010) 245 final, 19.5.2010, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0245:FIN:EN:PDF.

[40] European Commission (2010), *The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion*, COM(2010) 758 final, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0758:FIN:EN:PDF.

[41] COM(2010) 2020 final, op.cit., p. 5

dropped out from school, thus contributing to alleviating poverty and to their social inclusion.

They are in line with the Commission's intention to publish a Communication on rethinking the way education and training systems are providing skills in 2012.

3.3.2. Consistency with other policies, tools and instruments in the field of education, training and youth

The objectives are in conformity with the 2014-2020 Multi-Annual Financial Framework proposal[42] and with the objectives of the proposed Erasmus for all Programme, in particular (a) the improvement of the level of key competences and skills and their relevance for the labour market and society and (b) the promotion of a European lifelong learning area[43].

They are closely linked and complementary to the tools and instruments discussed in section 2.2. They are further consistent with the development of other specific instruments, namely a new module under Europass to record non-formal and informal learning experiences, ESCO[44], the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning[45] and the quality assurance reference framework EQAVET[46].

They are coherent with the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)[47] including its target of 15% of adults participating[48] in education and training by 2020[49]. They are in line with EU policies developed on education and training (adult learning, vocational training, higher education), as witnessed in particular by the Bruges Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training that calls for validation procedures to be put in place by 2015.

They are also consistent with policies and initiatives on youth and voluntary work (e.g. the European Strategy for Youth[50] and the 2011 European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship[51]).

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[42] European Commission (2011), *A Budget for Europe 2020*, COM(2011) 500 final, http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/biblio/documents/fin_fwk1420/MFF_COM-2011-500_Part_I_en.pdf.

[43] Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing "Erasmus for all", the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, COM (2011) 788 final, http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/doc/legal_en.pdf.

[44] European taxonomy of Skills, Competences and Occupations, under development.

[45] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key competences for lifelong learning, OJ L 394, 2006, p.10, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF

[46] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, OJ C 155, 2009, p.1, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF.

[47] Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), OJ C 119, 2009, p.2, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF.

[48] The percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training during the 4 weeks prior to the survey (Eurostat/Labour Force Survey).

[49] Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), OJ C 119, p.2, 2009.

[50] European Commission (2009), *An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities*, COM(2009) 200 final, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF.

3.3.3. Consistency with employment policy and other policies

The objectives are consistent with the Annual Growth Survey 2012 which calls for adapting education and training systems to reflect labour market conditions and skills demand[52], with the framework agreement by the European social partners on inclusive labour markets of 2010 calling for the recognition and validation of competences and for improving the transferability of qualifications[53] and with the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines for the Economic and Employment Policies of the Member States[54], in particular its guideline 8 on "developing a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs".

They are in conformity with the objectives of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, which promotes the free movement of persons and services, and more in general with the objectives of the Single Market[55] as well as with the Commission proposal for the modernisation of this Directive[56] which stresses that skills developed through working experience may be taken into account for access to a regulated profession.

4. SECTION 4: POLICY OPTIONS

The policy options that are considered here are the following:

1. No additional EU action (baseline scenario);
2. A Council Recommendation on the implementation of validation;
3. A new Open Method of Coordination devoted to validation aimed at the development of a European Quality Charter on validation.

The potential option of discontinuing EU actions and initiatives in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been discarded at an early stage, as this would be contradictory to announced policy intentions, in particular the EU 2020 Strategy.

4.1. Option 1 (baseline scenario):

This option consists of the current situation which can be summarised as follows:

– Validation of non-formal and informal learning is taken into account in European policies concerning education and training, employment, youth and active citizenship;

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[51] Council Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship, OJ L 17, 2010, p.43, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:017:0043:0049:EN:PDF.

[52] European Commission (2011), *Annual Growth Survey 2012*, COM(2011) 815 final, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/ags2012_en.pdf.

[53] Framework Agreement on Inclusive Labour Markets, Business Europe, UEAPME, CEEP, ETUC/CES, 25 March 2010, http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf_20100325155413125.pdf.

[54] http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/Brochure%20Integrated%20Guidelines.pdf.

[55] European Commission (2010), *Towards a Single Market Act, for a highly competitive social market economy; 50 proposals for improving our work, business and exchanges with one another*, COM (2010) 608 final, http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/smact/docs/single-market-act_en.pdf.

[56] Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information of 19 December 2011, COM(2011) 883 final, http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/docs/policy_developments/modernising/COM2011_883_en.pdf.

- Existing European instruments such as the EQF, ECVET, ECTS, Europass etc. call for the possibility to validate experiences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, without indicating how to do this;
- The Common European principles on validation by the Council in 2004, the publication of European guidelines on validation by Cedefop in 2009, as well as available funding through the Lifelong Learning Programme, the future Erasmus for All Programme and the European Social Fund will continue to be relevant;
- Validation is part of the policy agenda in most Member States, but only implemented in a comprehensive way in a few Member States;
- Member States exchange experiences on validation under the Open Method of Coordination such as in the EQF Advisory Group, in other sectoral settings (e.g. in the fields of higher education, VET, Adult Learning and Youth) as well as under the European employment strategy.

4.2. Option 2 (Council Recommendation on the implementation of validation):

Option 2 entails political and practical measures to be undertaken by the Member States and stakeholders in the form of a Council Recommendation, as announced by the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives "Youth on the Move" and "Agenda for New Skills and Jobs".

The measures build on the Common European principles and on the European Guidelines for validation of 2009. They also take account of Member States' and other stakeholders' experiences with validation as expressed in several Peer Learning Activities and as analysed in the European Inventory and they build on existing credit systems in higher education and in the vocational education and training sector. In addition they build on experiences of stakeholders with regard to the use of skills and qualification passes developed under the European social dialogue.

The measures provide for a key role of labour market stakeholders (employers, employer organisations, trade unions, public employment services) in the practical development and implementation of measures. They respect the key principle that seeking validation should remain a voluntary act of citizens.

<u>The measures to be included in the Recommendation will call on Member States to:</u>

- Ensure that all qualifications, at any level of the national qualification framework, can in principle be acquired through the validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, respecting the same standards as for qualifications obtained through formal programmes;
- Put in place mechanisms that provide citizens with the opportunity to submit an application for the validation of their learning outcomes; ,
- In the forms appropriate to the national context and needs, ensure that information on validation opportunities is widely available, that guidance is available for individuals who wish to undertake a validation procedure and that transparent quality assurance mechanisms in their validation system concerning both the assessment (methodologies and tools, qualified assessors) and its results (agreed standards) are established;
- Provide specific measures for disd-advantaged groups, including citizens most likely to be subject to unemployment or insecure forms of employment, for whom such an approach could help increase their participation in lifelong learning and their access to the labour

market, in particular in relation to targeted information and awareness raising measures and through specific guidance;

- Provide individuals with the opportunity to undergo a skills audit/'bilan de compétences' within three months of an identified need, promote the use of current and future Europass tools to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes, promote partnerships and other initiatives to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes developed within SME and other small organisations and establish links between validation arrangements and credit systems such as ECTS and ECVET;
- Provide incentives to social partners and other relevant stakeholders, namely employer organisations, trade unions, chambers of commerce, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers as well as civil society organisations to be actively involved in the development and implementation of the validation mechanisms
- Provide incentives to employers, youth organisations and civil society organisations to promote and facilitate the identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired at work or in voluntary work;
- Provide incentives to education and training providers to facilitate access to formal education and training on the basis of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings and ensure co-ordination between education, training, employment and youth implementation services as well as between relevant policies.

The proposed measures leave it up to the Member States how to implement the Recommendation within the national system, including the burden sharing between public authorities and private operators.

The measures to be proposed in the Recommendation are in line with the results of the public consultation: strengthening the implementation of practical measures was considered as important by 83 per cent of the respondents. Along the priorities and items for action they will address the following replies received to the public consultation:

- raising the status and value of validation (mentioned by 96 % of the respondents as being very important, important or moderately important);
- awareness raising (95 %);
- exchange of good practice and peer learning (95 %);
- strengthening the implementation of practical measures at national regional and local level (94 %);
- enhancing the comparability, transparency and trust across national boundaries (94 %);
- improving the visibility of non-formal and informal learning including through documentation (94 %);
- building flexible pathways between non-formal and informal learning and formal education and training (93 %);
- building links between validation and education and training credit systems (92 %);
- enhancing synergies between the existing European tools and frameworks that support validation (91 %);
- integration of validation in mainstream education and training and qualification systems (90%).

The Recommendation will be complemented by more intensive cooperation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning within the existing EQF Advisory Group as Open Method of Coordination structure. Making use of the EQF Advisory Group will reinforce the

integration of validation of non-formal and informal learning within the ongoing EQF process.

The measures will strengthen the implementation of the EQF Recommendation by filling its "gap" on the implementation of validation

In addition to the baseline scenario the measures foreseen under Option 2 foresee for the Commission a role in regularly updating the European Inventory on validation of non formal and informal learning and the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. The European Inventory will be stronger focussed on evaluation of results of validation systems than is currently the place. The European Guidelines will be regularly reviewed in the light of experiences made with validation systems.

Under this option the Council Recommendation is expected to be approved in 2012, with an implementation of the proposed mechanisms by the Member States and the European Commission from 2013 onwards.

4.3. Option 3: A new process based on a new Open Method of Coordination devoted to validation aimed at the development of a European Quality Charter on validation

Under Option 3 Member States will work together, in a new Open Method of Coordination (OMC) specifically devoted to validation, aiming at the setting up of a European Quality Charter on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The new OMC would work in parallel to and be independent from other existing OMCs, in particular the EQF Advisory Group. Relevant stakeholders will play an important role in the new OMC process, such as trade unions, employer organisations, formal and non-formal education and training providers as well as relevant quality assurance bodies. If relevant also other parties (e.g. individual companies with useful experiences in validation) will be involved in the process.

The European Quality Charter will build on both European (e.g. European guidelines and the common European principles on validation) and on national initiatives (public and private) related to quality assurance in the area of validation. It will be developed based on a mutual learning process. A European Quality Charter could contribute to building trust and confidence between Member States. It should be implemented on a voluntary basis.

The idea of a European Quality Charter as such is not new and has been part of a Recommendation on transnational mobility for education and training purposes of 2006[57].

The European Quality Charter could be formulated around the following lines:

- Quality ensured validation procedures for existing validation centres;
- Quality standards for assessors (methodologies and tools, training of assessors);
- Guidance and counselling (for individuals who wish to have their skills validated);
- Access to validation (avoiding barriers to validation);
- Stakeholder involvement (social partners, both sectoral and transversal, education and training providers, quality assurance bodies);

[57] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility, OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p.5, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0005:0009:EN:PDF.

- Specific target groups (in particular disadvantaged groups);
- European dimension of quality assurance (in line with the quality assurance principles that underpin the EQF).

Apart from its focus on developing a European Quality Charter, the new OMC process will, compared to the baseline scenario, also consist of:

- A new set of reporting mechanisms by Member States, including national action plans, to be implemented on an annual basis;
- Monitoring progress by the Commission.

Option 3 fully respects the prerogatives of Member States as far as the setting up and the implementation of validation systems is concerned, including how the financial burden is shared between public authorities and private actors.

Like in Option 2, in addition to the baseline scenario, Option 3 foresees for the Commission a role in regularly updating the European Inventory on validation of non formal and informal learning and the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning.

The OMC mechanisms are expected to be put in place late 2012 which should lead to the approval of the charter in 2014. Its implementation is expected to follow from 2015 onwards.

5. ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS

The assessed impacts concern economic, social impacts and other impacts, assessed in comparison with the baseline scenario. As all options have only limited environmental impacts and are not significantly different between each other, these will not be explored in more detail.

The social, economic and other impacts have been examined in qualitative terms based on likely impacts, as there are no hard data available. For each of the likely impacts it has been assessed whether it leads to an improvement (+: slightly positive, ++: positive) or a deterioration (-: slightly negative, --: negative) in comparison with the baseline scenario. A score of "0" is given if there is no likely improvement or deterioration compared with Option 1. The score for Option 1 (the baseline scenario) is always 0.

The realisation of the expected impacts will depend on a number of factors such as the concrete implementation by Member States of the recommended measures (Option 2) and the way in which Member States will effectively work towards a European Quality Charter on validation (Option 3).

The scoring is further based on the following two assumptions:

- The set of recommendations addressed to Member States (Option 2) will have more immediate effects on the creation of more validation opportunities than will be the case for the newly created OMC (Option 3). Ongoing developments of National Qualification Frameworks (see section 2.2) will benefit from the measures proposed under Option 2 which will be able to deliver concrete outcomes already in 2013. The forthcoming new module under the Europass Framework (Europass Experience), to be adopted in 2012, will facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

– Immediate effects will better contribute to reaching the Europe 2020 targets in time and therefore higher scores have been given to impacts realised in the short than to impacts that are realised in the longer term.

5.1. Economic impacts

Economic growth and employment

Under Option 1, current policies on employment and on education & training under the EU 2020 Strategy, focus on the strategic objective of enhancing economic growth. A positive effect on economic growth and employment of these policies is therefore assumed (0).

In addition to existing policies, Option 2 foresees measures which focus on the creation of more validation opportunities (including individual entitlements), and on better comparable and more coherent validation systems facilitating mobility. Skills will become more visible and can be better appreciated and used through validation, leading to a better skills match on the labour market. This will strengthen economic growth and employment (++).

Under Option 3 the Open Method of Coordination will increase validation activities and economic growth. The European Quality Charter could enhance mutual trust between Member States on validation systems with a positive effect on the mobility of workers and on economic growth. However these impacts will only be realised in the longer run (+).

Public expenditure[58]

The available evidence suggests that in most countries validation initiatives are to a large extent publicly financed[59], both from national/regional sources and from European resources (mainly from the European Social Fund and from the Lifelong Learning programme).

According to the European Inventory comprehensive earmarked validation budgets are the exception rather than the rule and if they exist they usually concern one part of the validation system. Luxembourg (4.5 million EUR for the period 2009-2010) and Spain (30 million EUR for the period 2009-2010) are the only countries were budgets on an aggregate level are available.

For certain countries figures are available on costs for obtaining a certificate. They usually vary between 800 and 1,800 EUR for a complete validation process leading to a certification. Concrete examples are Portugal (1,600 EUR), Sweden (1,550 EUR), Belgium (Flanders) (between 960 and 1,440 EUR), France (between 800 and 1,800 EUR) and the Netherlands (between 800 and 1,600 EUR).

Based on the examples of these countries, combined with statistical indicators on the use of validation (see annex 3), it is possible to provide some indications on aggregated costs:

– Portugal: around 320,000 people obtained a certificate through validation of non-formal and informal learning. Based on the assumption that this figure relates to 4 years of

[58] The information related to the country examples is based on the Belgian (Flanders), French, Luxembourgish, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish country chapters of the *European Inventory on Validation 2010,* op. cit.

[59] Antonio Giménez Plaza, Jo Hawley and Manuel Souto Otero (2010), "Thematic Report: Costs and Benefits of Val, *European Inventory 2010*, op. cit., p. 2.

validation policy, the total costs per year are EUR 120 million. The Portuguese case of validation is unique as the large number of applicants for validation is closely related to the general low level of professional qualifications of adults. Costs are high as specific centres were set up as part of the validation policy;

- France: average costs of EUR 1,300 multiplied by around 50,000 applications per year lead to an annual budget of EUR 65 million;
- In the Netherlands the annual average budget of 28.5 million EUR covered for 14,000 experience certificates.

In countries which according to the European Inventory show a lower level of development, the cost figures are also lower, e.g.:

- Belgium (Flanders): total annual costs of EUR 625,000 for 500 certificates of vocational experience;
- Sweden: total annual costs of EUR 3 million EUR for 1,900 qualifications awarded.

The country examples above have been given for illustrative purposes. They reflect the wide variety in validation policies and practices in the Member States. A more detailed analysis of costs and benefits of validation is provided in Annex 4.

The real costs of putting in place validation mechanisms depend on a number of factors, such as:

- The readiness of the current system: if validation arrangements can be developed within the existing institutional set up (e.g. assessment centres, available guidance), and if existing standards can be used (assessment, certification), the costs will be lower than if hardly any infrastructure exists[60];
- The scale of validation arrangements: in a well functioning education and training system with an appropriately qualified population and workforce, there is less need for a large scale validation programme than in a country where the overall qualification levels of the population are low. This is illustrated by the French and Portuguese cases which both have a comprehensive validation system, but with a completely different scale[61];
- Target groups of validation: the costs for guidance and counselling of most people belonging to disadvantaged groups are higher than guidance costs for already well qualified people[62].

When referring to the costs of putting in place validation mechanisms at the same time, the cost savings for formal education and training should be taken into account. The final trade off between public expenditure resulting from setting up validation systems and the savings on public expenditure resulting from formal education and training will depend on several factors e.g. the way in which education and training institutions are financed.

Relating the three options, the following situations are expected:

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[60] Peer Learning Activity on the costs and benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning, 12-13 February 2009.

[61] Whereas in France 53,000 people, on a total population of around 60 million, applied for a qualification on the basis of validation of past experiences in 2008, in Portugal more than 320,000 people, on a population of about 10 million had been granted a certificate through the validation process by the year 2010.

[62] Antonio Giménez Plaza, Jo Hawley and Manuel Souto Otero (2010), op. cit., p.7

- Option 1: public expenditure will probably increase due to the increase in validation that is brought by the EQF process, however no quantitative estimates can be given (0).
- Option 2: the full costs of a validation procedure are on average between 800 and 1,800 EUR. As most activities concerning validation are publicly financed, it is probable that the enlarged opportunities for validation developed under Option 2 will lead to higher public expenditure compared to Option 1. Exact estimates cannot be given as this depends on measures taken by the Member States. The Commission will face some limited higher expenses due to the regular updating of the European Guidelines on validation[63] (--).
- Option 3: the development in validation follows in the short term a slightly more intensive pattern than under Option 1. Given the absence of a set of concrete measures recommended to the Member States, developments will be slower than under Option 2, but could receive a further boost once the European Quality Charter is in place and then result in higher public expenditure at a later stage. The meetings under the OMC and the additional reporting by Member States under Option 3 will also entail some higher public expenditure[64]. Overall the increase in public expenditure will be lower than under Option 2, but no overall quantitative estimate can be given (-).

Private expenditure

In many countries individuals pay fees in order to receive recognition of prior learning for their access to formal education and training or to obtain a formal qualification on the basis of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal education and training system. For example in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Latvia individuals have to cover the charges of validation schemes ran by public authorities and stakeholders, however no concrete amounts of fees are available[65]. Also companies pay for validation schemes, especially if they see the direct benefits of validation, such as the Philips case study has shown[66].

Translated into the three options the expected impacts are as follows:

- Option 1: under the current EQF process opportunities for validation are enhanced through the development of National Qualification Frameworks, which will increase private expenditure by individuals; it is not possible to give a further indication of costs (0).
- Option 2: two factors contribute to higher private expenditure. The first factor is that stakeholders (e.g. employers and education and training providers) are called upon to document the learning outcomes acquired through non-formal learning, using Europass, Youthpass and ECVET; depending on how Member States have set up their validation system, this might increase the financial burden upon them. The second factor is that under Option 2 more validation opportunities will be created compared to the current situation, increasing the private expenditure of individuals (-).

[63] Based on experience the costs for an update of the European Inventory can be estimated at between 200,000 and 250,000 EUR per update.

[64] Based on three meetings a year of between 30 and 35 meeting participants (one per member State, candidate country and country participating in the Lifelong Learning programme), the costs for the Commission are estimated at 60,000 EUR per year.

[65] Antonio Giménez Plaza, Jo Hawley and Manuel Souto Otero (2010), op. cit., p.7.

[66] Rasa Jucite (2010), "The Philips Vocational qualifications programme, the Netherlands", in: *European Inventory 2010 op. cit.*

– Option 3: given the absence of a set of concrete measures recommended to the Member States under this option, the development of more validation opportunities will be slower than under Option 2, but could receive a further boost once the European Quality Charter is in place (0/-).

Obligations on business

Under Option 1 no additional obligations are imposed upon business (0).

Under Option 2 social partners, employers, employment services, youth organisations, education and training providers and civil society organisations are called upon to document the learning outcomes acquired through non-formal learning, using Europass, Youthpass and ECVET. There will be more obligations upon business, but what really happens will depend on the situation in each Member State (-).

Like Option 1, Option 3 does, at this stage, not impose any further obligations upon business. Once the envisaged European Quality Charter on validation is adopted and subsequently implemented, there could be some more obligations on business in the field of validation, such as the documentation of learning outcomes, but this will depend on the situation in each Member State (0/-).

Administrative burden to Member States

Under Option 1, there will be no additional information obligations to the Member States (0).

Also under Option 2 there is no additional administrative burden to the Member States, as this option does not impose upon them any additional legal obligations to provide information. Monitoring will take place through a more regular European Inventory which is drafted by national and international experts in validation but for which Member States do not have to engage in additional reporting (0).

The new OMC process proposed under Option 3 entails important additional administrative burden, related to the additional annual reporting by the Member States and to the additional meetings under the OMC in preparing and implementing the European Quality Charter. Both the participation in meetings and the contributions to reporting represent administrative burden. On the basis of an estimation per country of 0,5 FTE during 3 years, for 27 Member States the total estimated staff costs will be 4 million EUR for a three year period (--).

5.2. Social impacts

Employability and access to the labour market

Option 1: under the baseline scenario, the ongoing developments under the EQF process and under current employment policies facilitate the access to the labour market as well as employability and job transitions, both on the national and on the European level. However under the baseline scenario the potential employability is not achieved to its full extent as the current situation does not fully exploit all possibilities for validating non-formally and informally acquired skills (0).

Option 2: the measures proposed have an explicit European dimension by recommending Member States to develop their validation systems in a comparable and coherent way, thus facilitating mobility between them. Labour market access and job transitions, on both the

national and the European level, will be improved compared to Option 1. The proposed measures also focus on the documentation stage of validation, making knowledge, skills and competences of individuals more visible and therefore more easily usable on the labour market, thus increasing their employability, without necessarily leading to a formal qualification (++).

Option 3: the European Quality Charter will enhance access to the labour market and facilitate job transitions as well as improve the employability of individuals. Given their later timing and their larger uncertainty these impacts will be less strong than under Option 2 (+).

Access to further learning

Option 1: under the baseline scenario the 2009 Bologna stocktaking report showed that "while a small number of countries have put in place quite advanced systems for recognition of prior learning, in most countries there is little or no recognition of learning undertaken outside the formal education system". It further concluded that "there has not been much progress since 2007[67]". The same findings were confirmed by a recent Eurydice study, which stated that "higher education institutions need to open up to flexible learning and to introduce more access routes that would enable broader participation of disadvantaged groups"[68] (0).

One of the specific foci of Option 2 concerns the recommendation to Member States to provide incentives to providers to facilitate access to formal education and training on the basis of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings. This will also contribute to the EU 2020 headline target on participation in tertiary education. Given the targeted measures access to further learning should be clearly enhanced (++).

Option 3: under the OMC process no direct measures are proposed on enhancing the access to further learning. This could however be an important element of the European Quality Charter. In the mid-term a positive effect is therefore possible (+).

Information on available skills

Under Option 1, the process of developing National Qualifications Frameworks has led to an increased focus on validation of non-formal and informal learning at policy and practice level. Through validation of non-formal and informal learning more information on individuals' skills becomes available through their identification, documentation and assessment (0).

Compared to Option 1, Option 2 focuses explicitly on making the skills of individuals more visible. Several measures that are proposed to the Member States explicitly focus on enhancing the availability of information on skills. This goes in particular for the putting in place of mechanisms providing citizens with opportunities to submit an application for the validation of their learning outcomes and for the possibility for individuals to undergo a skills audit within three months of an identified need. The French and Dutch cases provide evidence for this potential of validation (++).

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[67] *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009*; Report from working groups appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Stocktaking_report_2009_FINAL.pdf.

[68] Eurydice (2012), *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe, Funding and the Social Dimension*, p.23, http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/131EN.pdf.

The European Quality Charter could be an important source of inspiration for the further development of validation systems, and enhance the available information on individuals' skills (+).

Working conditions

Option 1: the number of individuals benefiting from better working conditions as a result of the validation of their non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes is limited (0).

Option 2 does not directly address working conditions. However, it includes measures addressed to Member States that all qualifications obtained on the basis of formal learning, should, in principle, also be accessible through the validation of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning. As collective labour agreements are in most countries based on occupations and qualifications individuals obtaining a higher qualification will be able to obtain better working conditions (++).

Option 3: the impacts are the same as under Option 2, but they will develop more slowly and could receive a boost through the new impetus created by the European Quality Charter (+).

Education level of workers

Option 1: under the baseline scenario the general education level of workers will rise further to the existing recommendation for policies against early school leaving and the benchmarks on early school leaving and on tertiary education attainment (0).

Option 2: in comparison to Option 1 a boost in validation policies and practices is expected. The most frequent form of non-formal learning concerns learning at the workplace. As such more validation possibilities do not increase the education level of workers, however validation values learning and motivates people to engage in further learning, hence improving the education level of workers. In order to reach this positive impact it is essential that, as proposed by Option 2, education and training institutions create more opportunities for recognising prior learning. Experiences from Portugal, France, the Netherlands and Finland confirm this potential (++).

Option 3: the impacts are the same as under Option 2, but they will develop more slowly and could receive a boost through the new impetus created by the European Quality Charter (+).

Mobility of workers

Under Option 1 the mobility of workers across the European Union is guaranteed by Regulation 492/2011 and facilitated by Directive 2005/36 on the recognition of qualifications of regulated professions. It is furthermore facilitated by credit systems, such as ECTS and ECVET and by the Europass tools. Under the current EQF process referencing to the European qualification levels will increase the transparency and comparability of qualifications and thus facilitate mobility (0).

Under Option 2 the proposed measures will enhance validation opportunities and result in a better comparable and more coherent approach on validation between Member States. The validation measures proposed have as a purpose to facilitate the mobility of workers at different levels: within companies, between companies, between sectors, regions as well as

between Member States. Increased mobility of skilled labour will make the European economy more competitive[69] (++).

Option 3 focuses on national action towards agreed objectives and benchmarks on validation. The setting up of a European Quality Charter will enhance the mutual trust between Member States in validating non-formal and informal learning experiences and result in a better comparable and more coherentapproach to validation across the European Union. As the Charter will be developed within a few years of time, such comparable and coherent approach will probably develop at a later stage than under Option 2; as a consequence the enhanced mobility will also be facilitated at a later stage. Taking into account the current initiative to facilitate the mobility of learners and workers (the Youth Opportunities Initiative) the later implementation of Option 3 gives it a disadvantage compared to Option 2 (0/+).

Equality (including gender equality):

Option 1: the EU 2020 benchmarks on early school leaving, on tertiary education attainment, on a 75% employment rate for women and men and on reducing poverty and social exclusion are all part of the baseline scenario. The Early School Leaving Recommendation explicitly targets the early school leaving benchmark. The 2010 Update of the European Inventory revealed that for the majority of countries, there is a tendency to target validation initiatives to disadvantaged groups, forming part of broader strategies to improve social cohesion, including through the promotion of employment and equal opportunities[70] (0).

Option 2: validation policies that have a specific focus on marginalised groups will have a positive impact on equality such as a more equal access to qualifications[71]. One of possible target groups for validation policies are women returning to the labour market or learning after a career break (++).

Option 3: the European Quality Charter could pay particular attention to the situation of disadvantaged groups. Positive impacts on equality (including gender equality) are therefore probable in the longer term (+).

Administrative requirements upon individuals

In neither of the options additional administrative requirements for individuals are expected. In all options, seeking validation would remain a voluntary initiative of citizens, in line with the existing common European principles on validation. The score for the three options is (0).

5.3. Other impacts

Information to the public

Option 1: under the baseline scenario one of the drivers revealed by the European Inventory explaining the low take up of validation opportunities in some countries was a lack of

[69] European Commission (2010), *Towards a Single Market Act, for a highly competitive social market economy; 50 proposals for improving our work, business and exchanges with one another*, COM (2010) 608 final

[70] Claire Duchemin and Jo Hawley (2010), "Thematic Report – Validation for Specific Target Groups", in: *European Inventory 2010,* op.cit.*,* pp.1-2.

[71] P. Werquin (2010), *Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Outcomes, Policies and Practices*, Paris: OECD, p.50.

awareness. Existing tools and policies do not foresee any specific measures raising the awareness of validation (0).

Option 2 specifically calls for Member States to make information on validation opportunities widely available, with particular reference to targeting disadvantaged groups (+).

Under Option 3, once adopted, the European Quality Charter could become an important reference point on validation in Europe with the potential to have more positive effects on the available information to the public in the longer term than Option 2 (++).

Cooperation between Member States

Under the baseline scenario the existing cooperation between Member States will continue. The main forum for cooperation is the EQF Advisory Group under which also Peer Learning Activities will be organised (0).

Option 2 will strengthen the political basis for further cooperation between Member States within the EQF Advisory Group. Under the measures proposed by Option 2 are the support proposed to be given by the Commission to Member States and stakeholders for the facilitation of peer learning and the exchange of experiences and good practices (+).

Under Option 3 the new OMC specifically devoted to validation and focussed on the development of a European Quality Charter could entail an even more intensified cooperation between Member States (++).

Involvement of stakeholders

On the level of the Member States the involvement of stakeholders in validation policies and practices varies between very important in some countries, with a major impact on the implementation of validation, to less important or nearly inexistent in other countries (0).

Among the specific measures proposed under Option 2 is the involvement of a large group of stakeholders, comprising employer organisations, trade unions, chambers of commerce and labour, (public) employment services, formal and non-formal education and training providers on both the national and the European level (++).

In setting up the European Quality Charter, the new OMC process under Option 3 involves quality assurance organisations in addition to the stakeholders involved under Option 2 (++).

Fundamental rights

Under all three Options the fundamental rights of citizens are fully respected. There are no major differences in impacts between the options (all options: 0).

5.4. Risks and uncertainties

5.4.1. Risks

It is possible to consider two different risks, related to different scenarios.

Risk 1: The initiative is adopted and implemented, with unintended, unwelcome consequences, namely under Option 2: it forces a formal structure on a whole set of

experiences for which informality, flexibility, reactivity are distinctive characteristics, opposed to the rigidity of formal systems.

Comment to Risk 1: the initiative aims at better validating the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, but leaves the learning process itself untouched. This is confirmed by the existing evidence. Comprehensive validation systems do exist in a few Member States, and have not had any negative impact on the provision of non formal and informal learning.

Risk 2: The initiative is adopted, but some Member States, namely those where little has been done so far, may take very limited action or any at all, considering that the objectives are too demanding.

Comment to Risk 2: this reaction by Member States is unlikely, because all of them are implementing the EQF Recommendation by developing national qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes. This means that qualifications are defined through learning outcomes, separate from formal programmes, and that there already is a working platform for dialogue of all concerned stakeholders. Therefore, even in countries with little experience in validation, the ground is well laid.

5.4.2. Uncertainties

The assessment of different impacts is based on a qualitative judgement. The final impacts will depend on the concrete actions that will be undertaken by the Member States, as well as by the willingness of other actors, such as social partners, business, NGO's/voluntary organisations to support validation policies and, more importantly, validation practices.

6. COMPARING THE OPTIONS

The comparison between the three options is based on the efficiency/cost-effectiveness, effectiveness and coherence with EU policy objectives (section 6.1). Together with the expected economic, social and other impacts, the overall results of the comparisons between the options are presented in section 6.2.

6.1. Efficiency/cost-effectiveness, effectiveness and coherence with EU policy objectives

Legend

++	+	*0*	-	--
positive	*slightly positive*	*Neutral*	*slightly negative*	*Negative*

	Option 1 **Baseline scenario**	**Option 2** **Concrete measures**	**Option 3** **European Quality Charter**	**Explanation of given ratings**
Efficiency/cost-effectiveness				
Efficiency/cost-effectiveness	0	++	0/+	Option 1 is the Option with the lowest costs, but also with the lowest expected impacts and the lowest benefits for individuals, the economy and the society at large. Option 2 requires investments (e.g. for infrastructure, guidance to individuals, assessments, training of guidance counsellors and assessors, awareness raising, and quality assurance). These costs depend on the status quo in a country (e.g. the infrastructure in place) as well as on policy choices (e.g. target groups). The net direct costs are the result of the total direct costs minus cost savings for formal education and training. Individual costs for obtaining a qualification on the basis of validation are on average between 800 and 1,800 EUR, which is generally lower than the costs for formal education or training leading to the same qualification. On the level of systems there exist high marginal costs for validation and limited marginal costs for additional formal education or training. Also opportunity costs have to be taken into account. The resulting net costs of validation have to be weighted against the benefits of validation. Given the absence of hard data on the aggregate level these cannot be quantified. For each individual the cost-benefit ratio is different, as is the case for each Member State, depending on the status quo and on policy

				choices. It is assumed that the aggregate benefits of validation altogether outweigh the net costs of validation. This is supported by the assumption that current comprehensive validation systems exist on the basis of the underlying assumption of a positive benefits-costs ratio. The benefits resulting from Option 3 are expected to be higher than under the baseline scenario, but surrounded by more uncertainty and realised at a later moment in time than under Option 2. Overall the score for benefits will be lower than under option 2. By analogy with Option 2 it is assumed that the aggregate benefits of validation altogether outweigh the net costs of validation. Another element negatively affecting the efficiency/cost effectiveness of Option 3 concerns the new structures that will be created in addition to the existing structures under Options 1 and 2. These will increase the additional administrative burden and costs due to additional annual reporting by the Member States and to the additional meetings under the OMC in preparing and implementing the European Quality Charter.
Effectiveness				
Specific Objective 1: To put in place systems for the validation of non formal and informal learning at national level linked to the National Qualifications Framework	0	++	+	Option 1 invites countries to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning in their national qualification frameworks, but it does not indicate how to do that. The European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning do so, but have not been adopted by a law making body, which reduces their clout. Skills and Qualification passports developed by the social partners through the European Sectoral Social Dialogue are useful as support to validation in a certain sector, but they do not have a transversal coverage and are not primarily focussed on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Under Option 2 Member States are recommended to put in place validation mechanisms linked to their National Qualifications Framework. This is expected to contribute largely to attain the objective. The new OMC under Option 3 could also lead to attaining the objective, but its outcomes are less certain and its results only expected in the longer run.
Specific Objective 2: To establish an appropriate level of comparability and coherence between national validation systems linked to the National Qualification Framework	0	++	+	Current policies focus on the comparability and transparency of qualifications, but do not address the comparability of validation systems. The measures proposed under Option 2 are common to all Member States and will lead to a better comparable and more coherent approach in validation across Member States. The European Quality Charter under Option 3 will provide a series of common quality assurance criteria on validation; it explicitly addresses the European dimension of validation. Its results will depend on the cooperation between Member

				States and be realised at a later moment in time than under Option 2.
Operational Objective 1: To establish national qualification frameworks in a way that qualifications can be acquired through formal programmes as well as through the validation of non-formal and informal learning	0	++	+	The EQF Recommendation refers in its recitals to the fact that each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable by way of a variety of educational and career paths. Option 2 goes one step further and includes an explicit measure recommending Member States to ensure that all qualifications except regulated professions falling under Directive 2005/36, can in principle be obtained through the validation of prior learning, which largely contributes to reaching the objective. Under Option 3 this objective could also be achieved, but it is less certain given the absence of concrete measures.
Operational Objective 2: To provide mechanisms for the identification, documentation, and quality assured assessment and validation of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, taking advantage of common European instruments such as Europass, ECTS, ECVET	0	++	+	Under Option 1 the identification, documentation, and quality assured assessment and validation of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning are addressed by both the Common European principles and the European guidelines on validation. The Principles are however very general and the Guidelines have no political/legal status which reduces their clout. Under Option 2 the objective is explicitly addressed and could be achieved depending on the implementation of the Recommendation by the Member States. Under Option 3 the OMC process and the European Quality Charter could, on the basis of a mutual learning process, finally also lead to reaching the objective, but this is less certain than under Option 2.
Operational Objective 3: To allow individuals to have their skills and competences identified and documented without resulting into a formal qualification	0	++	+	Under Option 1 the identification and documentation are in a limited way addressed by both the Common European principles and the European guidelines on validation. Option 2 contains measures that directly focus on achieving this objective, in particular the skills audit for individuals. Under Option 3 the identification and documentation of skills should be part of the European Quality Charter contributing to the objective at a later stage.
Operational Objective 4: To extend and intensify the cooperation and exchange of good practice between Member States, supported by peer-learning activities and European reporting tools	0	+	++	Under the baseline scenario Member States cooperate, also involving social partners, in the EQF Advisory Group under which also peer learning activities are organised. Under Option 2 cooperation between Member States will continue in the same way as under Option 1, except for an additional focus on validation in the EQF Advisory Group. In addition, the European reporting tools on validation will be strengthened: in particular the European Inventory and the European Guidelines on Validation. Under Option 3 a new OMC process is launched leading to more intensive cooperation between Member States, involving stakeholders, which should in the end lead to a European Quality Charter on validation.
Operational Objective 5: To raise the awareness	0	+	++	Under the baseline scenario raising the awareness of validation opportunities depends

of validation opportunities				on policies and practices in the Member States. Option 2 includes the recommendation to Member States to ensure that information on validation opportunities is widely available with particular reference to disadvantaged groups. This will result in higher awareness of validation opportunities. The European Quality Charter under Option 3 has the highest potential in raising the awareness of validation opportunities as the Quality Charter's potential is to receive a high level of visibility.
Coherence with wider EU policy objectives				
Coherence with wider EU policy objectives	0	++	+	Option 1 is compatible with the wider EU policy objectives announced by the EU 2020 Strategy which focus on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Option 2 is fully coherent with the wider EU policy objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy, and its different flagships. The measures proposed under Option 2 will create more validation opportunities, their larger use and more comparability and coherence between validation systems across the EU, facilitating the mobility of workers and learners. These results of Option 2 will to contribute to the EU 2020 targets on economic growth, early school leaving, tertiary education attainment, poverty reduction and on the overall employment rate. The new OMC proposed under Option 3 will also contribute to reaching the EU 2020 objectives and benchmarks, but at a slower pace and surrounded by more uncertainty than Option 2.

6.2. Comparison between the options: synthesis

Legend

++	+	*0*	-	--
positive	*slightly positive*	*Neutral*	*slightly negative*	*negative*

	Option 1	**Option 2**	**Option 3**
Efficiency/cost-effectiveness	0	++	0/+
Effectiveness:	0	++	+
Coherence with EU policy objectives	0	++	+
Social, economic and other impacts:			
Economic growth and employment	0	++	+
Public expenditure	0	--	-

Private expenditure	0	-	0/-
Obligations on business	0	-	0/-
Administrative burden to Member States	0	0	--
Access to the labour market/job transitions	0	++	+
Access to further learning	0	++	+
Information on available skills	0	++	+
Working conditions	0	++	0/+
Education level of workers	0	++	+
Mobility of workers	0	++	+
Equality (including gender equality)	0	++	+
Administrative requirements upon individuals	0	0	0
Information to the public	0	+	++
Cooperation between Member States	0	+	++
Involvement of stakeholders	0	++	++
Fundamental rights	0	0	0

6.3. Conclusion

Option 2, a Council Recommendation targeted to improving the implementation of validation by the Member States, results overall as best option. Option 2 is also the most coherent with EU policy objectives and with the largest positive economic and social impacts.

Its proposed measures are justified with regard to the importance of validation as a means to make skills visible, allowing for their optimal use for labour market and further learning purposes, representing important benefits for individuals, the economy and the society at large.

Under Option 1, the current situation of validation is expected to change only slowly, implying that the limited availability and use of validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences, as well as a lack of a comparable and coherent approach in validation across Europe, will remain.

Option 3 (a new OMC) is expected to lead to improvements compared to the baseline scenario regarding impacts effectiveness, efficiency and coherence with wider EU policy objectives. However the setting up a new OMC creates additional structures and additional reporting mechanisms, increasing the administrative burden and costs for the Member States. Moreover due to its exclusive reliance on the OMC method there is more uncertainty as to the concrete action is taken by and in the Member States as well as to the timeframe of such measures.

Apart from impacts, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence with EU policy objectives, the main assets of Option 2 are:

– it will fill the "validation gap" which currently exists within the available European tools and instruments such as the EQF, Europass and credit systems. It will in particular fill the missing link in the European Qualification Framework which provides for the promotion of validation of non-formal and informal learning, without further guidance on its implementation;

- it proposes concrete practical measures for implementation of validation in the Member States;
- a Council Recommendation, as legal instrument, signals the political commitment of Member States towards the measures indicated, most of which will require implementation at national level and adapted to the national context;
- it explicitly involves relevant stakeholders (labour market stakeholders, youth/voluntary organisations, education and training institutions) in the development of validation systems;
- Member States will continue to cooperate within existing OMC structures, in particular the EQF Advisory group, representing a more simple implementation structure than foreseen under Option 3;
- it will form a new and stronger political base for cooperation in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Finally, the Commission created high expectations among Member States and stakeholders by announcing the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Europe 2020 Flagships on "Youth on the Move" and on the Agenda for "New Skills and Jobs".

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

7.1. Tools and instruments for monitoring and evaluation

Under the initiative monitoring will take place on the basis of the use of existing tools. This will limit its costs for monitoring as well as the administrative burden to the Member States:

- The European Inventory on Validation, under the responsibility of the Commission and of Cedefop, will be further consolidated and strengthened in view of the monitoring the implementation of the Council Recommendation by the Member States;
- The annual Cedefop report on the development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe will be used for assessing the progress achieved by Member States in creating validation of non-formal and informal learning as a pathway to obtain a qualification;
- Member States will report on their implementation of the Recommendation through their national progress reports already planned in the context of the Education and Training Strategic Framework 2020 (next reporting year: 2014);
- Strengthening peer learning, involving governmental actors and stakeholders, focussed on the exchange of experiences and demonstrations of good practice. Given the close relationship between the initiative and the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework, the EQF Advisory Group would be the most appropriate body for those activities.

An external evaluation of the Recommendation's implementation is to be foreseen within four years after its adoption.

7.2. Indicators for monitoring and evaluation

Objective	Indicative indicator	Reporting instrument
• To provide citizens in all Member States with the opportunity to validate their skills acquired outside formal education and training systems (general)	Number of Member States where citizens have the opportunity to validate their skills acquired outside formal education and training systems Number of citizens in each Member State who apply for the validation of their skills acquired outside formal education and training systems	Progress Report European Inventory on Validation Bologna Stocktaking Report (higher education)
• To providing citizens with the opportunity of using their validated skills for working and learning purposes throughout Europe (general)	Number of citizens exercising their right of mobility on the basis of validated learning outcomes resulting from non-formal and informal learning	European Inventory
• To put in place systems for the validation of non formal and informal learning at national level linked to the National Qualifications Framework (specific)	Number of Member States having in place comprehensive validation systems	European Inventory
• To establish an appropriate level of of comparability and coherence between national validation systems (specific)	Degree of comparability and coherence between validation systems of Member States	European Inventory Cedefop's follow up of NQFs development
• To establish national qualification frameworks in a way that qualifications can be acquired through formal programmes as well as through the validation of non-formal and informal learning (operational)	Number of NQFs foreseeing this possibility	European Inventory Cedefop's follow up of NQFs development
• To provide mechanisms for the identification, documentation, and quality assured assessment and validation of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning (operational)	The nature and quality of validation mechanisms developed in each Member State	European Inventory
• To allow individuals to have their skills and competences identified and documented without resulting into a	The nature and quality of systems for identification and documentation of learning	European Inventory

formal qualification (operational)	outcomes resulting non-formal and informal learning in each member State	
• To extend and intensify cooperation and exchange of good practice by Member States, supported by peer-learning activities and European reporting tools (operational)	Number of organised peer learning activities Number and quality of other initiatives taken to exchange experiences (e.g. conferences)	Progress Report European Inventory
• To raise awareness of validation opportunities	Number of initiatives taken by Member States and stakeholders to raise awareness	Progress Report European Inventory

8. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Results from the EU-wide public consultation

Annex 2: Consultation of the EQF Advisory Group and outcomes of Peer Learning Activities

Annex 3: Country sheets on the situation of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Member States

Annex 4: Cost/benefit analysis

8.1. Annex 1: Results from the EU-wide public consultation

Under the Europe 2020 Strategy, in particular the flagships on Youth on the Move and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, the Commission announced the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2011.

As a preparation to this proposal a public consultation was launched and ran between 1 December 2010 and 9 February 2011. It included an online questionnaire consisting of multiple choice questions and three broader open questions. Stakeholders were further invited to provide broader contributions and position papers.

The consultation was aimed in particular at individuals, organisations and public authorities involved in the delivery and/or validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In addition to including information on the consultation and a link to the questionnaire on DG EAC's web-page and the 'Your Voice in Europe' webpage, a wide range of networks, European Committees, groups and organisations were directly invited to respond to the online questionnaire and disseminate it:

- Permanent Representations to the EU;
- The Education Committee;
- The European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group;
- The Recognition of Learning Outcomes Group;
- The Lifelong Learning Stakeholder Forum;
- The Advisory Committee for Vocational Education and Training
- The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training User Group;
- The Adult Learning Working Group;
- The Modernisation of Higher Education Working Group;
- Members of the Bologna Follow-up Group;,
- Europass and Euroguidance centres;
- The European Lifelong Guidance Policy network;
- The Youthpass Advisory Board;
- The National Academic Recognition Information Centres network;
- The Higher Education Recognition of Prior Learning Network;
- The Expert Group on The mobility of young volunteers.

The European Social Partners and a range of NGO networks were also contacted. Finally, other Commission services (including DG Employment, DG Enterprise, DG Information Society, DG Health and Consumer Affairs, DG Research, DG Home Affairs, DG Internal Market) were invited to raise awareness of the consultation amongst their groups and networks.

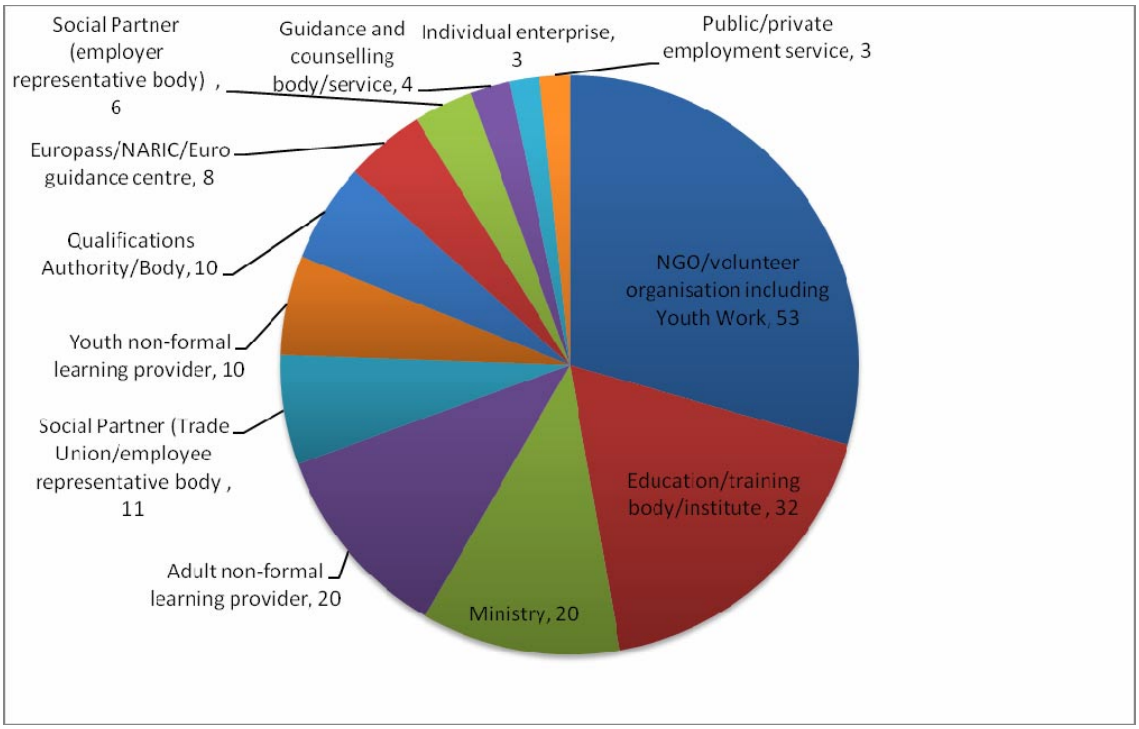
In line with the Commission's general principles and standards governing consultations of interested parties, this report describes the public consultation process and analyses the contributions received. It provides an overview of the responses highlighting main findings, trends, suggestions and concerns arising from the diverse views expressed.

Participation in the public consultation

The Commission received 469 responses to the questionnaire and 24 position papers. Responses were fairly evenly balanced between individuals (53%) and organisations (47%). Among the organisations, around half of the responses came from public sector organisations

(e.g. ministries; qualifications bodies; employment services; Euroguidance and Europass Centres), and a third from the third sector (e.g. NGO/volunteer organisations). The private sector (individual employers, employer organisations, and private employment services) was less well represented, as only about one sixth of the replies came from such organisations (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Organisations who responded to the consultation



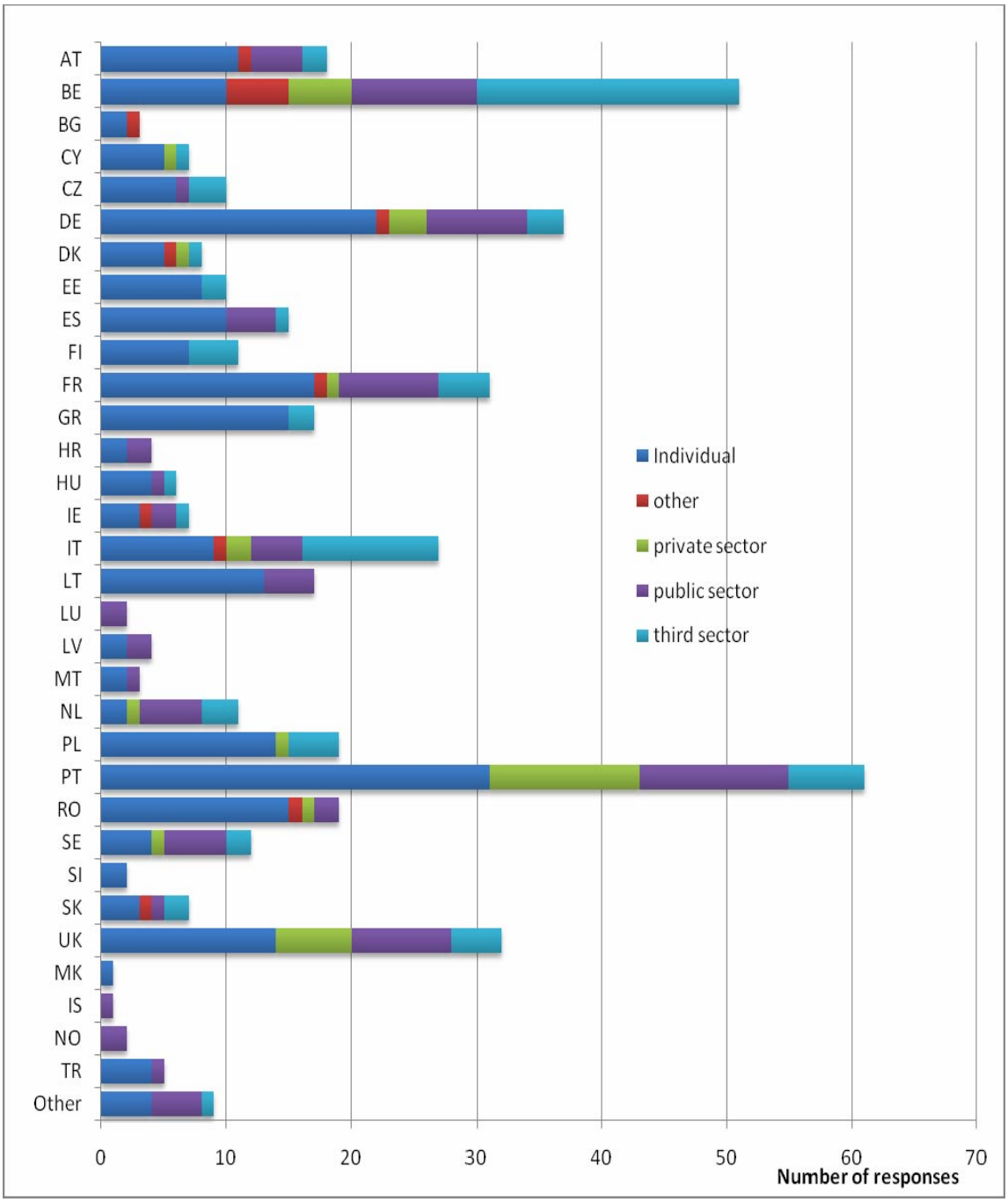
More than two thirds of the 20 ministries responding to the survey had education policy as their main responsibility, and although some responses were received from public employment services, enterprises, and social partners, overall the labour market perspective was less well represented than the education/training perspective.

From a gender perspective, it can be noted that almost two thirds of the contributors were female. This reflects the gender-biased labour market in the education and training sector.

Regarding the geographical distribution of contributors, responses were received from all 27 EU Member States, 4 candidate countries (Iceland, Turkey, Croatia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and Norway. More than half the contributions came from six countries: Portugal, Belgium, Germany, the UK, France, and Italy.

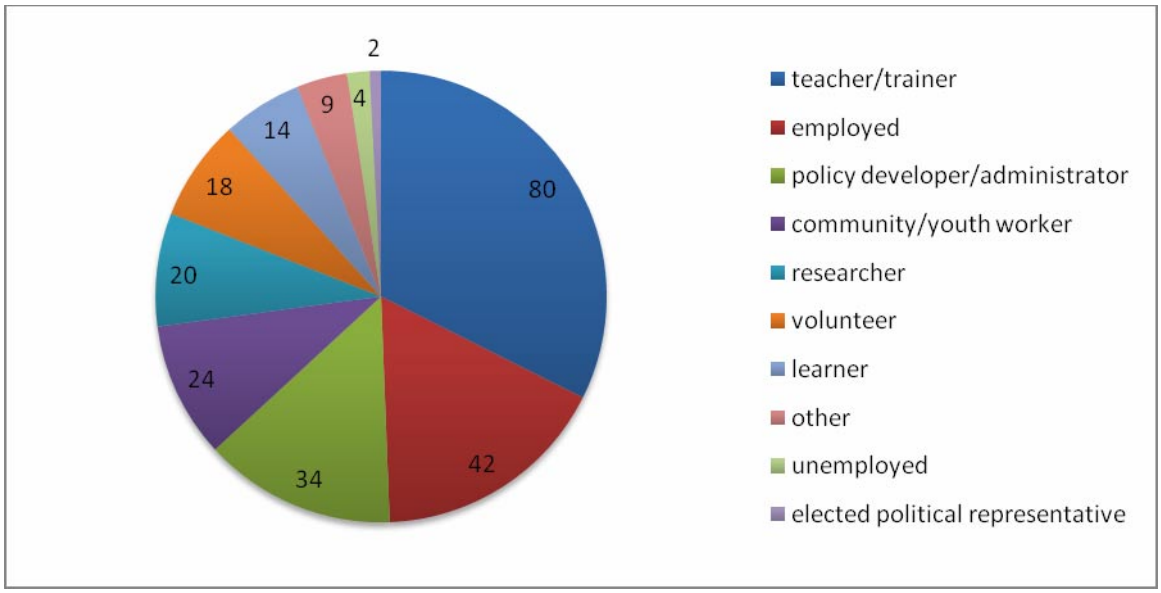
The high response rates from some countries can be seen as an expression of highly developed systems for validation (France, Portugal, UK and Germany), while the high response rate from Belgium can be explained by the concentration of European and international organisations and associations in Brussels. Figure 2 details the distribution of contributors in different countries.

Figure 2: Responses per country - individuals and organisations per sector



Half of the 247 individuals responding were either teacher/trainers (80 contributors) or belonged to a rather large group who declared that they were 'employed' without giving further details (42). 14 of those who have given their occupation as 'employed' have been actively involved in validating the learning of others. Civil servants (policy developer/administrator), community/youth workers, and researchers also contributed visible shares. Overall, it appears that the consultation has elicited most interest from those individuals who are actively engaged in developing and running qualification systems and validation systems (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Occupations of individuals responding to the consultation[72]



The real or potential target groups for having their learning validated are less well represented. In all 42 persons may be seen as belonging to the target audience for validation of non-formal and informal learning: 20 persons, who give their occupation as 'employed' and have no personal experience with validation, 18 volunteers and 4 unemployed.
Therefore, the results of the consultation represent better the provider perspective and to a lesser extent the user perspective.

Results from the online questionnaire

The main part of the online questionnaire consisted of three sections designed to elicit contributors' opinions on:

- The importance and added value of non-formal and informal learning and validation;
- The developments and perceived challenges to non-formal and informal learning with a focus in validation;
- Focus on EU action and possible policy priorities.

In addition to closed questions with multiple choice response options, contributors were given the opportunity to expand and detail their views and opinions on validation of non-formal and informal learning in free text in each of the three sections.

The importance and added value of non-formal/informal learning and validation

Under this section three blocks of questions were asked of which the results are summarised in figures 4, 5 and 6 below.

[72] The occupational categories are those used in the online questionnaire.

Figure 4: It is important that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by individuals through life and work experience are identified and made visible

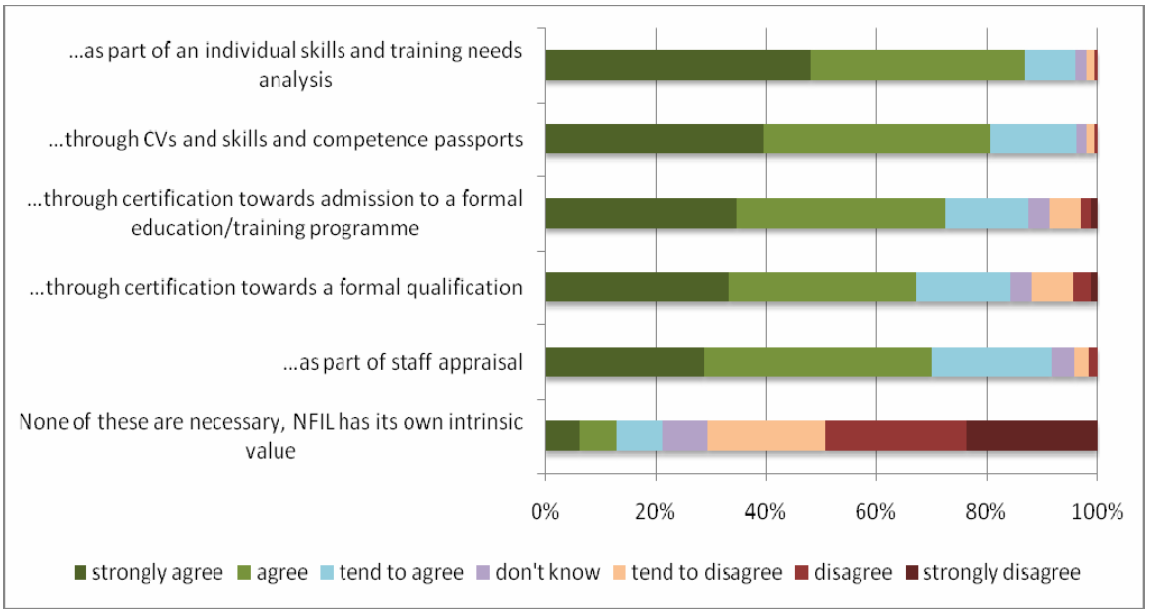


Figure 5: Learning in non-formal and informal settings is:

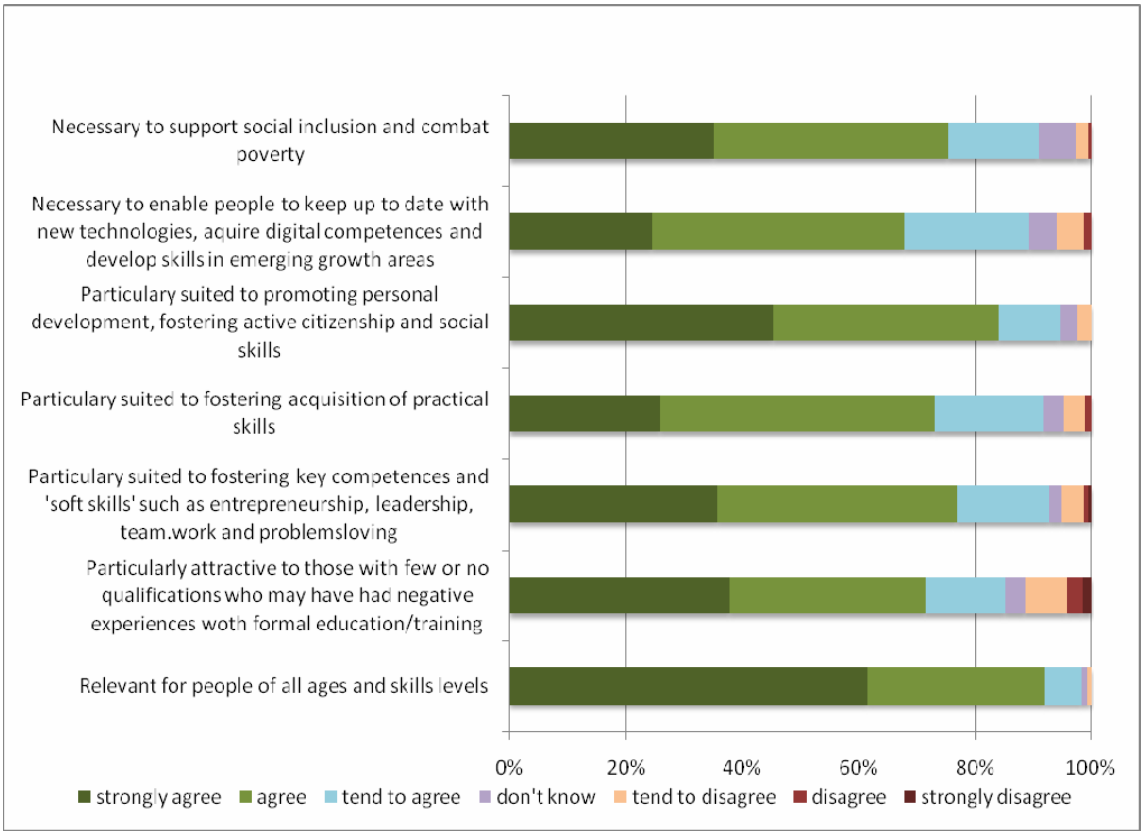
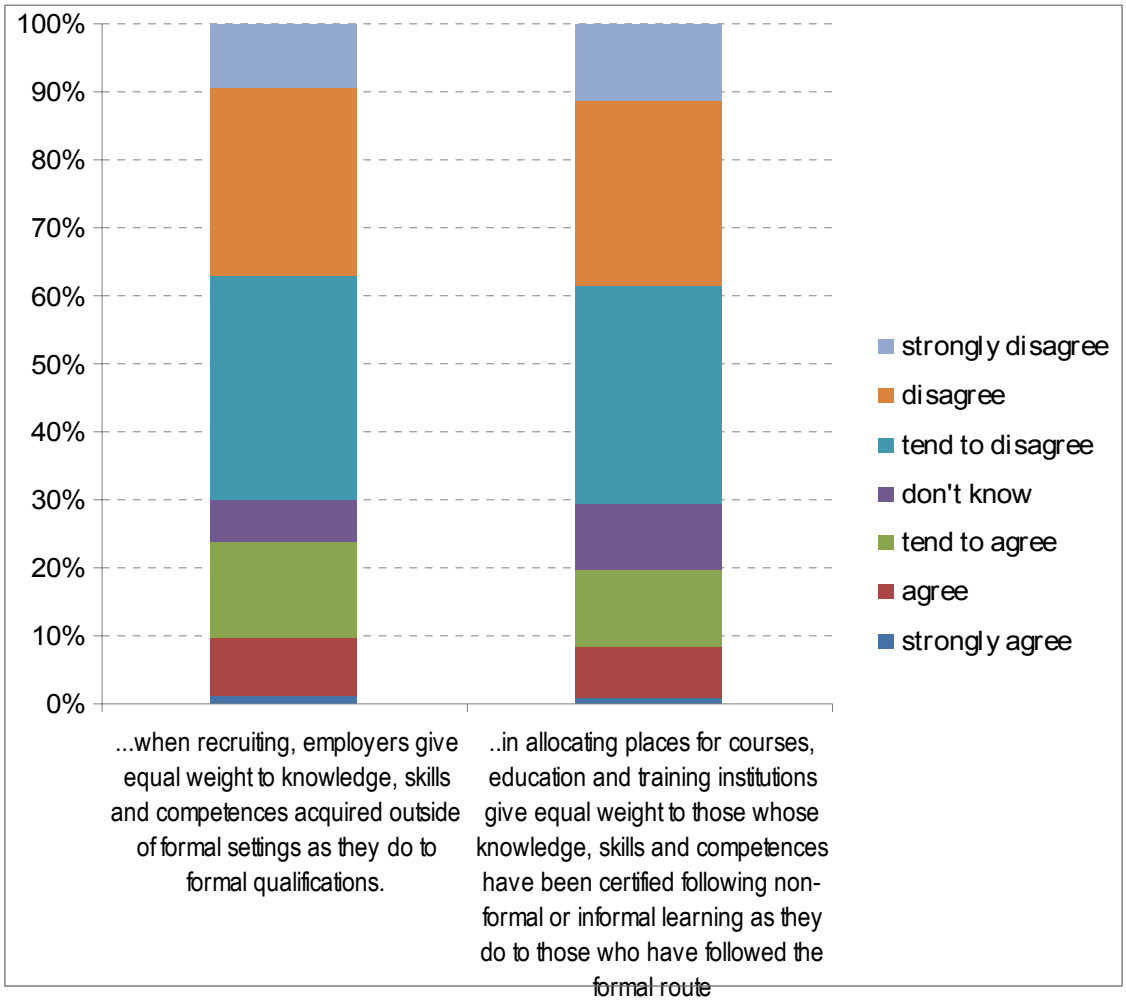


Figure 6: Status and value of non-formal and informal learning compared to formal learning



The replies to the questions show strong support for making non-formal and informal learning visible in some form. There is also widespread consensus that validation, understood in the broad sense of improving the visibility of knowledge, skills and competences, is valuable. The replies to finally reveal that knowledge, skills and competences gained through non-formal and informal learning are not perceived as having equal status and value by employers and educational institutions with those acquired through formal learning.

Perceived challenges

Figures 7 to 10 below show the replies to the questions related to perceived challenges.

Figure 7: Perception of existing schemes of validation: In my country...

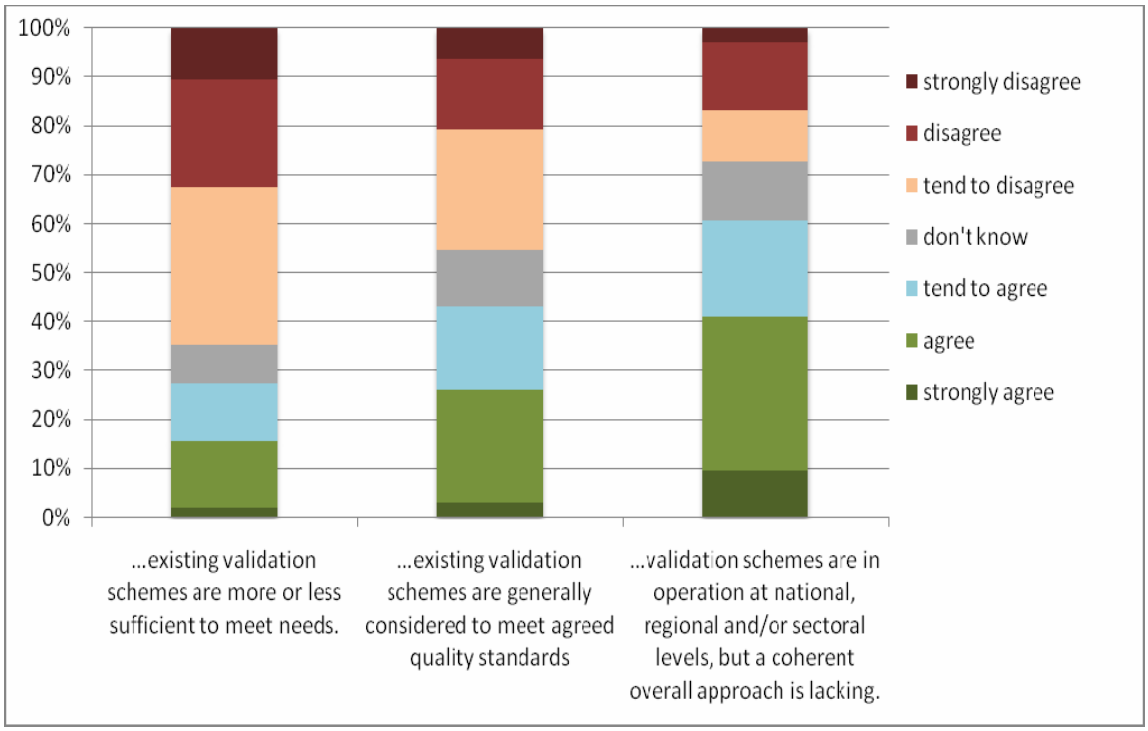


Figure 8: In my country/region, validation forms an integral part of…

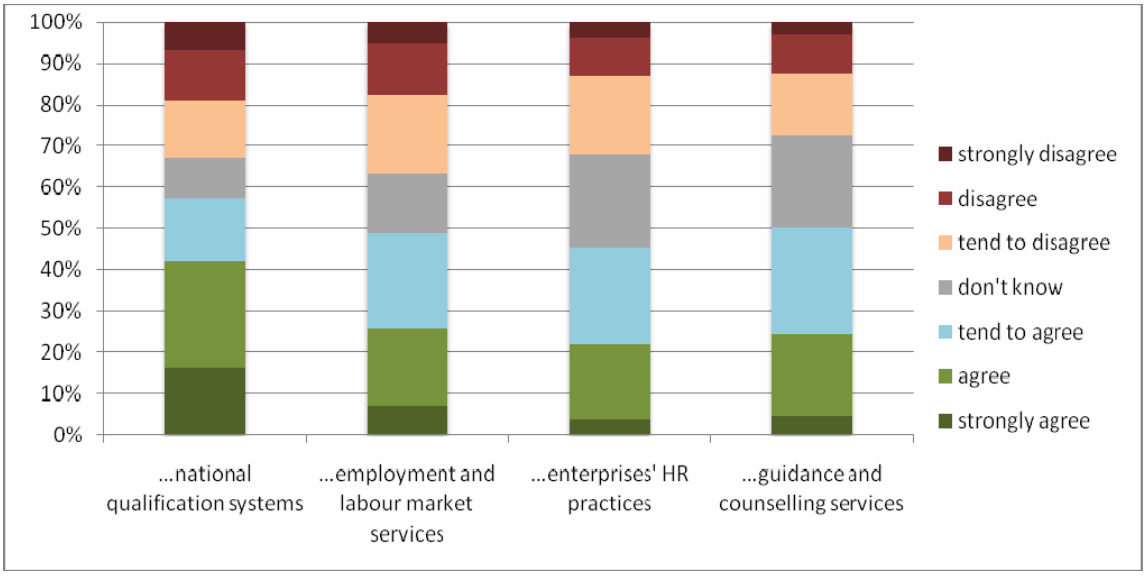


Figure 9: In my country/region, progress in validation is held back by:

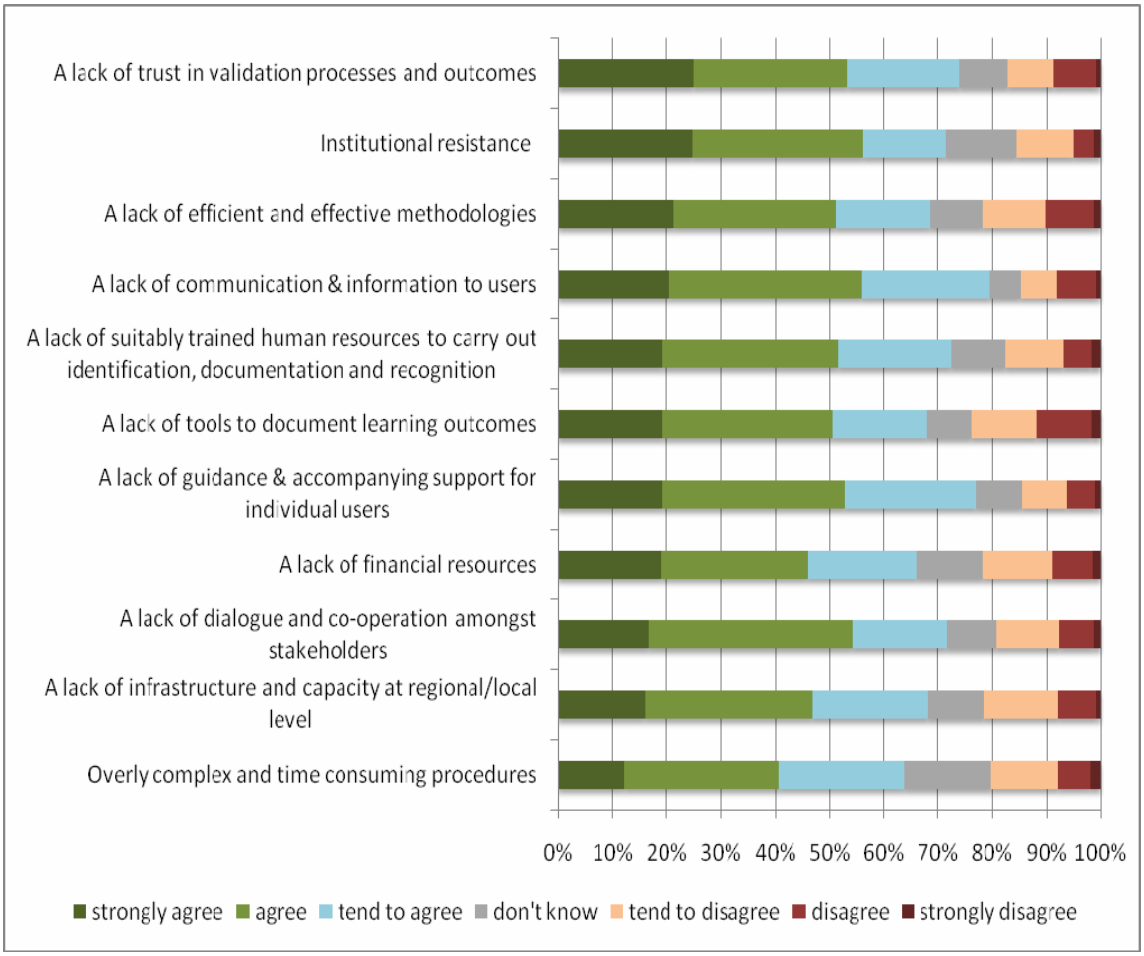
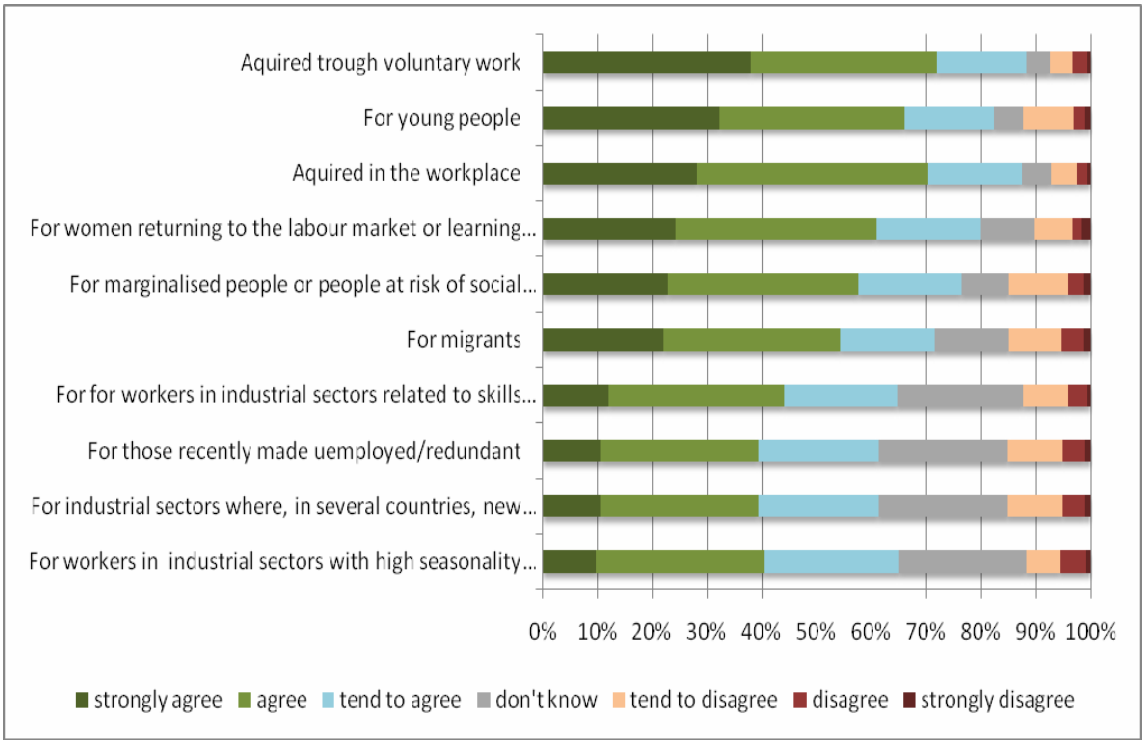


Figure 10: In my country/region, there is particular potential for further development of validation of non-formal and informal learning:



The most important outcomes of the questions on perceived challenges reveal that only a quarter of the respondents consider existing validation schemes as sufficient and that they meet agreed quality standards. Furthermore a minority of about 40 per cent of respondents is of the opinion that in his/her country a coherent overall approach towards validation exists.

The replies are favourable to the potential for further development of validation for all categories proposed in the questionnaire (see figure 10), but strongest support exists for validation of learning outcomes acquired through voluntary work, by young people and for learning outcomes acquired in the work place. Finally the most important perceived barriers for progress in validation concern attitudes, lack of awareness and lack of willingness to change established procedures and regulations.

Focus of EU actions and possible policy priorities

Figures 11 to 15 show the results of the questions related to the focus of future EU actions and policy priorities. Figure 11 concerns the focus of future EU actions and figures 12-15 concern potential policy priorities with regard to the scope of action (figure 12), values related to validation (figure 13), quality and effectiveness (figure 14) and governance (figure 15).

Figure 11: Types of action the EU could take to further progress in the promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning:

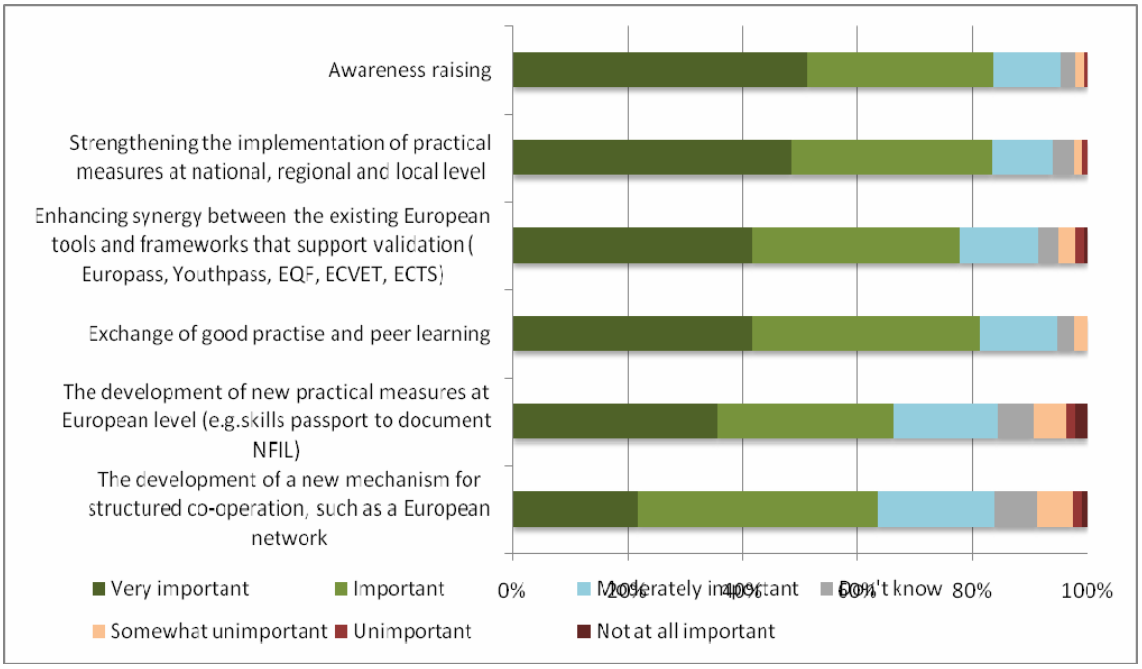


Figure 12: Policy priorities requiring particular attention (scope of action):

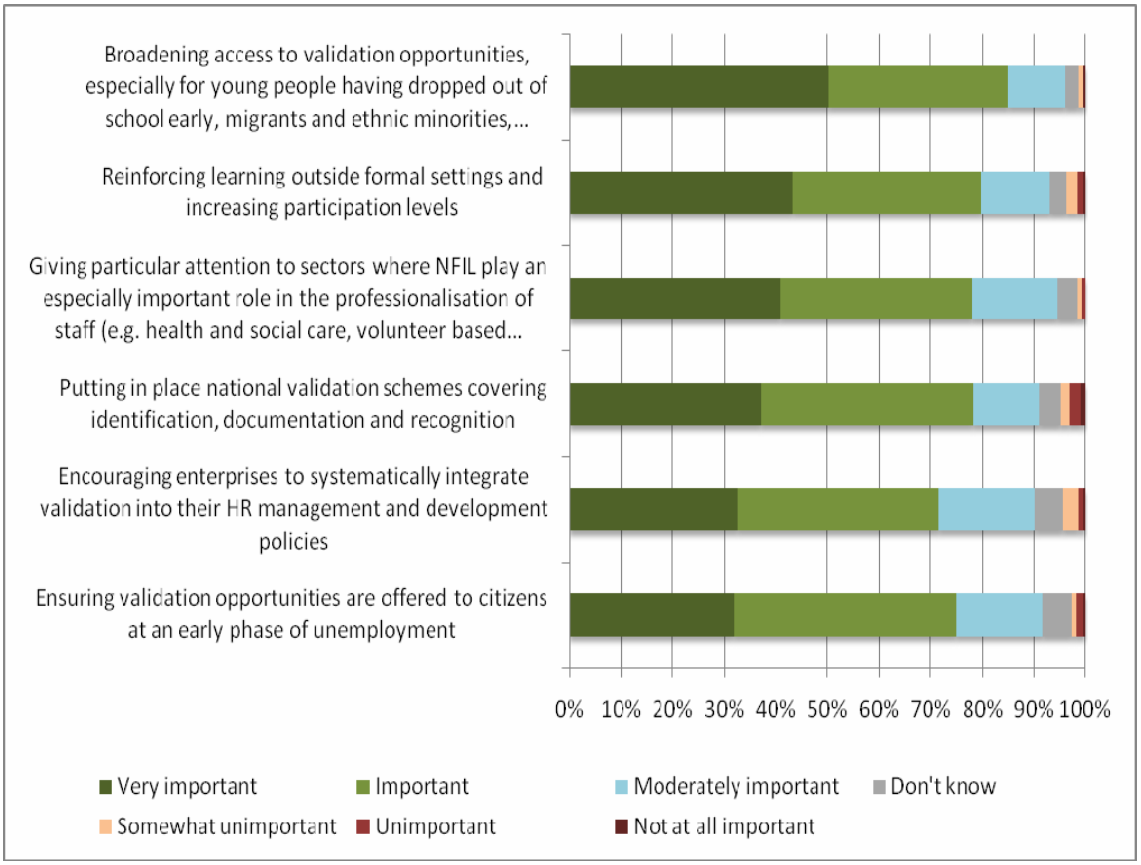


Figure 13: Policy priorities requiring particular attention (values):

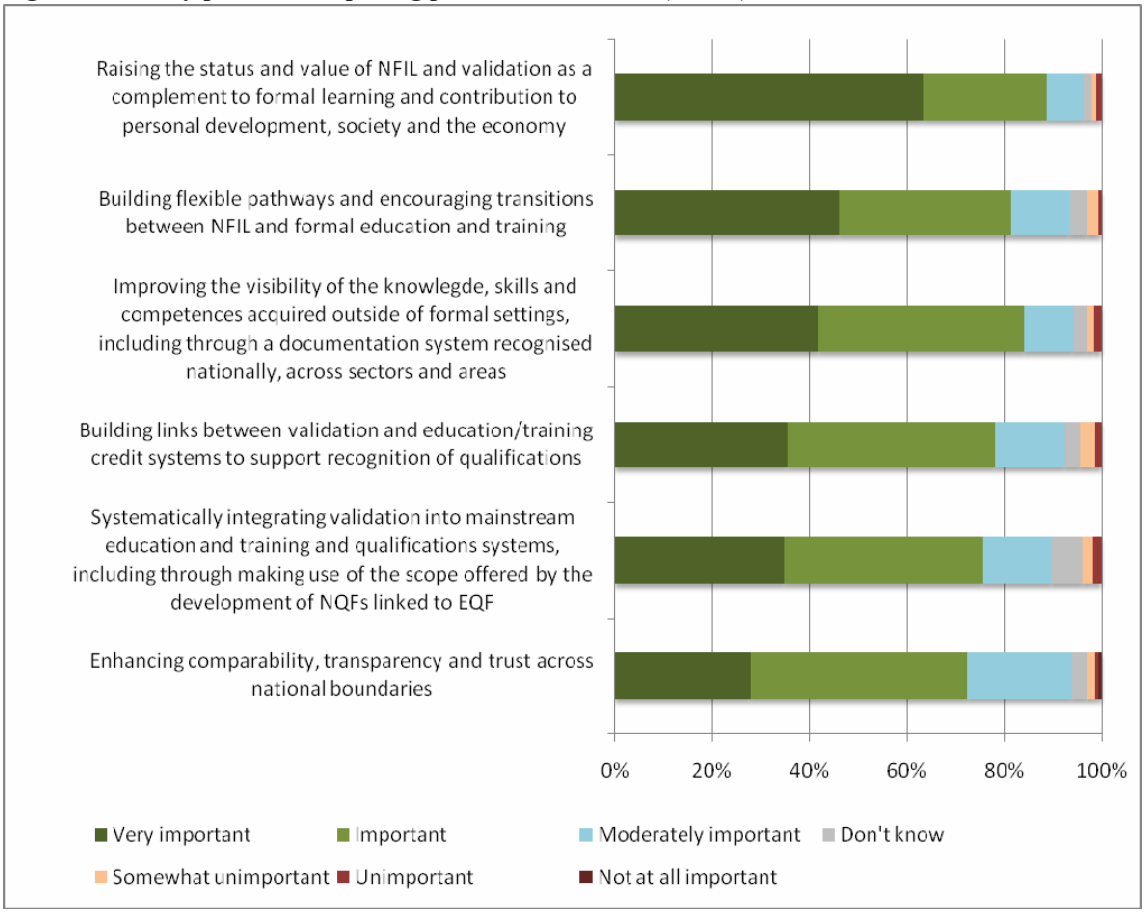


Figure 14: Policy priorities requiring particular attention (quality and effectiveness):

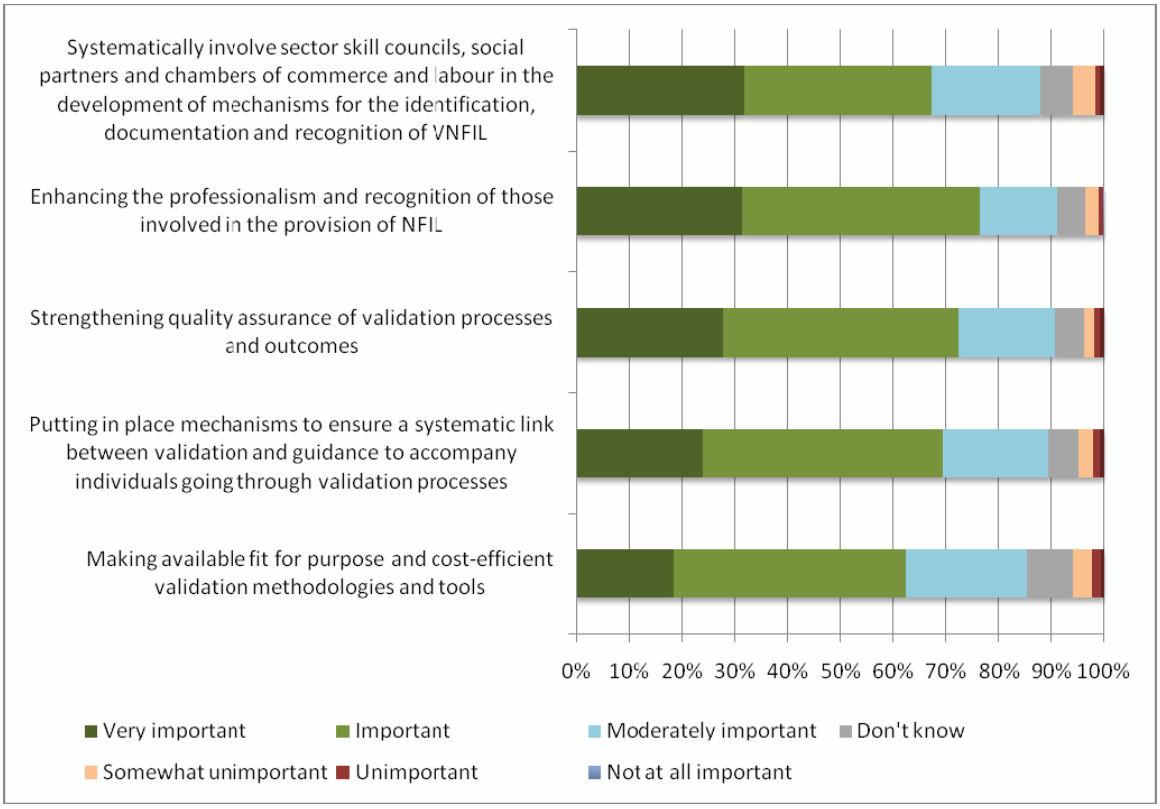
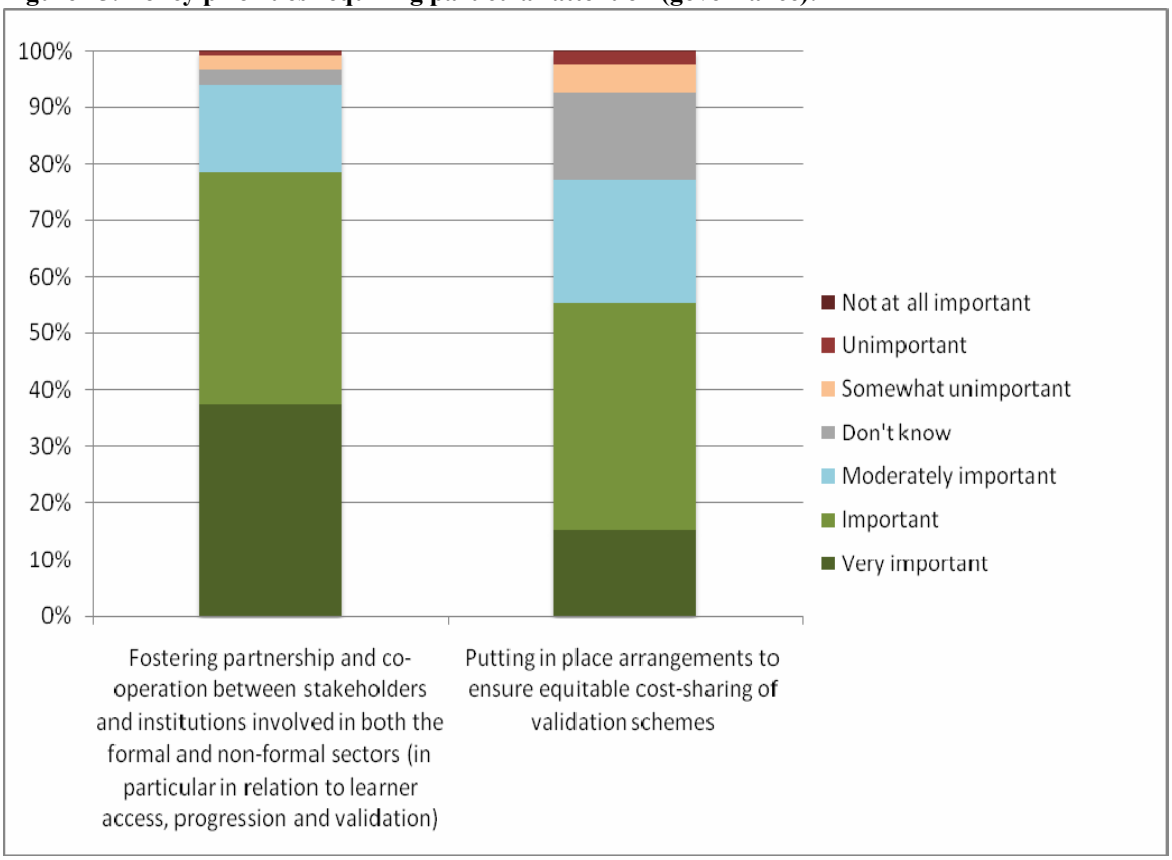


Figure 15: Policy priorities requiring particular attention (governance):



There is a strong consensus among the contributors that further action at European level is called for. Close to 100% of contributors express that new initiatives are required to complement existing efforts and instruments. Two of the priorities for action at the EU level

that come out unambiguously are support to *awareness raising* and *exchange of good practices*. In addition, the replies gave a clear message concerning the need to strengthen implementation of practical measures at national, regional and local level and not only at European level.

Position papers

The Commission received 24 position papers submitted by various stakeholders. They can be consulted through the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/consult/vnfil/report_en.pdf.

Figure 16: Position papers received in the framework of the consultation

Organisation	Type of organisation	Country	Title of position Paper
1. Ficeméa	NGO	France	Contribution de la Ficeméa à la consultation de la Commission européenne sur les futurs programmes européens dans le domaine de l'éducation, de la formation de la politique pour la jeunesse.
2. CLECAT/FIATA	NGO	Belgium/European	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
3. Vlaamse Jeugdraad	Public Authority	Belgium/Flanders	ADVIES: Bedenkingen over het EVC en EVK debat naar aanleiding van het OESO-rapport over de erkenning van niet-formeel en informeel leren
4. Vlaamse Jeugdraad	Public Authority	Begium/Flanders	Advies: Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur
5. FOYER: European Collaboration: a. France: UNHAJ b. Germany: AUSWÄRTS ZUHAUSE c. The Netherlands: Kamers met kansen d. United Kingdom: Foyer Federation	NGO	European collaboration. France, Germany, The Netherlands, UK	Youth on the move – Strengthening support to Europe's young people
6. AONTAS (National Adult Learning Organisation)	NGO	Ireland	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
7. Universidad Popular de Ayuntamiento de Cáceres (Cáceres City Council)	Public Authority	Spain	Propuesta de modelo de educación no formal
8. European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA aisbl)	NGO	Europe	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
9. EHFA – The European Health & Fitness	NGO	Europe	EHFA statement on its position on non-formal and informal learning

Association			
10. Erasmus Student Network (ESN AISBL)	NGO	Europe	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
11. OBESSU	Social Partner	Europe	The school students view – why is non-formal education and informal learning important to us?
12. ISCA (International sport and culture association)	NGO	Europe / Denmark	Sport for All – increasing European Human Capital
13. European Forum for Freedom in Education	NGO	Europe	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
14. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Public Authority	Scotland	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
15. European Office for catholic youth and adult education	NGO	Europe	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
16. IJAB (Fachstelle für Internationale Jugendarbeit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V.)	NGO	Germany	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
17. UEAPME	Social Partner	Europe	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
18. ENSIE (Social Integration Enterprises)	NGO	Europe	SYSCOM conference documentation
19. EPSA (European Pharmaceutical Student's Association)	NGO	Europe	Additional contribution to consultation on promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning
20. AGE Platform Europe (a European network of around 150 organisations of and for people aged 50+)	NGO	Europe	Additional comments to the survey
21. Représentation Permanente de la France après l'Union Européenne	Public Authority	France	Réponse France Consultation apprentissage (Additional comments to the survey)
22. Association CH-Q -Swiss Qualification Program for Career Development	NGO	Switzerland	Valuation and validation of learning; Development and implementation from the perspective of a bottom-up stakeholder
23. Yc3, Youth cross-border corporation and communication	NGO	Baltic sea region	Response to public consultation on Non-formal and informal learning
24. Consortium: a. Association CH-Q,	NGO/Public Authority	Europe	Managing European diversity in Lifelong Learning. SCC Sustainable Culture of

Switzerland. b. Foundation Competence Management / European Network for Valuation of Prior Learning VPL, the Nether-lands & Flemish Belgium c. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority QCA, England			Competence. Commitment of stakeholders Benefits to users and organizations (2007)

Conclusion

The responses to the consultation clearly indicate that validation of non-formal and informal learning is strongly supported by a diverse group of individuals and stakeholders and that there is an overwhelming consensus on the importance of making the skills and competences gained through life and work experience visible. Respondents agree almost unanimously that important benefits for individuals, for the labour market and for society at large can be expected from increased action in validation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

At the same time existing validation schemes and arrangements are portrayed as insufficient and only a quarter of the respondents is of the opinion that they meet agreed quality standards. In particular, it should be noted that three quarters of those who have first-hand experience, either with validating the learning of others or having their own learning validated, are dissatisfied with the existing arrangements.

The respondents also recognise some barriers for further implementation, of which the most important, according to this consultation, are lack of trust in validation and institutional resistance to accepting non-formal and informal learning on equal footing with formal learning.

8.2. Annex 2: Consultation of the EQF Advisory Group and outcomes of Peer Learning Activities

The EQF Recommendation (mentioned in 1.2.1) establishes a European reference framework to which Member States are invited to relate their qualification levels. To ensure coherence to its implementation, it asks the Commission to set up an EQF Advisory Group bringing together representatives from national authorities and other stakeholders (e.g. social partners). The EQF Recommendation explicitly states that the validation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning should be promoted, as it is a legitimate pathway towards formal qualifications. Validation of non-formal and informal learning, and in particular the preparation of this initiative, has therefore regularly been discussed in the EQF Advisory Group and in the related Learning Outcomes Group. Particular attention was given to validation during its meeting of 11 February 2011. Its members generally expressed support for the Commission's intention to propose a Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The Learning Outcomes Group is a subgroup of the EQF Advisory Group, to which it provides direct advice on the shift to learning outcomes approach in education and training policies and practices, including validation, and supports national policy developments. It is composed by national policy makers, practitioners, social partners, Cedefop, the European Training Foundation and the European Commission.

The Learning Outcomes Group and its predecessor, the Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes, have been operating under the Open Method of Coordination, as a key part of the Education & Training 2010 work programme[73] and of the Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)[74] respectively.

The Cluster on Recognition of Learning Outcomes organised a series of meetings in the period 2007-2008 laying the groundwork for the European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning[75]. Under the Learning Outcomes Group two Peer Learning Activities on the topic of validation were specifically organised to contribute to the present initiative:

- On 15-16 November 2010 a peer learning activity on validation of non-formal and informal learning took place in Västeras, Sweden. The meeting focussed on the practical as well as the political challenges involved in developing high quality and cost-efficient validation arrangements at national level. The discussions were intended to feed into both the revision of the European Guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and into the reflection on a possible Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The meeting concluded that developing and implementing validation as a systematic feature of education and training systems is urgent. It furthermore concluded that validation of informal and non-formal learning requires the strengthening of interfaces with the formal qualification systems;
- A specific meeting of the Learning Outcomes Group took place on 2-3 March 2011 in Brussels which discussed the possible contents of a Council Recommendation. During the

[73] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/nationalreport08/joint04_en.pdf.
[74] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1120_en.htm.
[75] Cedefop (2009), *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4054_en.pdf.

meeting a broad support was expressed by the participants for a Recommendation focussing on setting up coherent and coordinated systems for validation by the Member States, linking to National Qualification Frameworks.

In addition to the learning outcomes group peer learning activities on validation took place with a specific sectoral focus, in particular concerning higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning:

– Validation issues, namely the recognition of prior learning in the higher education systems, were also discussed by the thematic working group "Modernisation of Higher Education" in a Peer Learning Activity in Malta on 11-13 October 2010 on "The role of Higher Education systems in supporting lifelong learning". Recognition of prior learning was an area of particular relevance – covering interest in how this is linked to qualifications frameworks, how it is funded, how it is implemented and how it is quality reviewed. The main message that resulted from the activity was that Recognition of Prior Learning is not just about documenting past achievements but also about shaping future achievements. Where recognition of prior learning is seen as a means of enabling access to higher education only it tends to be carried out by individual institutions. However systems that actually certify prior learning linked to qualifications frameworks and provide, for example, e-portfolios tend to have a much more formal approach with review mechanisms and fees associated.

– A relevant meeting on quality assurance procedures for recognition of prior learning which took place in Malta from 17-20 November 2008, in the framework of the European network for quality assurance in vocational education and training (EQAVET)[76].

– A relevant Peer Learning Activities had taken place in the framework of the Action Plan on Adult Learning: "It's always a good time to learn" a peer learning activity on validation took place on 21-24 June 2009 in Prague, especially focussed on policies and strategies to encourage and support low-skilled people to seek validation of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning[77]. Many workers referred to as "low skilled workers" are in reality not low skilled but rather "low qualified". Hence validation is an appropriate way of valorising their experiences and undocumented competences.

[76] http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/library/policy-briefings.aspx.
[77] http://www.kslll.net/Documents/PLA-%20valiidation%20of%20non-formal%20and%20informal%20learning_June%2009.pdf.

8.3. Annex 3: Country sheets on the situation of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Member States

Austria[78]	
National strategy on validation	There is no explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning, but validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a central element in the Austrian lifelong-learning (LLL) strategy. The strategy recommends that recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be supported, either through individual competence portfolios or by a national system of recognition.
Legal situation of validation	There is no uniform legal framework to regulate validation in Austria. Different acts and regulations relating to education and training include mechanisms and arrangements that enable formal education and training institutions to recognise learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings.
Institutions involved in validation	There is no national institution responsible for validation across all sectors. Formal education and training institutions and apprenticeship offices of the competent economic chambers organise exams for certification. Public Adult Education Centres have developed their own methods for validation. Ministries, social partner institutions, companies or the Public Employment Service are all involved in other aspects of validation (policy making, legislation, information etc). In 2009 a thematic working group proposed setting up "bodies responsible for qualifications", in order to regulate qualifications which are valid sectorally and/or nationally (but do not have an equivalent in the formal education system), whose main task would be to undertake the validation and quality assurance function. So far, such bodies have not been established.
Validation procedures	Current certification policies are to a large extent based on "external examination", where almost all qualifications (except university degrees) can be obtained without participating in formal education, provided that the same exam as required in the regular system, is passed. In the Adult Education Sector competence audits and portfolios are used.
Costs	The funding for validation activities depends on the respective measure, procedure or project. The development of new methods in pilot projects and research is financed in many cases through EU initiatives, co-financed by the responsible ministries and/or social partner organisations. Depending on who maintains or implements the project or measure, the municipal and provincial governments also provide support and ministries and social partner institutions may also set up their own initiatives. Because Austria does not have a national institutional framework for validation, no overall data on costs to individuals is available. The direct and indirect costs differ between the different measures and initiatives. Costs can therefore vary from near to nothing to EUR 2 000 or more, depending individually on how much the candidate's competences have already been evidenced and recognised). OECD Report: For the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (BRP) it can be assumed that a maximum of EUR 200 of exam fees must be paid for all four exams. It is difficult to identify who will bear these costs as there exist different subsidisation options. A topical study has calculated that average costs for the BRP in the winter semester 2005/06 are about EUR 3,082 at the national level, when including

[78] Genoveva Brandstetter an dKarin Luomi-Messerer, , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Austria* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77444.pdf

	courses for all four exam subjects and exam fees. When subtracting various provincial subsidies (ranging from 365 EUR to a 100 per cent of the 61 total costs), average net costs of about EUR 1,768 will accrue. The exam fees for other *Externistenreifeprüfungen* in upper secondary school or colleges (AHS or BHS) within the public school system are much lower than the fees for the BRP – they are equal to the fees of the "Hauptschulabschluss-Prüfung" for external exam candidates (26 EUR).[79]
Benefits	No large-scale data on benefits exist, but experiences from different validations schemes have in general been positive. The fact that many methods of recognition are closely tied to the formal education system, gives the certificates a high level of acceptance on the labour market, whereas portfolio methods have shown to empower applicants to recognise their skills and find jobs or chose appropriate further education. Participants of the Competence Balance program felt that they had acquired important skills for approaching problems and tasks in their work environment (such as stress-coping and problem solving strategies), whereas an academic secondary school for adults reports a reduced number of drop-outs thanks to the validation schemes. Validation portfolios for women returning to the labour market after an absence in working life (mostly because of raising children) were also described by the participants as helpful in recognising and describing their competences when applying for a job. Two thirds of the participating women were employed after completing the program. Similarily, 63 % of the people participating in the competence profile program KOMPAZ, who previously were unemployed, found employment after completion of the program.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The NQF policy paper and the recently adopted Strategy for lifelong learning place high importance on general demand for integrating non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes in the NQF. The NQF aims to map all national qualifications and encompass all forms of learning. An act on the NQF is currently being prepared and is expected to be adopted in 2012. This law will provide the basis for the alignment of national qualifications to the NQF and referencing to the EQF.[80] The question on how to recognise learning outcomes which do not have an equivalent in the formal system remains open.
Role of social partners in validation[81]	Relevant stakeholders participate in working groups that elaborate proposals on how to make learning that takes place outside formal settings more visible. Some social partners are also actively involved in different pilot projects.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	There is no national framework including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation exists in many contexts, but with lacking coherence.
Validation statistics	No overall data on flows of beneficiaries is available, however some examples exist: There are more than 800 candidates per year to the Hauptschule qualifications in second-chance education.; Approximately 5,300 candidates per year take the apprenticeship-leave examination (LAP) in second-chance education; Approximately 3,800 people per year are awarded the professional title Ingenieur; In the school year 2007/08, more than 2,600 persons have successfully taken part in the Berufsreifeprüfung exam; In 2008, Austrian universities newly enrolled 120 students with the ExternistInnenreifeprüfung as an entrance qualification, 96 with the Studienberechtigungsprüfung and 838 with

[79] OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning: Country Background Report Austria 2007 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/3/41679166.pdf

[80] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

	the Berufsreifeprüfung; In the winter term 2009, Austrian universities of applied sciences newly enrolled 195 students with the Studienberechtigungsprüfung as an entrance qualification and 838 with Berufsreifeprüfung;

Belgium (Flanders)[82]	
National strategy on validation	No explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning exists.
Legal situation of validation	A legislative framework for validation has been put in place, closely linked to the development of the Action Plan 'Lifelong Learning on the Right Track'. Federal legislation plays little role in detailed development in the field, but may gain relevance if validation affects the relationship between employee and employer. In 2002, a Federal law was passed, granting workers a right to be assessed and validated for skills gained outside the formal education system. Workers have a right to paid training leave for up to 120 hours/year. In HE, recognition of informal and non-formal learning is defined by a 2004 decree, linking to the Bologna process and aims at making higher education more flexible. In adult education, a decree from 2007 sets out a clear approach to assessment and certification of acquired competences. Validation of vocational education is defined by the 2004 decree on "Titles of Professional competence", more known as the "certificate for vocational experience".
Institutions involved in validation	The Department of Work in the Flemish government awards the certificate for vocational experience. This work is done through specific assessment centres. On other educational levels, validation is carried out by educational institutions, associations of educational institutions or through specific projects and third sector services.
Validation procedures	Employees or job-seekers can acquire a certificate of vocational experience if they are able to demonstrate the necessary skills as defined by the labour market (sectoral social partners). In higher education applicants can (based on portfolios and assessment) gain access to higher education programs, be awarded credits or a shortened study duration, or even be granted a degree. Practices differ depending on HE associations.
Costs	There is currently no specific budget allocated by the Flemish government to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is considered that the lack of funding is undermining the development of validation in Flanders. Costs are primarily carried by education institutions and individuals. The certificate for vocational experience is financed by the Flemish Government (55%) and the European Social Fund (45%). The organisations wishing to assess applicants have to apply for accreditation by responding to a call for proposals by the ESF-agency. Each assessment centre receives a certain amount per assessment (EUR 240 for guidance, EUR 960 -1200 or EUR 1440 per assessment, depending on the occupation) and also a budget for promotion. Institutions can ask participants for a basic fee to cover administrative costs and for an additional amount, which is related to the number of competences to be identified during the assessment phase. The procedure for recognition of

[82] Cecile Mathou , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Belgium (Flanders)* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77449.pdf

	acquired competences or qualifications in adult education does in general not involve any costs. The procedure for recognition of acquired competences or qualifications in higher education does not involve any costs to the individual, unless it relates to certificates for which the institution does not know the 'value' and considers it necessary to order an additional proficiency test. This is the case for competences acquired outside formal education, that is, through non-formal or informal learning. In that case, the associations are responsible for recognition and assessment and also for the cost price of the proficiency test. The maximum cost for the assessment varies: - EUR 590 for a proficiency assessment at academic or professional bachelor level; - EUR 770 for a proficiency assessment at master level if the individual has no bachelor degree (EUR 230 for a proficiency assessment at master level if the individual has a bachelor degree) - EUR 55 administrative cost for a proficiency assessment for partial elements of a study + cost depending on the number of competence assessments to be undertaken.
Benefits	The benefits of the certificate for vocational experience was recorder in a 2009 study, where all of the 320 candidates said the certificates meant a lot to them, and had improved their self-confidence, self-comprehension and pride. Up to 70% said that they believed the certificate had improved their chances on the labour market. Up to 90% would do the procedure again, and as many would recommend it to friends and colleagues. The 45 surveyed employers confirmed that the certificates added transparency and enabled the matching of skills required and the talents of the individuals.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The Parliament Act of 2009 on the Flemish qualifications structure (equivalent to the NQF) aims at defining level descriptors, types of qualifications as well as procedures to recognise them. The NQF is expected to play a vital role in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, explicitly mentioned as one of the objectives of the process. The road from formal adoption to actual implementation has proved more time-consuming and difficult than originally foreseen. As late as mid-2011 the implementation decrees necessary for putting the framework into practise had yet to be fully agreed, in particular with social partners represented in the Economic and social committee, thus making it impossible to include actual qualifications into the framework. The NQF, to be adopted in responses to the EQF, it is still very much work in progress. [83]
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners within the Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) are responsible for developing the qualification references for VET by the description of occupational profiles. Recognition of informal and non-formal learning has been received positively by trade unions and employer's organisations, but remains largely unknown among private companies. Within companies, where firm-based validation exists, it is rarely recognised in the wider labour market.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation is mainly focused on vocational skills. VET recognition is widespread and focuses on 48 occupations (bus driver, industrial painter, nursery worker etc). However, validation practises exist also in both higher education and adult learning. In more specific projects special focus have been paid to

[83] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

	disadvantaged groups.
Validation statistics	In relation to vocational, or professional, competences, since 2004 employees or jobseekers in the Flemish community have been able to acquire a 'certificate of vocational experience' if they demonstrate that they have learned or acquired certain skills required to exercise an occupation, as defined by the labour market (sectoral social partners) in a standard. Between 2006 to April 2010 2,039 certificates of vocational experience have been awarded and 3,563 candidates have registered and are currently in the process of receiving guidance, undergoing assessment or have just gone through the process. In higher education, the process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been in place in universities and colleges since September 2005. In adult education, a 2007 decree also sets out a clear approach to the assessment and certification of acquired competences. Statistics on take-up cover the period from 2005 to 2008 - the total number of applicants has decreased from 663 in 2005-2006 to 412 in 2007-2008.

Belgium (Wallonia and French Community)[84]	
National strategy on validation	No explicit national strategy including all sectors on validation of non-formal and informal learning exists. In the 2009-2014 "Declaration of Regional Policies" the Walloon Government set out its intention to make Validation of Skills one of the priorities of the next term in office.
Legal situation of validation	Federal legislation plays little role in detailed development in the field, but may gain relevance if validation affects the relationship between employee and employer.In 2002, a Federal law was passed, granting workers a right to be assessed and validated for skills gained outside the formal education system. Workers have a right to paid training leave for up to 120 hours/year. In higher education, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced in 1994/1995 and since the Act of March 2004 as VAE. VCP was introduced in 2003/2004. The VCP *Skills Certificates* are recognised by law.
Institutions involved in validation	VCP is handled by a Consortium consisting of the five most important public sector training providers: FOREM (The Walloon Employment and Vocational Training Service), Bruxelles Formation (Public Sector Training Agency), Enseignement de Promotion Sociale (Adult education provider), IFAPME (Training Agency for the Self Employed), and SFPME (training Service for Small and Medium-Sized enterprises). The consortium creates common standards for VCP and hands out *Skills Certificates*. Higher education institutes are responsible for VAE. Advisory bodies are used for cooperation and dialogue between institutions, but there is no common procedure. In 2008 a VAE Platform was created to facilitate this work. The Ministry of the French Community (DG Non-Compulsory Education and Scientific research plays a facilitating role between stakeholders and advisory bodies.

[84]Cecile Mathou , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Belgium (Wallonia)* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77451.pdf

Validation procedures	There are currently two frameworks for validation in French speaking Belgium: Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience - VAE in Higher Education and Validation des compétences professionnelles – VCP in the vocational education and training sector. VAE does not lead directly to certification, but can be used for both admissions and exemptions and is offered in all higher education institutions. Focus is more on knowledge than skills and qualifications. The process is aimed at encouraging adults who wish to enter higher education to do so via valorisation of their professional experience and training. VCP is specifically aimed at officially recognising professional knowledge and know-how acquired outside of typical training channels. This recognition is organised by the Skills Validation Consortium, which oversees a network of 32 centres which carry out the recognition and validation of competencies. Validation Centres carry out certification by delivering titres de compétences (Skills Certificates) to adults who can prove that they meet the standards for a certain occupation. These Skills Certificates are not on their own, equivalent to standard diplomas, but are designed to facilitate access to further training courses. The titres de competences can also be accumulated to obtain a qualification, on the condition of passing an integrated test (épreuve intégrée) organised by the Enseignement de Promotion Sociale.
Costs	VCP is free of charge for applicants. The real costs of the procedure are covered by the government which subsidises validation sessions. The main costs for validation consist of human resources for the centres organising the assessment. These costs are covered by the government. Validation as a method applied to higher education is also supported by public funds. For HE institutions, the main cost related to VAE is the recruitment of additional staff to advise, orient and support candidates. These costs are currently covered by the funding received by Universities for the implementation of VAE. The budget for the VAE Platform for the period 2008-2013 is 5.6 million euro (co-financed by the European Social Fund).
Benefits	Since the VCP is still a new procedure, there is still some mistrust towards the *Skills Certificates* on the labour market. However, the benefits are becoming more apparent, and employers are starting to realise the benefits of the certificate in facilitating recruitment. The role of skills and competences is also becoming more and more common in Human Resource Management within companies. The benefits of the VCP validation for individuals are: increased chanced of finding employment, facilitated access to vocational training programmes, official recognition of experience and bolstering professional identity and self-confidence. The benefits of VAE include adult access to university studies, a transformed academic landscape (with more adult learners) and enhanced personal development.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The French community has worked on a NQF linked to EQF since 2006. The efforts put into validation of non-formal and informal learning, involving broad stakeholder groups, can be beneficial for a broader development of the NQF.[85]

[85] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

	The future of the *Skills Certificate* depends on the extent to which they are integrated into the NQF and linked to other, more well-known, certificates.[86] This work is ongoing.
Role of social partners in validation	For each occupation for which VCP is used, management and labour representatives and training providers from various sectors form a Commission for Skill Unit Standards. Partners from education, business, trade unions and other training providers collaborate also in assessing future needs of businesses, in redefining training provisions and placing more emphasis on skills.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation is mainly focused on vocational skills and targets job seekers. At the end of 2008. 115 VCP certificates related to 37 occupations had been created.
Validation statistics	Data collected between September and December 2008 indicate that 294 applicants were examined by the VAE jury and that 185 registered as students. In 2008 the objective for VCP was 650 beneficiaries and the actual number 987. In 2009 the number of beneficiaries reached 1364, compared to a target of 780. Nevertheless, the beneficiaries of the VCP procedure is still relatively low due to low visibility and recent implementation.

Bulgaria[87]	
National strategy on validation	Plans to introduce validation of prior learning only began in Bulgaria in the context of fulfilling EU accession requirements and are still in the making. Strategic documents such as the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2008-2013, Action Plan 2009, the National Strategy for Further Vocational Education and Training 2005 – 2010, the Renewed Employment Strategy 2008-2015 and the 2010 National Action Plan on Employment highlight the establishment of a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning as a priority.
Legal situation of validation	Currently the only legislative regulation of validation is laid down in the 1999 Vocational Education and Training (VET) Act, with limited practical application. Amendments to the VET law are currently being planned.The terms non-formal and informal learning will be defined in the amended law, which aims to organise the validation at all levels – national, regional and provider level. The 2008 Law for amending and expanding the Employment Promotion Act focuses on adult training and stipulates that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science should create conditions for the assessment and recognition of the knowledge and skills of adults acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
Institutions involved in	The primary national institution with responsibility for validation is the Ministry for Education, Youth and Science. The National Agency for Vocational Education

[86]Cecile Mathou , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Belgium (Wallonia)* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77451.pdf

[87]Nataliya Nikolova , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Bulgaria* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77453.pdf

validation	and Training (NAVET) is a specialised authority whose main responsibility is to license vocational education and training institutions. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science together with NAVET are responsible for creating conditions and methods for validation. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is involved in validation related to LLL and awareness raising of validation schemes to job-seekers and employees. Once the system of validation is introduced, both public and private vocational institutions are expected to be licensed as providers.
Validation procedures	No system for validation has been established yet. A model system for validation was designed in 2009 as part of the project "Promoting adults' vocational training and employability in Bulgaria" and tested in three professions: carpenter, tailor, and social worker. The amendments to the VET Act are being designed on the basis of these experiments.
Costs	No clear assessment of potential costs. Currently, there are a number of EU co-funded initiatives which aim at developing the validation process. Validation will be funded by the state and municipal budgets. Funding will not be specifically allocated to validation but will fall under a general funding stream (e.g. for education and training). Beneficiaries will be expected to pay a fee for the validation/ certification of their qualifications, training, consultation etc. The amount of the fee will be established by an act of the Council of Ministers. The whole or a part of the fee will be paid by beneficiaries, employers or sponsors. Funds allocated to validation will also come from the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, the European Social Fund, and bilateral programmes.
Benefits	No data.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Establishment of NQF compatible to EQF is ongoing. A draft Bulgarian national qualifications framework for lifelong learning was approved by the Minister of Education, Youth and Science in June 2011. The Bulgarian national qualifications framework is one single, comprehensive framework, which will include qualifications from all levels and subsystems of education and training (pre-primary, primary and secondary general education, VET and HE). It will provide normative base for validation of non-formal and informal learning.
Role of social partners in validation	Organisations and trade unions have been involved in the 2009 pilot project. NAVET also involves social partners in assessing the needs of the labour market and the introduction of successful practices, such as validation of non-formal and informal learning. Involvement beyond consultation remains low.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation on a larger scale has not yet begun. Most work, however, seems to be done in the arena of vocational education. Smaller projects have so far mainly focused on disadvantaged groups, such as the elderly, disabled or disadvantaged people.
Validation statistics	There is currently no data since the system of validation is yet to be implemented.

Cyprus[88]	
National strategy on validation	No national strategy or guidelines exist, but some work on validation is being conducted through the NQF. There are no definite plans for introducing a national system of validation, but this may follow the Education Reform which is currently taking place. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not seen as a priority area in Cyprus at the moment.
Legal situation of validation	Neither a legislative framework for validating non-formal and informal learning nor national guidelines for validation have yet been established in Cyprus. A recent modification of the Law of the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS) allows the Council to recognise, at its discretion, transfer credits based on previous work experience as part of a formal degree title.
Institutions involved in validation	The Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA) is the national body responsible for establishing a System of Vocational Qualifications, and may be expected to play a role in the development of validation practices. In higher education, some steps towards the introduction of validation procedures have been taken on the initiative of higher education institutions. Credits are also recognised by the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS) based on previous work experience. In the private sector, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) operate a scheme certifying competences in computer-related subjects.
Validation procedures	No information available.
Costs	There is no public national funding framework for validation. A number of EU co-funded projects have allowed Cyprus to participate in pilot actions. There is little information on costs for participants in existing and planned validation schemes.
Benefits	It is expected that validation initiatives help to increase the possibilities of access to higher education, and the reduction of time to achieve a higher education qualification. Within sectors, validation is undertaken to better match individuals with job tasks. However, given the low profile of validation in the country, no studies have systematically evidenced the benefits of validation to individuals.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The issue of recognising prior learning arose in the discussions about the development of a NQF and steps are being taken in this direction. Candidates can be awarded vocational qualification no matter how they have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills and competences (e.g. through formal, non-formal or informal learning).[89] In the future it will be examined how the system will incorporate branches/titles of technical and vocational schools and the apprenticeship system and other initial vocational programmes. Through this the NQF aims to bridge the various qualifications acquired via formal, non-formal and informal learning and strengthen the links between initial and continuous vocational education and training.[90]
Role of social partners in	Social partner have been actively involved in the debate on developing a System

[88] Anna Manoudi , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Cyprus* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77457.pdf

validation	of Vocational Qualifications. Stakeholders are also engaged in discussions on the NQF/EQF implementation. Some private sector initiatives have started to be implemented both by social partners and individual companies, mainly in the areas of IT, banking and accounting/auditing.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	A system for validation for a few occupational sectors (hotels and restaurants, construction and retail etc) has been introduced during 2006-2009, but validation is so far only available to employees. The goal is to broaden and deepen the practices during the second phase of the System of Vocational Qualifications up until 2013, so that 72 new standards in priority occupations will be established and opportunities for access to validation will be extended to unemployed and economically inactive persons. ESF validation projects have focused on disadvantaged groups.
Validation statistics	No data available.

Czech Republic[91]	
National strategy on validation	Recognition and permeability are among the seven strategic goals of the Czech Lifelong Learning Strategy.
Legal situation of validation	Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is now well defined in the Czech Republic since September 2007 by law 179/2006, which defines the conditions and the process for recognition to achieve full and partial qualifications (at all levels except higher education).
Institutions involved in validation	The work is lead by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. Sectoral councils (consisting of representatives of educational institutes and relevant stakeholders) suggest what new standards are needed and where standards should be updated. Validation based on the standards can be carried out by schools for full qualifications or by authorised institutions (schools, private institutions, companies as well as individuals) for partial qualifications.
Validation procedures	Assessment standards (e.g. oral explanation, practical demonstration, etc.) are used both for recognition of non-formal and informal learning and examination/certification in formal education and training. They are being progressively developed by the sectoral councils and approved by the Ministry of Education. Full qualification can be achieved following the successful passing of final examination. Validation can not be used by higher education institutes in order to shorten the study period, whereas this is possible at some institutes focused on adult learning.
Costs	The development of the system of recognition receives significant EU funding through the ESF. The system is designed so that the direct costs of the recognition procedure will be covered by individuals (estimated to plausibly reach levels of several hundred euro). It is for the authorised persons to set the fee and in practice this varies depending on the qualification and the material needs for the assessment. However the fee has to be set within a scale that is set at national level. The fees can be covered by employers, but there is no legal obligation for employers to contribute to the expenditure. In case of unemployed people the costs may be covered by the public employment services. Human

[91] Daniela Uličná, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Czech Republic* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77454.pdf

	resources and other costs are carried by the accrediting institutions.
Benefits	No systematic evaluation or monitoring of benefits has been carried out. Some case study evidence shows benefits such as increased confidence, enhanced motivation to learn further and access to a qualified position in the labour market. OECD Report: Other assumed benefits based on Czech case study experiences and expectations include shortened study periods, enhanced work productivity, reintroduction of school drop-outs to formal education, and improving chances to attain further education.[92]
Integration of validation within the NQF	The validation procedure is tightly related to the on-going development of the NQF: a recognition procedure can only be carried out if the qualifications and assessment standard are defined in the qualifications register (defined by law 179/2006 and still incomplete when the law entered into force).
Role of social partners in validation	Sectoral councils include employers' and employees' representatives. Social partners (chambers of employers, professional organisations, schools, representatives of universities) participate also in the development of qualification and assessment standards.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	As the recognition process started in 2009, take up remains modest and validation only has only taken place for a limited number of qualifications. Since education levels already are high, the main focus of validation and recognition of non-formal learning is not so much on acquiring higher education level, but more on partial qualifications or additional qualifications, because these qualifications facilitate employment and can solve shortages in certain qualifications at the labour market. It also gives people with low or no qualifications the chance to upgrade their qualifications.
Validation statistics	Only initial figures can be identified, but already by June 2010 a total of 1206 partial qualifications had been authorised and 3126 assessments had been carried out.

Denmark[93]	
National strategy on validation	Validation of non-formal and informal learning aimed at all citizens, often with a special focus on low-qualified people, features strongly in policies and strategies focusing more broadly on lifelong learning. The 2004 policy paper "Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System" is also an important part of the strategy of validation of prior learning in Denmark.
Legal situation of validation	The recent key legislation on validation of prior learning is Act no 556 of June 2007 on the development of the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training. It gives individuals the right to ask an education institution for an assessment of his/her prior learning in order to obtain

[92] OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Country Background Report Czech Republic 2007 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/44/41679411.pdf

[93] Kirsten Aagaard , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Denmark* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77455.pdf

	recognition of his/her competences. The Act covers single course subjects in general adult education and general upper secondary education, vocational training programmes; basic adult education; short-cycle and medium-cycle post-secondary adult education (Diploma programmes). The Danish Ministry of Education has launched a number of initiatives that seek to improve the understanding of prior learning assessment and to promote its use (e.g. setting up a National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning) and is evaluating the implementation of the legislation in 2011-2011 with the view to define a new action plan to promote the validation of prior learning.
Institutions involved in validation	There is no national institution responsible for validation. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the legislative framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and for taking national initiatives for implementing the legislation within its field (does not include universities). The Ministry has developed *My Competence Portfolio* as a tool for use by all stakeholders, especially the education institutions. In 2007 the 'National Knowledge Centre (NVR), for Validation of Prior Learning' was funded by the Ministry of Education. The aim of the knowledge centre is to collect, produce and disseminate information and documentation on existing knowledge on VPL. The educational institutions themselves are responsible for counselling/guidance, assessing and approving RPL within their educational and training programmes, quality assurance, review and evaluation. Other stakeholders act as guidance institutions, e.g. the job centres, the trade unions and the third sector.
Validation procedures	Competence assessment is always based on the goals and admission requirements of the individual education programme (or subject area standards within general adult education and upper secondary subjects for adults). Methods of assessment are not standardised and include interviews, portfolios, practical exercises and tests. In general upper secondary education students can obtain (based on assessment of prior learning) credits for previously completed studies, periods of study abroad, etc., and be granted admission to subjects at a higher level or a reduced advanced level course load. Assessment is made after entry. In HE, individuals can be awarded competence certificates or admission on the basis of validation. Within adult vocational training persons have the right to request the assessment of their competences. This is for the award of certificates and to tailor programmes to take account of the competences the applicant already has.
Costs	The organisations involved in the recognition of prior learning must absorb the associated costs within their existing budgets, although education institutions can charge a fee for the assessment of prior learning. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is also financially supported by the Ministry of Education. The funding model is a continuation of the policy principles of a primarily public funded basic adult and continuing education and training system paid through the tax system and with moderate contribution by those who already have higher levels of formal education attainment. Public financing also includes support schemes/allowance schemes for forgone earnings for adults during participation in qualifying education and training. Co-financing by participants or their employers in the form of graduated user fees is becoming a more or less universal rule. In the OECD Report annual public costs for non-formal and informal learning are estimated as following: Basic skills programmes within continuing vocational training and related individual competence assessment: 1.2 MEUR (with approx. 50.000 participants); General adult education and general upper secondary: 333.333 EUR (approx. 500 participants); Diploma and

	other tertiary programmes within the adult education system: no estimate; additional expenditure: approximately 1.535 MEUR.[94]
Benefits	No research with an explicit focus on the benefits for individuals has so far been carried out. The knowledge about effects is based on small analyses and case studies. Intermediate results from NVR projects and other institutions show, however, that validation improves the individual's knowledge of their own competences. This motivates individuals to look for new jobs or to start again in education. In addition, RPL can be used to shorten a learner's educational pathway, in particular in relation to the Basic Adult Education programme (GVU) - adults are typically able to have their need for teaching at school reduced by at least half, compared with a normal course of education (their practical training experience being fully recognised). As indicated by the 2007 OECD Report, a Danish study on good practice of reducing dropouts in VET gives some evidence that the quality of the obligatory initial assessment of a student's competences and the guidance process associated with it as a basis for formulation of the personal education plan has some impact on completion rates.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Information on current regulations regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning and how degrees and certificates can be acquired on the basis of validation of non-formal and informal learning is expected to form a part of the information on the Danish qualifications framework.
Role of social partners in validation	The Danish Ministry of Education formed as one of its initiatives a partnership agreement with the social partners regarding recognition of prior learning running from August 2007 to August 2010, which resulted in many initiatives. In the area of Adult Vocational Training, as well as Vocational Education and Training, the social partners are usually involved in the validation process. They have contributed significantly and have had influence in a number of areas within the legislation. Thus the Government works closely with social partners, for example with the Council for Vocational Training (REU), the Council for Adult Education and Training (VEU-Rådet), the Council for Academy Profession Education and Professional Bachelor Education. These Councils advise the Government on their specific areas of education and training. The 'National Trade Committees' define the contents of qualifications and labour market competence framework and they monitor labour market developments so as to develop suitable VET.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	The validation of non-formal and informal learning has been high on the policy agenda in Denmark for more than a decade and is well developed especially in VET, adult education programmes and tertiary education. Many initiatives are aimed at low-qualified people. Although recognition of prior learning has been established for some time it is also considered that more needs to be done to recognise competences achieved at work and from taking part in non-formal adult education and training etc.
Validation statistics	There is still a need for more detailed statistics and registration of the activities. Validation activity is still relatively low because the new regulations are still under implementation. But at the same time the activity is increasing within all fields of education. The spread of prior learning assessment is greatest within vocational education and training at basic levels.

[94] OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal learning: Country Background Report Denmark 2007 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/33/41721389.pdf

Estonia[95]	
National strategy on validation	Principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (also known as RPL) in relation to higher and vocational education have been developed relatively recently at national level. Strategic documents such as the Development Plan for Estonian Adult Education 2009-2013, the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2009-2013 and the Estonian Higher Education Strategy 2006–2015 also aim at developing further RPL.
Legal situation of validation	In higher education, the 2003 University Act allowed the use of RPL to give access to university and award partial diplomas and required universities to elaborate their own rules and procedures for RPL. General principles regarding RPL have been set-out in the Standard of Higher Education 2007. In vocational education, the vocational standard sets the framework for RPL. No system has been initiated so far within general education.
Institutions involved in validation	There is no national institution with responsibility for validation. The Ministry of Education and Research has responsibility for the legal framework. Current developments in HE are led by the ESF-funded project 'Primus' and its office; validation in qualification standards is coordinated by Estonian Qualifications Authority and in vocational education the developments are led by National Examinations and Qualifications Centre. Based on the legal framework, all higher education, "applied higher education" and vocational education institutions have a set of regulations for recognition of prior learning in place.
Validation procedures	Validation can be used for admission to HEI's, changing curriculum, awarding credits or continuing studies in higher and vocational education, or achieving a professional qualification. Educational institutes have their own procedures, which include application forms, interviews, assignments etc.
Costs	Most of the validation development is funded through the ESF project Primus, which has an earmarked 1.46 MEUR budget for the years 2008-2013 (the project aims to raise the capacity of HEI's to assess and recognise prior learning). Project partners and HEI's must contribute 5 % of their own funding. Funding covers training courses for assessors, counsellors, applicants, the cost of assessment and counselling, information campaigns and other related activities such as the development of specific portfolios and study visits. RPL applicants in some HEI's have to pay a fee which varies by institution. Certain institutions charge a fee based on the amount of credit points that they apply for while for others there is a simple application fee with no additional credit point charge. Overall, the system for measuring RPL costs is going to be developed as part of the Primus project. Funding for developing RPL in vocational education is, similar to higher education, funded by the ESF programme. Funding is primarily for training validation practitioners and RPL promotion. There are staff costs associated with the implementation of RPL and in most of the HEI's there is a full-time or part-time RPL coordinator or counsellor.
Benefits	There is no common data available on the benefits of RPL to individuals. However successful RPL cases have been portrayed. The greatest emphasis was on saving time and resources in studying, whereas adult learners can

[95] Marin Gross, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Estonia* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77456.pdf

	benefit from validation of their prior learning since they are not required to repeat what they already know.
Integration of validation within the NQF	One of the goals of the NQF process has been to promote validation. According to the Professions Act, the Estonian qualifications framework (EKR) has eight levels. Descriptions of the qualifications levels in the EKR are identical to the EQF level descriptions. All the descriptions are competence or outcomes based and thus enable non-formal and informal learning to be taken into account.
Role of social partners in validation	Different ways of involving employers in assessment processes are being considered. Employers are part of assessment processes in more technical areas and also in the ICT area. Professional standards assessment is carried out by an awarding body which usually consists of employers' representatives.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation exists in both HE, adult and vocational education. Two new ESF initiatives were launched in 2010 for people who have dropped out of higher education or vocational education.
Validation statistics	Based on RPL statistics collected by the Primus project in 2009, there were in total 6,986 RPL applications in higher education, however only 900 of these related to the validation of non-formal learning and 568 were for informal learning. There is no data available about validation beneficiaries in vocational education, adult education or qualification standards. Current statistical information can be found at http://primus.archimedes.ee/node/54.

Finland[96]	
National strategy on validation	Validation of informal and non-formal learning has been on the strategic policy agenda for a long time now and the developments related to the design and implementation of the NQF have given new impetus for work in this field. In accordance with the Decree on the Development Plan for Education and University Research (987/1998) the Government adopts a plan for the development of education and university research within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture every four years for both the year in question and for the following five calendar years. The current Development plan is for the period of 2007–2012.
Legal situation of validation	The legal framework for validation is fairly well developed and education laws make validation the learner's subjective right in many fields of education (including upper secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education). Finnish education laws on general upper secondary education, Initial Vocational Education and Training, polytechnics and universities state that access to studies in these institutes may be granted to individuals on the basis or prior experience even if they do not meet the standard entry requirements. Furthermore, the Act on Matriculation Examination provides school principals with an opportunity to admit people directly to the final examination of the upper secondary school system - Matriculation Examinations. In relation to adult education, the competence-based qualification (CBQ) system offers an opportunity for adults to obtain basic, further and specialist vocational qualifications regardless of how and where their competencies and knowledge have been acquired.
Institutions involved in	Finland has no dedicated validation agency in charge of developing and co-ordinating validation in the country. The Ministry of Education and the National

[96] Anne-Mari Nevala, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Finland* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77460.pdf

validation	Board of Education are the two authorities leading work in this field. However, the Finnish system of validation in the field of adult education (CBQ) is strongly based on tripartite collaboration. Tripartite Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) are appointed by the National Board of Education and they bring together employers, employee representatives, teachers and, when applicable, representatives of the self-employed. In addition, the Committee can include independent experts. There are 152 qualification committees with about 1,000 members. The Qualification Committees direct and develop the competence-based qualification system, make contract with VET institutions on arranging the competence tests, confirm the assessment results and award certificates. Providers of education (VET schools and other VET establishments) are responsible for arranging and supervising the competence tests.
Validation procedures	So far, no common standards or requirement have been introduced for validation that would include all different levels of education. In relation to the CBQ system, the National Board of Education has drafted national qualification requirements for each competence based qualification. The documents specify the areas of assessment and standard/criteria for passing/failing. Each HEI has the autonomy to decide on the way in which they take forward validation as long as they follow the rules laid down in legislation for polytechnics and universities regarding recognition of prior learning. HE institutions are also expected to follow the recommendations laid down by the Ministry of Education and Culture and rectors councils regarding validation of informal and non-formal learning.
Costs	In principle, no funding has been earmarked in the national budget for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. However, the CBQ system has been running since 1994 and it is funded from public sources and built around the principle of validation. Several ESF funded projects have also been utilised to develop tailored validation procedures for immigrants. In the field of higher education, the HEIs have the responsibility to develop and carry out validation from their mainstream budget. In other words, there is no specific budget line for validation, though national development projects have been implemented since 2007 to provide training for personnel from HEIs, including he current AHOT-project for recognition and validation of previously acquired learning, with a budget of nearly one million euro between 2009 and 2011 (EUR 935,000). Validation does not cost anything to individuals in Finland; validation is carried out free of charge. This applies to students at all levels of education from general to vocational and higher education. However, all participants in the QBC system are subject to paying a fee of EUR 50 per qualification whether they study all courses or only take part in competence tests and thereby have their prior learning validated. The EUR 50 fee includes competence tests for *all* parts of the qualification. The fee is seen as a low one as all other costs are paid by the public authorities and this is the only fee for students. Therefore it is not seen as a barrier to learning or validation in Finland.
Benefits	No studies have been carried out to measure the benefits of validation to individuals as such. Among the benefits usually mentioned are access to formal learning and increased motivation. Shortened study times is also considered a benefit, since it in turn can reduce costs for the society - practically all adult students studying towards an IVET qualification have their study time shortened as a result of passing some elements of the qualification just by demonstrating their prior learning in competence based skills tests.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The NQF development process has made a positive contribution to the development of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Finland: It has led to new and intensified discussions about validation of prior learning in the country and learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences)

	have been defined for all levels. It is expected that the elaboration of learning outcomes for each level will make it easier than before to assess prior learning as it can be assessed against the learning outcomes described in the NQF. The possibility to expand the NQF from a qualifications framework into a knowledge framework, which would open the framework for recognition of all prior learning, has also been explored by the working group and future work in this field is expected.
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners are actively involved. Social partners (or individual employer and employee representatives) are involved in the planning and design of CBQ tests in co-operation with (training) organisations, the assessment of candidates and the provision of on-the-job-learning possibilities. Furthermore, they are involved in quality assurance, planning and development of VET and in informing the needs of working life (businesses and employees) to education authorities and organisers.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	The validation of informal and non-formal learning is more commonly used in the context of the competence-based qualification system than in other types of education. The reason is that the CBQ system has been built around the concept of validation and many learners are adults with relevant work experience. Just over a third of competence-based qualifications (36%) are taken in the field of technology and transport (36%). This is followed by commerce and administration (21%) and social and health (20%). *In practice, validation remains minimal in the context of general and vocational secondary education. Significant developments are taking place in higher education where a national development programme is being implemented with a goal of training staff from universities and polytechnics in the validation concept and associated methods.*
Validation statistics	The number of adults taking part in the competence-based qualification system has increased continuously since it was first introduced in 1997. The number of beneficiaries has increased from around 5,000 adults in 1997 to over 65,000 in 2008.

France[97]	
National strategy on validation	Not mentioned.
Legal situation of validation	Since 1985, the validation system in France has been based on a legal framework which is regularly updated after consultation and agreement with the social partners. Validation of prior learning has been established as a right for every citizen in France. The VAE system (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience) stems from legislation introduced in 1992 for qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education and Agriculture, extended to qualifications delivered by the Ministry of Youth and Sport in 1999, and to all main types of qualification in 2002. The most recent change in 2009 aimed to increase the number of individuals accessing the VAE process, in particular private sector workers, and to develop guidance for VAE.
Institutions involved in	The general institutional framework for validation of non-formal and informal

[97] Anne-Marie Charraud , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: France* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77462.pdf

validation	learning is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment, Industry and Finances, which is in charge of lifelong learning. Laws in this field are debated with social partners and Ministries which award qualifications. The entire formal education and training sector is involved in the development of VAE. It is compulsory for all education providers to develop a VAE process for each awarded qualifications, except in the case of qualifications related to regulated professions.
Validation procedures	The current VAE system, established in 2002, is used to deliver whole or partial qualifications. Each Ministry awarding qualifications has developed its own rules for the context-specific implementation of the principles outlined in the legislation. Generally evaluations are made on the basis of a "dossier" or a portfolio where the applicant describes his/ her experience. Further written evidence of the experience of the applicant is also frequently requested in order to support the evaluation. This "declaration" must include details of skills and competences used in their activities. Further evaluation methods include observations of real or simulated working activities, interviews and presentations. Certificates awarded by private actors (firms, sectoral organisations, private training centres) can be recognised after an accreditation process.
Costs	Funding for VAE is included within funding allocated for LLL. In practice, funding may come from different sources: State or regional funding, employers or sectoral bodies managed by social partners collecting taxes from employers and employees in order to finance and develop training. Employers contribute to the cost of VAE of their employees when it is part of their individual training plan, through the contribution they pay to the sectoral bodies. Validation costs vary depending on the awarding bodies, the status of the applicants and the qualification concerned. Two kinds of costs to organisations can be distinguished: Costs related to the design of the standards used for validation and costs related to the VAE procedure itself. Applicants pay registration fees, costs related to the support provided during the validation process (not compulsory but strongly recommended, vary from around EUR 400-1500) and the assessment process (approx. EUR 300). In the case of qualifications awarded under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education by the DAVA (Dispositif académique de validation des acquis), the process is free o charge for the participant, which only bears costs related to the accompaniment. Funding is allocated at national level by the Ministry of Employment to its regional structures, which themselves distribute the funding amongst the regional structures of other Ministries that deliver qualifications and other actors such as enterprises or educational institutions. For example, in the Alsace region, VAE 'vouchers' have been introduced to support validation applicants who do not benefit from unemployment benefits or support from their employer (from EUR 180 to EUR 600, plus an additional flat-rate of EUR 300 to cover the costs linked to the jury set-up, where applicable. Unemployed people can receive financial support for VAE from the Public Employment Service (Pôle Emploi). Additional support is provided by the regions which run specific subsidising programmes.
Benefits	Achieving a qualification through VAE brings personal benefits to individuals, such as improving their personal profile, capacities and self-confidence. It motivates individuals for further studies or training. VAE improves the employability of individuals and may also help the individual in his / her job and/or future career development, as it helps to facilitate internal or external mobility, etc. VAE is also seen as an opportunity to save time and money compared to the cost and duration linked to the acquisition of the same qualification within formal education. In case of partial recognition, individuals can obtain a full qualification, by completing further education or training, or undergoing further (work) experience in order to acquire the missing skills.

Integration of validation within the NQF	In France, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is directly linked to formal qualifications, as VAE specifically aims at the award of an official formal qualification (*certification*). The National Qualifications Directory or RNCP, which was established by law in 2002, is the basis for the French National Qualification Framework. The RNCP and the VAE are interdependent, since a VAE procedure must be available for all qualifications registered in the RNCP except when a qualification is linked to a 'regulated profession' (where activity made without the corresponding qualification is illegal). Very much supported by the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, the French framework can be seen as belonging to the first generation of European qualifications frameworks.[98]
Role of social partners in validation	The validation system in France is based on a legal framework regularly updated after consultation and agreement with the social partners. The main changes are generally made to integrate the outcomes of social partners' negotiations in the field of LLL. Social partners are also involved in the validation process through representatives of employers or employees from fields related to the activities targeted by the qualification concerned by the process.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Since 2002 the validation system was renamed VAE and extended to include all qualification officially recognised by the State and the social partners and listed in the national directory of qualifications (RNCP). Since 2002 a significant investment has been made in the higher education sector in particular to produce standards (référentiels) described in terms of learning outcomes in order to facilitate VAE (all vocational training diplomas are already described in terms of learning outcomes). In addition, in higher education, recognition of professional experience has also been used for a long time (dating back to the 1930s) to allow access to individuals who do not meet formal requirement criteria. Specific initiatives are carried out for example to help job-seekers, the disabled, civil servants, prisoners who want to benefit from VAE, via specific guidance or funding.
Validation statistics	The number of VAE candidates per year is high in comparison to most other European countries, with 53,000 in 2008. In 2010 the number of qualifications awarded through VAE was between 72,000 and 75,000.

Germany[99]	
National strategy on validation	Although the will to promote validation has become more and more explicit in recent years, no overall framework exists and validation in Germany can today still be described as a colourful mosaic of local, regional and national approaches.
Legal situation of validation	In Germany, there is currently no legal framework and no standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level. In vocational education and training, the External students' examination under § 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) includes provision for the validation of prior learning leading to the award of a qualification in a recognised apprenticeship trade. Access to higher education for qualified workers has been

[98] Jens Bjornavold, Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011

[99] Silvia Annen and Markus Bretschneider , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Germany* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77458.pdf

	regulated since 2009 by a decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder.
Institutions involved in validation	Due to the lack of legal framework and standardised system for validation, there is neither a central institution nor a standardised institutional framework. Instead, there is a variety of approaches, particularly below political level (the regulative level): Competent authorities (the Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of industry and commerce and Chambers of farming) are responsible for the admission to the External students' examination; For access to higher education, the German Rectors' Conference has defined the framework for validation. Concrete regulations and procedures are established by the respective university; To establish the ProfilPASS-system, a national service-centre was established in 2005. Currently it supports 55 local dialogue-centres. The system is built up by multipliers who qualify counsellors. The counsellors work in educational institutions or free-lance.
Validation procedures	Different validation methods exist: the ProfilPASS is a well-known system of formative validation for both adults and young people, while the External students' examination leads to the award of a full qualification (there is no difference between this qualification and a regular acquired qualification) in a recognised apprenticeship trade. Access to a higher education course can be granted through the access for qualified workers route. In higher education acquired knowledge and skills can be recognised up to a maximum of 50% if their content and level are equal to the equivalent formal qualifications.
Costs	Data about the total budget is not available; an overall and standardised funding framework does not exist. Funding can come from public authorities, as well as the private and the third sector. Approaches usually target specific groups using specific methods. Periods of funding vary. Chambers are responsible for information, counselling and validation in respect to the External students' examination. They are funded by contributions from their member companies. Candidates pay for preparatory courses and examination fees for the final examination. If candidates are sent by companies, usually the companies pay for the preparation and admission to examination. The Employment Agency also plays a part and currently has an initiative for accompanying the structural change in addition to standard funding. Information, counselling and validation are included within the general, federal funded, budget. Since the approaches proceed differently, it is also difficult to make precise statements of the costs to individuals. The ProfilPASS, originally funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the EU, the approach is now financed partly by the distribution of ProfilPASS-folders (each folder costed EUR 27.90 in 2010). Even though specific estimates on costs on validation cannot be maid, the OECD Report makes an attempt to provide some general knowledge to costs related to CET (Continuing Education and Training): - The expenditure of general CET providers was EUR 1.46 billion in 2003. In their turn, they are financed by tuition fees, grants from the Länder and local authorities, and third-party funding. - While the national education report claims that EUR 23.9 billion was spent on CET, the Expert Commission on Financing Lifelong Learning came to a figure of around EUR 32.0 billion (based on various studies), of which about 54 % was contributed by companies and only 18 % by individuals. The methodological differences that come into play when gathering information on costs are even more significant than when reporting on participation in CET, for example the

[100] OECD Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal Learning in Germany 2008 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/47/41679496.pdf

	basic assumption as to what constitutes expense and what does not.[100]
Benefits	The External students' examination leads to the award of a full qualification (there is no difference between this qualification and a regular acquired qualification) in a recognised apprenticeship trade. An analysis of the benefits of the External students' examination was carried out at the beginning of the 1990s (Hecker 1994). Vocational improvement, higher job-security, better chances for personal development and future perspectives were identified by the survey as the main results of the examination. Similarily, a ProfilPASS survey of counsellors and users mention increased awareness of one's own abilities and competences, as a result of this a growing motivation for further learning activities and the chance to respond better to vocational challenges. There have also been individual inquiries about practice and benefits of portfolio approaches that lead to similar results. These benefits arise even if a complete procedure of a validation is not performed. The steps of identification and documentation contain processes of self-reflexion and awareness-raising about learning results and own competences. This benefit is a precondition for a possible "hard" benefit. As noted by the OECD 2007 Report[101], "Young people aged 19–24 and people without a vocational qualification have a particularly positive opinion of the benefits of CVET and it is they who tend to experience the greatest change".
Integration of validation within the NQF	The current working status of the German Qualifications framework (DQR) is expected to support the shift towards the learning outcome principle, which will facilitate access for learners without formal qualifications. A special Federal-Länder-Coordination-Group has started to analyse curricula and further regulating documents of exemplary German qualifications from general, vocational and higher education and to classify these qualifications within the DQR. At first, however, only formal degrees are assigned. Learning outcomes that were acquired informally or non-formally are to be assigned after the completion of the DQR as well, but they have not yet been considered.
Role of social partners in validation	The social partners (Chambers) are involved (as 'competent authorities') in the delivery of the External Examination and they are also involved in the development of the National Qualifications Framework.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Many different approaches to recognition and validation of prior learning have been developed at regional and national level for different target groups in recent years. The External students' examination addresses people with vocational experience and legitimises admission to a final examination in a recognised occupation that normally requires formal training in the dual system. Access to higher education also addresses people with vocational experience who do not have the formal qualification that is usually required for access to university. To avoid the effects of discrimination, the ProfilPASS-system has been developed as a non-target-group specific approach. However it is targeted for different target-groups and there is for example a specific ProfilPASS for young people.
Validation statistics	Data on beneficiaries is difficult to find. The data report in the annual report on vocational education and training contains an overview of the number of candidates completing an external examination - about 29 000 p.a. of which about 77% passed the exam. Since 2006 the ProfilPASS has been used by more than 80,000 people, of which half were adults (43,000) and the other half young people (41,600).

[101] Ibidem

Greece[102]	
National strategy on validation	The effort for a coordinated policy for lifelong learning has started recently and so far no national strategy exists.
Legal situation of validation	The legal framework for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is currently being developed. The recent Law 3879/2010, passed in September 2010, aims to address the shortcomings of the Greek education and training system and brings all further training and adult education under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. The law discusses all types of education and training, including informal and non-formal learning.
Institutions involved in validation	The Ministry of Education is responsible for the coordination of all issues related to lifelong learning. Two institutions specifically dealing with validation are foreseen by the 3879/2010 Law: a) an institution that will be responsible for certifying the *inputs* to lifelong learning (the occupational profiles, training centre infrastructures, trainers, training programmes, training materials etc). This role will be performed by the existing EKEPIS institution which is renamed from 'National Accreditation Centre of Continuing Vocational Training' into 'National Accreditation Centre of Lifelong Learning Structures' maintaining the same acronym, EKEPIS. b). A new institution responsible for certifying the *outputs* of lifelong learning, i.e. the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals will acquire during learning is set up. The title of the new institution will be the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications (EOPP). The private sector has taken some initiatives to cover the gap created by the absence of a validation system for informal and non-formal learning, especially in the fields of language learning and ICT skills, but there is no overall certification system for assessing and recognising competences.
Validation procedures	A national system of validation has not yet been developed. This can be attributed to both the difficulty of evaluating non-formal and informal learning and to the conflicting interests of professional associations who feel that their professional rights might be threatened with the establishment of a validation system. Currently, the Greek government certifies foreign language learning and knowledge on Informatics and ICTs through two validation initiatives: validation of non-formal language competences through written and oral exams, and validation of ICT competences.
Costs	The system of the certification of Greek language competence (and the accompanying Greek Language courses that lead to such certification) are co-funded by national and EU funds, under the Operational Programme 'Education and Lifelong Learning' for the period 2007-2013, while accreditation of professional bodies entitling them to issue certificates on Information Technologies, which to date has been carried out by the Organisation for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK), is supported by national funds. Information on costs for individuals is not comprehensive, but the OECD report provides some insights: Participation in GSAE adult education programs, as well as assessment and certification (when provided) are free of charge. The certification procedure for recognition of computer skills is funded by the beneficiaries, which pay an application fee of 50,00 to 70,00 euros and an examination fee of 30,00 to 35,00 euros for every learning module (there is an

[102] Anna Manoudi , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Greece* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77459.pdf

[103]OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal learning: Country Background Report Greece 2007 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/56/41721594.pdf

	option of seven in total).[103]
Benefits	The ECDL Certification (European Computer Driving License), constitutes an essential qualification for participating in examinations for employment in the Greek Public Sector and is officially recognised by the Greek State, the OEEK and the organisation for the examinations for employment in the public sector (ASEP). This is also one reason explaining the impressive attendance of candidates in the programmes of acquisition of ECDL in Greece. In the provisions for employment in the public sector, it is stated that only ICT competence certificates that are published by institutions certified by the OEEK are accepted and ECDL is such a certificate. The ECDL certificate is also recognised by private sector employers.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Forthcoming legislation is to introduce a NQF and create an integrated system of validation of informal and non-formal learning: The Law 3879/2010 introduces a NQF)for Lifelong Learning, which is intended to create an integrated system of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Greece. The planned EOPP will be responsible for the creation and development of the NQF and its correspondence with the EQF; the correspondence of qualifications gained through non-formal and informal learning with the NQF levels; the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and the issuing of permits and the monitoring of bodies validating non-formal and informal learning.
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners are actively involved in the development of the NQF and the designing of occupational standards, which can be seen as one step towards a system for validation of informal and non-formal learning.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Currently, the Greek authorities only issue certificates to accredit prior learning in relation to language and ICT skills. However, it can be noted that up until early 2010, EKEPIS had accredited 283 Vocational Training Centres (KEK) with 560 training sites and with a capacity of 45,510 training places. The way in which the learning acquired in these training centres will be validated, will be determined in future. These centres specialize in nine thematic fields regarding technical and transport professions, agricultural, environment, education, health and care, culture, sports and economy professions. Moreover, 34 Specialised Centres of Social and Labour Integration for disadvantaged groups have been certified with 38 sites and 1 789 training places. Their future role in relation to validation is still unclear at this stage. In Greece, for cultural reasons, formal educational attainment, especially at University level, is held in high esteem. However, there is a lack of a training culture, while non-formal and informal learning are not valued. Moreover, the lack of a system for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Greece lowers the motivation of learners to participate in lifelong learning.
Validation statistics	With regards the existing initiative to certify foreign language learning, during the period 2003-2009 the following numbers for the participation in the exams for the state certificate of Language Proficiency were recorded: Participation in the examination of the English language: 160.550 (rate of success: 48.16%); French language: 17.565 (rate of success: 50.46%); Italian language: 25.674 (rate of success: 47.50%); German language: 26.703 (rate of success: 51.15%); Spanish language (2008-2009): 1.063 (rate of success: 70,62%). In relation to the aforementioned certificate of ICT competences, in 2006 61.392 people have so far participated in the exams in order to be accredited in the use of Information Technologies. In relation to private sector initiatives, 20.000 unemployed persons and soldiers participated in the ECDL certification programme.

Hungary[104]	
National strategy on validation	It is not yet possible to speak of a functioning nationwide system based on uniform principles and procedures for the validation for non-formal and informal learning in Hungary. A system is still under development. Partly as a result of EU initiatives, several national policy documents have now included the objective of the recognition of non-formal learning. The most important of these documents is the government's Lifelong Learning Strategy, which was produced in 2005. The document set out the main approaches and formulated the development goals for which funds are provided in the context of the relevant operational programmes of the First National Development Plan (2004-2006) and the New Hungary Development Plan (2007-2013).
Legal situation of validation	According to the Act on Adult Training, which came into effect in 2001; "Adults applying for training may request the preliminary assessment of their level of knowledge, which the training institute shall evaluate and take into consideration". This is limited to adults entering into a general, vocational or language training programme provided by an adult training institution operating under the Act on Adult Training.
Institutions involved in validation	At present there is no organisation or institution responsible for the creation, operation and further development of the validation system. Development takes place in the context of separate projects. Adult training providers are in charge of delivering prior learning assessment practice. From 2003 to 2005 an experimental project concerning the assessment of prior learning in adult education and training was conducted by the former National Institute for Adult Education. The Ministry of Education and Culture supervises the work aimed at developing a validation model for higher education. At the present stage of development an idea is taking shape to create a "knowledge centre" type institution that would, in the long run, undertake professional activities related to the introduction and further development of the validation procedure. ECDL examination takes place in separate training centres.
Validation procedures	The work carried out by the adult training providers is sometimes considered as an early form of assessment, which potentially could be used as a basis for validation. Currently, validation is being carried out mainly through language and computer skills certificates. In higher education, a system level development will be implemented within TÁMOP (SROP), the biggest government development programme to address validation. The project is managed by the project managers of the NQF and it aims to develop a validation model that can be implemented in higher education, as well as formulating proposals regarding its introduction. The main goal of this project is the development and testing of a voluntary 'validation model' operable for higher education.
Costs	The costs of prior learning assessment (which is only possible for adults) in the adult training sector are borne by the training provider (training providers themselves are funded by the state, by employers, by participants, or by a mix of these). The procedure itself is free to adult students entering training, regardless of how the training provider is financed. Costs are basically "hidden" as there are no calculations regarding the cost items of assessment or any other related services as such. The costs of credit transfer in higher education are borne by

[104] Éva Tót, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Hungary* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77461.pdf

	the HEIs concerned. In general, one of the main challenges is the lack of a clear and transparent financial regulation on sharing of the costs and benefits among the interested parties. Actual figures of funding are only available for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) examination system, where participants cover the costs (between EUR 15 and 40). According to the 2006 OECD Country Report[105], the costs for the development of assessment tools carried out by the Institute of Adult Education amounted to approximately 530.000 EUR, through which 53 training institutions received funding for the infrastructure development necessary for carrying out assessments (setting up workstations). This funding was used to finance the development of special-purpose software and the drawing up of the assessment tools (tests). No calculations have been made of how much it costs to assess an individual's prior learning. According to training institutions, costs depend on how many individuals are assessed altogether – how far the assessment flows in a "production line" fashion. Hungary has also received various EU-funding for validation and LLL related initiatives.
Benefits	There is no evidence-based evaluation on the benefits to individuals. There are only assumptions concerning these benefits and the motivation of the individuals (i.e. that it is a shorter and more cost-effective way to get a qualification).
Integration of validation within the NQF	A NQF is currently under development. The development of the NQF and the validation system are interconnected as they rely on a learning outcomes-based approach in the formulation of the education and training requirements. This close connection is reflected also in the fact that the two development projects are organised under the same project management.[106] However, student-centred learning, outcomes-based orientation and use of learning outcomes in designing programmes and learning units are still a key challenge in the HE sector.[107]
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners are consulted in the NQF process.[108]
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	There are very conspicuous sectoral differences in implementation, a feature that generally characterises the Hungarian education and training system and developments. Thus the connections between the management of public education, higher education, vocational education and training and adult training have been very weak to date, and as a result developments in the various sectors are separated from one another. Of these sectors VET and adult education and training are most receptive to validation. Currently there are some isolated but very successful validation procedures of validation such as the European Computer Driving Licence examination scheme and foreign language proficiency examinations. Initiatives to develop recognition

[105] OECD Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Country Backgroud Report Hungary http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/52/41679667.pdf

[106] Eva Tót, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Hungary* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77461.pdf

[107] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

[108] Ibidem

	of non-formal learning on a larger scale are driven by the government (several national policy documents refer to this objective, including the 2005 Lifelong Learning Strategy), with the strong influence of the European Commission initiatives.
Validation statistics	There is very little data available on the number of participants in existing validation initiatives in Hungary. The ECDL examination can be seen as a unique skill assessment and certification programme. According to data from ECDL Hungary nearly 400 accredited examination centres have been set up nationwide. Although similar systems are in operation, in Hungary, thanks to strong management, the ECDL examination has become widely used. By February 2009 335,000 people had registered in the system (of which 210 000 people had been awarded the certificate). According to the number of participants, Hungary is eighth among the ECDL countries. According to Educational Authority statistics, more than 175,000 people passed a language proficiency examination. There is no data regarding the numbers that have acquired their skills outside the framework of formal training.

Ireland[109]	
National strategy on validation	Not mentioned.
Legal situation of validation	The legal framework for all matters including validation is the Qualifications (Education & Training) Act, 1999. The Act, while referring to recognition of prior learning, does not legislate specifically for a detailed validation system but rather brought into being a range of institutions which through their policies and procedures has ensured that validation is now a key issue and one which is being addressed by all sectors of the educational system.
Institutions involved in validation	The Qualifications Act established entities that have had a significant impact on the educational landscape in Ireland. These include the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the awards bodies for higher and further education, the Higher Education & Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education & Training Awards Council (FETAC). The work of the NQAI has been the single biggest contributor to the development of policies and practices in the field of RNFIL. The NQAI has a responsibility to develop the use of RNFIL throughout the Irish System and to ensure as far as possible that the developments take place in a coherent manner, and that there is a degree of harmonisation, if not full compatibility, across the systems devised for the different educational sectors. There are seven universities in the Republic of Ireland, all of which are autonomous in terms of degree awarding status and the validation of awards. Technically the universities are not governed by the NQAI or the decisions this body makes but in reality the universities are now fully committed to the NQF. *Note:* Due to the economic crisis and following the work of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes, Government has announced that the NQAI will be merged with the awards bodies, the Higher Education & Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Further Education & Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Irish Universities Quality Board.

[109] Dermot Coughlan, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Ireland* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77464.pdf]

Validation procedures	The Qualifications Act allows for RPL to be used for access, transfer/progression and the awarding of full awards. In HE systems differ somewhat and the components depend on the specific way validation is applied (i.e. access, exemption or full award). The assessment may include applications portfolios, interviews, tests etc. In further education each education provider can develop their own system, provided that they conform to the general guidelines of FETAC.
Costs	The funding of Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (in Ireland referred to as simply RPL) is difficult to address from a number of perspectives: the expenditure associated with RPL is not insignificant and has been increasing in recent times, but the allocation is being done in a defused manner – main source is central government funding, with additional resources secured from the European Commission and minor amounts from industry and the professions. One of the difficulties is the fact that up to recently, RPL initiatives could emerge from at least two principal Government Departments. The extent of the funding made available through central government can be gauged by an outline of the funding made available as part of the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF): 139 MEUR was made available through the two rounds of SIF, of this 35.2 MEUR was allocated to areas related to Lifelong Learning and Teaching and Learning. Not all of this was directly related to RPL but from it emerged very significant work in this area. Principal amongst these was the Education in Employment project, which was a dedicated RPL project. Generally RPL is financed by public providers of education and training from within their overall budgets. In recent years, the vast majority of the funding for RPL initiatives has come from specific projects such as the SIF funding. Anecdotal evidence from institutions and employers regarding their RPL activities suggests that RPL is a resource-intensive activity. The majority of the costs are those required to provide advice and guidance to candidates and to structure and carry out the assessment of the candidate. Some costs decline over time or as activity expands, e.g. administrative and certification costs. In addition, it can be noted that costs differ according to the particular kind of RPL intervention, e.g. costs are generally lower for access to programmes and higher for access to full awards/qualifications The problem with this approach is that much of the costs are absorbed into the general budgets of those involved and a true costing is then never calculated. This, coupled with the fact that detailed data on the level of RPL activity is not collated in any meaningful way, means that a genuine costing is impossible. Finally, there is not accurate information collected regarding the time spent by advisors and guidance professionals. To date the practice of charging the individual learner a fee has not been universally applied but as the budgets of educational institutions continue to be eroded it is possible that the practice will become more widespread. In some cases employers contribute to industry-wide initiatives, but the extent of this income is unknown as no data is collected.
Benefits	The benefits of validation have not been reported upon other than in general terms. On a policy level, there is clear evidence emerging from the actions of central government that education and the re-skilling & up-skilling of the labour force are seen as key drivers for economic recovery. On an individual level, learners have been clearly enthused by the fact that their experience cannot just be recognised but that values can be attributed to it and consequently their educational journey is less fraught with difficulty and barriers. There is also broad acceptance that the special targeted programmes such as the Labour Market Activation Fund (LMA) have had a positive impact in raising the esteem and self-worth of individuals, but all of this evidence is anecdotal and prompts the need for further examination of this issue. In terms of RPL, it will be worthwhile in due course to examine how many of the funded projects had included it as part of their offerings and if it was successful.
Integration of validation	The development of the practice has been significantly enhanced through the

within the NQF	continued work being undertaken pertaining to the development of the NQF. As a result of the major developments, which have seen the Irish Framework fully referenced to the EQF, RPL issues have emerged as important developments and as they have arisen they have been addressed, albeit not in great detail.
Role of social partners in validation	The role of the social partners has many facets. Since the 1970s, Ireland has had a series of what began as national pay agreements but which, beginning in the 1980s, developed to become agreements on a broader range of social issues, including education and training. Employers and Trade Unions, through their central role in these agreements, have driven many of the education and training reforms and special initiatives such as Skillnets, SIF and LMA to name a few. Specific validation programs are also set in place by social partners in areas such as aviation, hospitality, engineering and nursing.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	There is clear evidence that institutions across all sectors of the educational cycle outlined in the NQF are using RPL, but the level of uptake and the uniformity of the practises remain unclear.
Validation statistics	The collection of data is a weakness in Ireland. It is possible to obtain some statistics from pilot studies and other 'one off' initiatives but an overall picture is hard to develop. For instance the The Cork Institute of Technology published some material indicating that, 1,060 portfolios of prior experiential learning were submitted over the period 2000- 2006. At the University of Limerick, the National Council for Exercise and Fitness (NCEF), has processed 421 applications for RPL from September 2007 to May 2010. The vast majority of these applications were for access and were successful.

Italy[110]	
National strategy on validation	No national strategy seems to exist, but some recent Government initiatives are expected to lead towards the introduction of a validation system in Italy, such as The White Paper of the Ministry of Labour (2009), Italia 2020 – An action plan for employability of young people, and Guidelines for Education in 2010.
Legal situation of validation	There is no specific legal framework related to validation, but the Ministerial Decree No. 270/2004 affirmed the possibility for the Universities to recognise "the knowledge and professional skills certified according to the existing legislation as well as the other knowledge and skills gained in training courses at a post-secondary level in which the university contributed in design and delivery". Also, Italian legislation (Legislative Decree 469/1997) entrusts the Regional and Provincial Authorities with the programming, organisation and implementation of a wide range of "employment services" (including reconstruction and recognition of competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning and skillmatching in the labour market).
Institutions involved in validation	A wide range of institutions are involved, which partly has delayed the process of introducing a national system of validation. Despite the difficulties, national and regional institutions, for example the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, social partners and employers' associations at national level and representatives of the Regions have tried to establish a set of professional standards of reference for the

[110] Elisabetta Perulli and Gabriella di Francesco *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Italy* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77467.pdf

	promotion of initiatives of validation of non formal and informal learning. In addition, there have been initiatives to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning in the form of credits within University courses.
Validation procedures	Until now, the design, formalisation and implementation of institutional systems and devices aimed at validation of non-formal and informal learning has only been fully developed at a regional level: In recent years, some Italian regions have introduced tools for the validation of informal and non-formal learning, making it an individual right (e.g. Emilia Romagna and Toscana), linking it to the recognition of credits for the access to formal training or education (Valle D'Aosta, Lombardy, Marche, Umbria) or using it to promote the employability of jobseekers (Veneto and Lombardy). Centres for Lifelong Learning (CAP) are academic centres operating at regional and national level also in partnerships with enterprises and pubic administrations. One of the main purposes of CAP is to help individuals to validate non-formal learning (as credits toward the university programmes the individual is interested in), and to personalise training pathways according to the previous experience acquired in other contexts and to facilitate the access of adult learners and / or employees to validation. Schools, VET and University Systems (and related providers) 'receive' students who apply for the recognition of (training) credits based on the value given to previously acquired competences. The practice of credit recognition requires a clear outline of the criteria, tools and methods that are necessary to carry out this process. In Italy, self-assessment and evidence collection methods are preferred instead of external testing and assessment methods. However, sometimes these processes may suffer from a lack of validity and reliability, due to the lack of external objective assessment
Costs	Funding for validation programmes is almost entirely derived from public resources and mostly from the European Social Fund (ESF) or the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. There is no official information about the costs of validation procedures. However some information is available for example in relation to the *Libretto Formativo* (a strategic tool for the development of a national validation system). In tests, it has been found that 8 - 12 hours of staff time are required to complete the competence analysis of an individual, excluding the eventual assessment sessions and the formal certification. From this data it can be estimated that the validation procedure will cost EUR 500/1000 of staff costs per individual. There are no validation programmes in Italy in which a direct cost for the individual is envisaged.
Benefits	There is no reliable data available to evaluate the benefits or results of the existing validation methods. Potential benefits that are mentioned include: – Shortened learning pathways to achieving/completing formal certificates; – Greater opportunities for the recognition and certification of experience; – Economic benefits in the form of increased wages; – Increased motivation / self-esteem / confidence; – Opportunities for individualised training / career planning; – Increased transferability of competences; – A better understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, to inform career development;

	– A means of better presenting oneself to employers. Other potential benefits mentioned by stakeholders in the 2008 OECD Country report[111] include: possibility of reducing dropout rates, and thus raising internal efficiency rates; and greater prospects of reaching employment and training targets set at the European level and adopted as a frame of reference in national programming documents (the percentage of individuals with upper secondary-education certificates and university degrees, etc.).
Integration of validation within the NQF	Although there is a significant interest from policy-makers, the development and institutionalisation of a national system of validation and certification of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning has been delayed, in particular due the absence of a National System of Qualifications and the diversity of institutions involved in this matter at national, regional and local level. During 2009 and 2010 national developments have further encouraged the recognition of learning acquired outside the formal education and training context in line with plans to set up a NQF.
Role of social partners in validation	The Social Partners are involved in almost all processes of the Italian validation system, in order to ensure it functions well. On 17 February 2010 an agreement between the Ministry of Labour, the Regions and Social Partners was signed, concerning training and general policies to be jointly implemented through the year. The agreement envisages the national qualifications system as the fundamental basis for efficiency and transferability of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is mentioned as an important aspect to develop in relation to competitiveness and lifelong learning. Italian labour legislation measures give also enterprises the authority to 'recognise' individual qualifications whether acquired in a training setting or in non-formal or informal contexts. In such cases, the process of validation of non formal and informal learning is connected with the role of private Institutions (for developing continuous training.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	A number of local experiences have been implemented in Italy applying to various sectors/ levels of education, but there is no comprehensive approach to validation.
Validation statistics	The European Inventory Country Report does not provide any specific statistics, but it does state that "Some significant experiences of validation of non formal and informal learning can be found within programmes and initiatives financed by public resources."

Latvia[112]	
National strategy on validation	Recent policy and legislative documents have supported the concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning. One of these documents is the revised national Lifelong Learning Strategy "Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013". The strategy's action programme identifies the definition of the procedure of validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside

[111] OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal learning: Country Background Report Italy 2008 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/33/41712650.pdf

[112] Agnese Rusakova and Prof. Andrejs Rauhvargers *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Latvia* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77471.pdf

	of the formal education system among the tasks to be carried out during the period 2008-2013.
Legal situation of validation	The system on validating professional competence obtained outside formal education legally was established by adopting the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Procedure how professional competence obtained outside formal education system is assessed" (February 2011). In vocational education, a system (except tertiary levels and regulated professions) will be put in place via an amendment of the Vocational Education Law. The Vocational Education Law states that: 1) the assessment of vocational competence performed by accredited education institutions shall take into account the requirements of the respective Occupational Standard; 2) The accredited education institutions and accredited examination centres can be delegated to perform the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning. 3) The regulation on the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning is defined by the Cabinet of Ministers". As regards the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (also in the field of higher vocational qualifications), the draft Law on Higher Education has been submitted to the Parliament for approval and is still awaiting its adoption at the time of writing of the Inventory report. There is no clear deadline for its adoption.
Institutions involved in validation	The Ministry of Education and Science develops the framework regulations for both academic and vocational education and accredits providers. It also creates and updates the register of Occupational Standards and makes proposals for the allocation of funds from the state budget. Through the recently adopted amendments of the Vocational Education Law the Ministry of Education and Science will coordinate the validation system of professional skills acquired in learning other than formal learning. Within the Ministry, the Department of Higher Education, Department of Vocational and General Education and the State Service of Education Quality all play their role in validation. Other institutions involver are the Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil, the Latvian Rector's Council and the Higher Education Council.The institutions assessing professional competence may be accredited education establishments or examination centres, which have been assigned by the State Education Quality Service.[113]
Validation procedures	The methodology for assessing non-formal learning and skills defines a procedure for the vocational qualifications system, namely for acquiring vocational qualifications from level one to three, without affecting the tertiary levels and regulated professions. The obtained certificate will be identical to the one acquired through formal learning and will not contain any indication that the document has been obtained through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In June 2011 first qualifications were awarded using this procedure.[114]
Costs	In the draft "Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers on the validation process of competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning" it is planned that validation candidates will have to cover the costs for the service of completing the process of validation of non-formal learning. Thus it will not affect the budgets of the state or the regional local government. The institutions or examination centres that have been delegated the task of validation will have to provide guidance prior to the validation free of charge. The adopted Vocational Education Law states that the draft amendments to the Law will promote competition among the educational institutions and examination centres in

[113] Jens, Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

[114] Ibidem

	providing a quality service of non-formal learning validation. It will also promote settling objectively reasonable and proportionate fees, as the Cabinet of Ministers will quote publicly the fees of the services provided by the institutions licensed to validate non-formal learning. They will make sure that the fees do not exceed the costs of the validation procedure and thus will make sure that the rights and possibilities to obtain the assessment are not infringed for different target groups. At the same time the action programme "Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013" emphasises the accessibility of formal and non-formal learning by for example considering possible motivational measures (tax reductions). There is a monthly allowance available to unemployed people wishing to undertake non-formal learning.
Benefits	The benefits to individuals are currently only evident at the theoretical level, in concepts and guidelines elaborated by the policy makers. Potential benefits of the forthcoming validation system include for example: Reduced period (terms) of education; Reduced education fee; Better career possibilities; Increased possibilities of mobility; Increased individual competitiveness on the labour market; More opportunities for further education; and Flexible learning pathways. During the approval of the *"Methodology of Validating Non-formal Learning and Assessing the Skills"*, four potential applicants for validation were involved in testing the methodology. Even though the initial attitude towards validation is rather positive, it was evident that it is necessary to discuss the benefits of and need for the procedure and its components with social partners and other representatives, since the concept is rather new to individuals and many uncertainties create a hesitant and reserved attitude.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The introduction of a National Qualifications Framework and the development of a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning are twin objectives.
Role of social partners in validation	The Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Subcouncil is part of the National Tripartite Cooperation Council (an institution working at national level, where the appointed representatives of Government, Employers' Confederation of Latvia and Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia collaborate). The Subcouncil is taking care of elaborating and updating the Occupational Standards and their relation to the educational programs, it is responsible for organising vocational further education in the lifelong learning framework; it coordinates the creation and activities of Sectoral expert councils. It will also provide experts for conducting the validation process at the delegated validation institutions and/or examination centres. National cycle descriptors for the NQF have also been elaborated in cooperation with social partners.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	The policy on validation in Latvia during the period of economic downturn is targeted primarily at individuals who are willing to achieve a vocational qualification – an official certificate – with the aim to enter the labour market and the possibility to further acquire competences which they are lacking, if they are not awarded a full qualification.
Validation statistics	According to the estimated results to be achieved in the following years, as stated in the "Programme for Implementation of Guidelines for Lifelong Learning 2007-2013 in 2008-2013", the number of beneficiaries in 2010 were expected to be 100, with a 5-10% increase annually. However, taking into account the delayed development of the legal framework, these numbers most probably will not reflect the real situation of validation at least by the end of 2010.

Lithuania[115]	
National strategy on validation	Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a new concept in Lithuania as such, although practical implementation has been rather slow and so far based on single initiatives. Several strategic documents (Strategy on Vocational Guidance, Strategy Paper on Lifelong Learning and their action plans, Strategic Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2003-2012 and Single Programming Documents for 2004-2006 and 2007-2013) have set out concrete measures for the further development of a national knowledge and competence assessment system, including the validation of non-formal learning experiences. These documents call on the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry and Social Security and Labour to implement respective measures.
Legal situation of validation	An early impetus was provided by the White Paper on VET (1998) through the principle of 'formal recognition of the acquired qualification, irrespective of how it has been acquired'. Since then legal acts defining the procedures for the formal recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal (including vocational training and adult education) or informal learning have been adopted.
Institutions involved in validation	The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) shapes and implements State education policy. The Ministry organises matura examinations and confirms the Procedure for final qualification examinations, including the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences. In relation to the validation of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal vocational training, vocational schools and labour market vocational training providers (regional labour market training centres) have an overall responsibility to offer all necessary support leading towards final qualification exams to an applicant seeking to validate knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education. There is no clear stipulation in the legal acts in relation to validation of non-formal and in-formal learning at universities. If such possibilities are created, they are usually developed by the universities as their own initiative.
Validation procedures	An overall institutional model of validation of non-formal and informal learning achievements is not established as yet. The process mainly relies on scattered ad-hoc initiatives.
Costs	Most of the national level initiatives are funded by the ESF with co-financing from the state budget. International projects and various EU funding streams in the field of education and training are now included under the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig etc.). Existing possibilities of validation of non-formal and informal learning usually require applicants to contribute with a small fee to cover administrative costs. The absence of a national approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning, standardised procedures, and an institutional framework drives the costs up for individual stakeholders, for instance companies / NGOs and others using certain competence assessment methods and procedures for their individual operational needs. High costs to organisations are among the main obstacles to greater take up and the development of validation initiatives among

[115] Rasa Juciute , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Lithuania* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77469.pdf

	the potential providers of these opportunities. Only larger entities (companies, NGOs, trade unions, employers' associations, sectoral organisations etc.) can afford the investment required in terms of time, expertise and sustainability of the process. Validation of non-formal and informal learning offered by education and training providers requires a financial contribution by the individual. One common basic fee is applied for every application submitted; then a second fee is based on the volume and level of certificates applied for. Overall, the actual fee is not high (just to cover administrative costs) and it is always much lower than a fee for study programme credits / modules offered by education providers as part of formal education study programmes.
Benefits	It is an early stage for any generalisations, but available anecdotal evidence suggest that further career development and improved self-esteem are among the main benefits for individuals of validation of non-formal and informal learning.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Assessment / recognition (validation) of qualifications is an integral part of the NQF and consists of three main elements: assessment regulations, assessment methods and assessment and recognition institutions. A national project is currently being planned to focus on the development of the content of these elements. Meanwhile the system of standards is still incomplete and only vocational education and training standards are in place. VET standards are used for validation purposes but mostly in the case of validation of competences for the unemployed (as a labour market policy measure). Occupational standards are being developed further and it is the responsibility of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre to manage this process within the ESF programme for the Development of a National Qualification System.
Role of social partners in validation	Amendments to the Law on Vocational Education have broadened the powers of stakeholders (employers and trade unions) in VET and now they are more closely involved within the entire VET organisation and delivery process. Stakeholders are legally obliged to participate in shaping VET policy, initiate the development of new qualifications, occupational standards, VET curricula, provide content contributions and support for the development of VET standards and training programmes. In addition, since 2006 the responsibility for running final qualification exams at VET schools was also fully transferred to the network of Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Crafts and the Chamber of Agriculture and includes the entire cycle of tasks from designing examination material and providing assessors to award qualifications. Validation of non-formal and informal learning achievements at vocational schools is also assigned to the remit of their responsibilities.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Recognising non-formal learning in admission processes has been implemented by most education providers and study programmes for years, whereas the award of qualifications through validation of competences is currently in development.
Validation statistics	Numbers of beneficiaries are so far relatively low but are gradually increasing.

Luxembourg[116]	
National strategy on validation	The system of validation of non-formal and informal learning is not yet fully unified but further developments are expected, as recommended in the 2009 governmental programme.
Legal situation of validation	In Luxembourg, a legal framework consisting of complementary legislations to support validation of non-formal and informal learning exists. At this stage most sectors/levels of learning are concerned. However, general compulsory education has not been targeted so far.
Institutions involved in validation	The Ministry of Education and the University of Luxembourg are the main stakeholders in the validation of non formal and informal learning processes leading to certification. In the area of adult learning, the Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre (LLLC), the training department of the Chambre des salaries, is noteworthy.
Validation procedures	Regardless of the level/sector concerned, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is being, as a minimum, introduced as a way of accessing formal learning. Vocational secondary education certificates and diplomas as well as vocational upper secondary qualifications (e.g. *brevet de maîtrise*) can be achieved by individuals who have not followed formal education beforehand. The only requirement is to introduce a formal request *(dossier)* to have their prior informal or non-formal learning validated. To do so, they must supply evidence that the total length of their prior learning amounts at least three years and is effectively related to the certificate/qualification desired. This validation model is similar to the VAE (*validation des acquis de l'expérience*) system offered in France. With regard to higher education, the law of 19 June 2009 notably specifies validation related rules for programmes leading to higher technician certificates (*Brevets de Technicien Supérieur* or BTS). The following specificity is worth being noted: whilst these programmes are offered by upper secondary schools which fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, resulting diplomas are overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education. At University level, the legislation creating the University of Luxembourg in 2003 includes an article allowing a prospective student to request a *'validation des acquis de l'expérience'*, which is effectively a validation of non-formal and informal learning of the candidate, as a substitute to certification or other proof of having undertaken the formal education required for entry to the university. In the field of adult learning, the *'Règlement grand-ducal'* (17 June 2000, revised 18 May 2007) regarding the organisation of adult learning allows in certain cases, the admission to courses (giving access or shortening the length of the regular training) for candidates who do not meet the regular requirements, providing that they have relevant previous professional experience, which can be validated.
Costs	Validation of non-formal and informal learning in the VET and non-university higher education sectors (programmes leading to BTS) is publicly funded. In these sectors, the '*validation des acquis de l'expérience'* falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and a budgetary line is specifically

[116] Oberheidt, Stephanie, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Luxembourg* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77470.pdf

	devoted to this activity. This budgetary line covers the fees allocated to the members of the validation commissions, the costs for training the latter, administrative and management costs, etc. This budgetary line is fixed on a yearly basis accordingly with national budgetary rules. The Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre (LLLC) for adult learning is funded with EU support: EUR 4.5 million was allocated by ESF to the centre for 2009-2010. In the case of the LLLC, the validation process cost EUR 150 in total per certificate. Other costs associated with the process are the costs required to pay the practitioners involved in evaluation committees. In the case of validation processes in the VET sector, individuals are only required to pay EUR 25 for the formal submission (*droit de timbre*) of their application. The rest is fully free of charge for the applicant. No information was found on the costs to individuals at university and in the adult learning sector.
Benefits	No data with evidence of benefits of validation to individuals was found. With the exception of the LLLC which has carried out validation processes for some years, such processes are rather new in the VET and higher education sectors.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The concept of validation is clearly referred to in the forthcoming NQF.
Role of social partners in validation	The principal private sector stakeholders in the training and lifelong learning sector in Luxembourg are as the chamber of commerce, the chamber of crafts, the *Chambre des Salariés* (representation group for all workers) and the *Institut de Formation Bancaire*, Luxembourg –IFBL (Institute for training in the banking sector). The above-mentioned professional chambers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, deliver formal apprenticeship schemes. Validation procedures are in place in this area. In addition, the *Chambre des salariés* (which has been formed from the merging of the former *Chambre de travail* and *Chambre des employés privés*) has set in place provision for validation of skills and competences for candidates to its adult education evening courses in continuing vocational training. The *Chambre des salariés* offers evening courses to adults in a variety of vocational subjects, including ICT and administration, accounting and management, law and sales. The courses are delivered by the Luxembourg Lifelong Learning Centre (LLLC), the training department of the *Chambre des salariés*, and on completion of six modules learners are delivered an official diploma by the Ministry of Education (although it does not constitute a formal state qualification).
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Currently, validation according to the legislation concerns most sectors/levels of learning: vocational secondary and upper secondary education, vocational higher education, university level and adult learning (general compulsory education is not covered).
Validation statistics	Little data is available on the number of beneficiaries to date.

Malta[117]	
National strategy on validation	The Government, in its effort to meet the targets set out in the Lisbon Agenda, is committed to developing a framework and administrative structures for the validation of informal and non-formal learning as part of the country's National Reform Programme for the period 2008-10.
Legal situation of validation	There is currently no overarching legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta - the legislation which regulates the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Malta is still in draft form.
Institutions involved in validation	In Malta the Ministry of Education, Employment and Family has the ultimate responsibility for the entire education system. The regulation of the NQF is under the responsibility of the Malta Qualifications Council, (MQC) which has recently taken a number of important steps towards the development of a system of validation, including consultations, collaborative pilot studies, etc. Following legislation, Sector Skills Councils will be established and occupational standards for the different sectors will be developed.
Validation procedures	The MQC intends to develop a decentralised system of assessment, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, which will ensure that the standards and guidelines are respected through internal and external verifiers. Before a system of validation is implemented, it is intended to establish a number of Sector Skills Units, with the role of identifying the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their sector. These units will identify the different jobs in their particular sector, outline the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform these jobs and map these against the National Qualifications Framework. They will also ensure that the validation institutions are meeting the required standards set out for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Sector Skills Units will also be responsible for the validation process as well as training institutions. The University (and its institutions) is responsible for its own validation procedures.
Costs	The details of the funding framework for validation have not yet been defined and no study has been conducted to verify the costs of the validation of informal and non-formal learning to organisations. It is also yet to be determined what the costs to individuals of the validation procedures will be. For participants in EU-funded projects, participation is usually free of charge.
Benefits	Systematic studies on the benefits of validation to individuals have not been carried out in Malta. However, the policy document '*Valuing all Learning IV*' outlines the following key benefits for learners of the introduction of a validation framework: Increased self-confidence as learners – which can lead to better motivation for further learning; The opportunity to better plan their career; Access to better and more informed career guidance support; and wider opportunities for lifelong learning.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The Government is committed to developing a framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning as part of the country's National Reform Programme for the period 2008-10. The MQC has been tasked with implementing a new national qualifications framework for the country.
Role of social partners in	It is envisaged that representatives of employers and employer associations,

[117] Katerina Mantouvalou , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Malta* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77472.pdf

validation	workers and professionals and trade unions will be members of the aforementioned sector skills units, which will be set up by the MQC. Enterprises are also already working independently to validate their learners' informal and non-formal learning.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation procedures are highly scattered and incomprehensive. National, private and third sector organisations use different tools of assessment.
Validation statistics	Information is not available, since a validation system does not exist. Data on validation in companies and the third sector is not collected either.

Netherlands[118]	
National strategy on validation	With the publication of *De Fles is Half Vol!* ("The glass is half full!") in 2000, a first step towards lifelong learning using the Accreditation of Prior Learning (*APL*; *EVC* or *Erkenning van Verworven Competenties*) was taken in the Netherlands. A national working group on EVC formulated a broad vision on EVC and the implementation process. Practices already in use for some years were disseminated and the quality-issue of the procedures was addressed by developing a national quality-code on EVC.
Legal situation of validation	There are no specific laws regarding validation, but validation of non-formal and informal learning is well developed and embedded in existing education acts. There is however an informal right for citizens without a formal starting-qualification to obtain this level of qualification. He/she can enter any VET school and start a learning programme towards this goal. In VET, the Law on Adult & Vocational Education (WEB, 1996) was the basis for developing a national standard for the recognition and certification of acquired skills. For Higher Education, the WHW law on higher education and scientific research regulates the admission and exemption policy in higher education and stipulates the possibilities for RPL in higher education.
Institutions involved in validation	The Kenniscentrum was the main institution responsible for setting up the Quality Code for EVC. Presently, the Ministry of Education is responsible for maintaining this Quality Code and overcoming the bottlenecks in the process. It is expected that in the future this responsibility will be taken over by an intermediate organisation or a conglomerate of such organisations. The government focuses on the infrastructure and on the quality of EVC and the EVC system. The government stimulates the use of EVC with a communication campaign (Ervaringscertificaat), subsidies for regional partnerships, a fiscal facility for EVC, the knowledge centre EVC, platforms with experts and companies, the regional learning and working desks, subsidies for the Ervaringscertificaat during the economic crisis (2009-2011), research into the use, the success and failure factors and the effects of EVC. A regional infrastructure policy was put forward in the working plan for 2005-2007, *Strengthening Learning and Working*. The ministries of Education, Culture and Science, of Social Affairs and Employment, of Agriculture and Nature Management, and of Economic Affairs, were all involved. Other stakeholders are social partners and vocational training institutions. Colo is the association of 17 Dutch National Centres of Expertise on Vocational

[118] Ruud Duvekot, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Netherlands* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77473.pdf

	Education, Training and the Labour Market (KBBs). These 17 Centres of Expertise jointly represent more than 40 different branches of industry. Colo stimulates dynamic interaction between the labour market and vocational education and represents its members on local, regional, national and international levels. The qualification structure, developed by the Centres, is used as a basis for EVC procedures.
Validation procedures	Educational institutions have signed agreements with the government to carry out EVC procedures and guarantee a minimum quality standard of these procedures. The '*Ervaringscertificaat'* is the formal procedure in which a candidate can get accreditation of his/her learning outcomes. A candidate who wants to reflect his/her prior learning outcomes on a qualification, has to fill in a portfolio (showcase) in which s/he can demonstrate how his/her learning experiences match with the competences in the qualification s/he has chosen. In an assessment s/he is judged and gets a report stating all learning outcomes that match with the learning outcomes that are defined for the chosen qualification. With this Certificate of Experience (*ErvaringsCertificaat*) s/he can turn to an awarding body (the exam committee) of a school or university. Only the awarding body is allowed to turn the advice into an official exemption. This awarding body can decide on exemptions in the learning programme. On the basis of these exemptions it is possible to achieve a (partial or full) qualification. In VET and HE, the autonomous institutions decide for themselves how to use the results of EVC procedures (the extent to which these results lead to exemptions or a diploma). The government plays no part in this, but does ensure that the procedures meet quality assurance standards In HE, EVC is primarily an instrument for awarding exemptions, but can also be used for admittance. Within higher vocational education, an important development is the introduction of the Associate Degree programmes. An Associate Degree programme is a two-year programme within the HBO-bachelor programme that leads to a new legally recognised qualification: the Associate Degree (AD). This education programme is intended for workers and students entering from MBO (Secondary Vocational Education).
Costs	Over the years 2005-2010, the Dutch government invested nearly EUR 100 million in lifelong learning including EVC at upper secondary and higher vocational education levels, in developing a regional infrastructure for learning and working and in promoting EVC. Now, EVC is financed in different ways by different stakeholders. Sectoral Training and Development Funds often finance agreements on EVC. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these sector funds, which were originally set up to support educational initiatives for employees in the sector. In January 2007, the Dutch government extended a tax facility to EVC applicants. In 2007 an EVC procedure for level 3 and 4 (Vocational education) cost between EUR 800 and EUR 1 300. For higher vocational education this was between EUR 1 000 and EUR 1 500. A grants scheme has been set up to promote prior learning assessment and recognition (EVC) in higher education and tailor-made programmes for working and learning. Also, when EVC is not funded by the government or the social partners, the individual user can fiscally deduct the costs for EVC. EVC is fiscally considered as a cost for learning and all costs above EUR 500 are tax-deductable.
Benefits	The Dutch European Inventory country Report does not report any documented evidence on benefits, but refers to an extensive list of potential benefits, including developing confidence in own competence, gain official qualifications, employability, reintegration to labour market etc.
Integration of validation within the NQF	At the moment there is no NQF in the Netherlands. There is however a working group established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences to work on setting up a National Coordination Point for translating Dutch qualifications to the EQF.

Role of social partners in validation	Social partners stimulate the use of EVC by collective labour agreements. In most cases social partners, sector organisations and regional vocational training institutes (ROC's) are involved in setting up EVC procedures. The further design and implementation of validation remains to be developed as a strongly labour-market driven process in which the government expects the social partners to take responsibility and steer the EVC-process. Also, Colo has a tripartite board consisting of representatives from employers, employees and the national vocational education bodies (laid down in the statutes of the association). Social partners are specifically responsible for defining and updating the occupational profiles, which form the basis of the qualification profiles. At regional level, most regional training centres (ROC) have a representation of social partners in their supervisory board.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation is comprehensive, but it is important to note that Dutch higher education is a binary system of higher vocational education (HBO) and of universities (WO). EVC is embedded in higher vocational education but not in universities (academic levels; apart from the Open University).
Validation statistics	The number of *Ervaringscertificaten* awarded has increased during the last couple of years, from 9,900 in 2007 to 12,500 in 2008 and 15,700 in 2009. This meant that in the period 2007-2009 the number of awarded *Ervaringscertificaten* has grown with more than 60%. For 2010 33 000 Ervaringscertificaten were expected.

Poland[119]	
National strategy on validation	A new strategic document, the 'Perspective of lifelong learning', is being prepared by an interdepartmental team of experts. Its main aim is to highlight the two dimensions of lifelong learning (taking account of the potential of nonformal and informal learning) as well as the learning outcomes (indicating the need for assessment and recognition of competences as learning outcomes, irrespective of the method, place and time of their acquisition)
Legal situation of validation	The current legal framework in the field of education does not define the concept of validation and there are no regulations at central level addressing validation of learning outcomes achieved in a mode other than formal education. The legal environment has been gradually adjusting to meet the demands in this respect and different aspects of non-formal education are regulated by separate legislation. In particular, the legislation from 2006 adopted specific arrangements whereby professional/vocational skills acquired through employment can be validated through qualification examinations. The new regulation also introduced mechanisms for awarding partial qualifications in recognition of competences obtained as a result of completing training in a non-school setting, and for recognising partial qualifications obtained in this way by adults who take up study in schools for adults providing vocational education and training.
Institutions involved in validation	In the vocational education and training sector, four areas of validation can be distinguished together with various bodies that are responsible for them: Central Examination Commission (*Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna*, CKE) and eight District Examination Commissions (*Okręgowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna,* OKE) in

[119] Aleksandra Duda, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Poland* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77475.pdf

	charge of examinations confirming vocational qualifications in the formal education system; Chambers of crafts supervised by the Polish Craft Association that carry out master and journeyman exams, which are treated as a part of formal system of vocational education; Sectoral organisations/branch associations (e.g. Accountants Association, Polish Federation of Engineering Associations, the Association of Polish Electricians) which organise training, exams and certification; Institutions/organisations that carry out validation of informal and non-formal earning through various, often ESF-funded, projects. In adult continuing education, several levels of state administration are in charge, with the key responsible bodies at the central level including: The Minister for National Education, whose competences include formulation of overall policies concerning education; The Minister for Labour and Social Policy, who lays down conditions and procedures for attending training and other forms of vocational activation by the unemployed and job seekers; The Minister for Finance, who proposes the budget assumptions for a given budget year and tax allowances; and the Minister for Science and Higher Education, who is responsible for administration, preparation and implementation of the strategy and policies for the development of higher education. Although not decided on yet, the formation of a central, supra-departmental body coordinating the processes of examination and validation was listed by the team of experts as one of the key conditions for a proper implementation of the NQF and comparability of qualifications.
Validation procedures	One of the long-established practices of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in private sectors in Poland is the training and examination for craftsmen and candidates for particular certificates in craftsmanship. These examinations can be taken by both young people who have completed vocational education and training in crafts, and adults wishing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through work and theoretical training. The openness and accessibility of this track of examination for these two groups make it different from exams carried out by OKE and correspond in a way to validation of informal and non-formal learning. The most common validation method applied in Poland represents a mixed approach. It usually consists of an examination in the form of a test of work activity (*próba pracy*), based on checking the practical skills, accompanied by a theoretical part (written or oral examination). The institutions responsible for formal education (schools, universities) also have the power to issue appropriate types of certificate and diplomas. A separation of educational activities from those related to organising the validation process was recommended by the NQF expert team as a necessary step in the implementation of a lifelong learning policy.
Costs	There are no studies regarding the costs to organisations in Poland. Resources for the validation of non-formal learning may come from: state and local government budgets; special-purpose funds: e.g. the Labour Fund, State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons; programmes supporting vocational activity of people with disabilities; foreign assistance funds – i.e. World Bank loan; European structural funds and enterprises. For individuals, the external examination is free of charge. Sectoral exams are usually financed by the applicants (who can apply for the reimbursement of the examination fee at the labour offices). In the case of private schools, the learners are obliged to pay for the tuition. As for the training organised by the public employment services (mainly the district labour offices), the beneficiaries of such education are not charged.
Benefits	Building on the experience of the 'Let's build together' project from Olsztyn, it can be said that a key benefit to individuals from participating in a validation initiative is an opportunity to confirm their skills and obtain a certificate without bearing any costs. Among the most important motivations specified by the respondents were: to increase their employment opportunities (35%) and to obtain a certificate (22%). The evaluation of this project also revealed that the validation of competences acquired through non-formal learning had a positive impact on the self-esteem of its participants and their desire to improve their competences. Accordingly, almost all respondents who participated in the project felt encouraged to undertake further training (98%).

Integration of validation within the NQF	The new Polish Qualifications Framework model has been drafted in January 2010 and work on it will continue until 2012. Parallel to that, a system for validation of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal system will be developed.
Role of social partners in validation	Employers are actively involved in the NQF development. In general, the private sector shows a high level of interest in the implementation of the validation system.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	A fully-fledged system of validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal or informal learning is not yet in place. Plans are in place to introduce a comprehensive validation system.
Validation statistics	There is no systematic and comprehensive statistical data available regarding the situation (including that of beneficiaries) of non-formal and informal learning in Poland.

Portugal[120]	
National strategy on validation	The New Opportunities initiative, launched in December 2005 by the ministries defines a strategy for national education and training in Portugal, aiming to raise the qualifications level of the population to secondary level (12th grade), to reinforce vocational and technical paths as real options for young people and to develop basic and secondary education and vocational training for the working population. Validation processes are an important axis of the measures in place to meet these goals.
Legal situation of validation	In 2001 the National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (SNRVCC) was created. In HE, recent legislation allows access to adult students who do not meet the standard admissions requirements based on the recognition of prior learning.
Institutions involved in validation	The SNRVCC was created by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, under the coordination of the National Agency for the Education and Training of Adults, *(ANEFA),* which launched the first network of Centres for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies in 2000. From 2004, responsibility for the SNRVCC was held solely by the Ministry of Education, but it became a joint initiative of both Ministries again in 2007, under the responsibility of the National Agency for Qualifications (*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, ANQ*). The ANQ, created in 2007, is now the body responsible for the coordination of the national system of validation, as well as the development of young and adult education and training policies. ANQ's activities are developed in strong cooperation with the Employment and Vocational Training Institute (IEFP), with social partners and other organisations from civil society. The underlying principle is that these stakeholders should work together and share responsibilities according to their own aims and missions. Under the coordination of ANQ, the New Opportunities Centres were created in 2007 to develop processes for the recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC processes). By April 2010, the national network of New Opportunities Centres was composed of 454 centres. The New Opportunities network of centres is constituted by a large range of institutions: national organisations of education and training, such as vocational training centres, basic and secondary schools, professional schools, entrepreneurial associations, enterprises, local and regional associations, and local authorities. At the level of Higher Education, the

[120] Ana Luisa Oliveira Pires *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Portgal* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77477.pdf

	responsibility for validation is devolved to the universities and polytechnics themselves. According to a recent law, institutions have autonomy to develop their own strategies and methodologies in order to give credits to nonformal and informal learning.
Validation procedures	The National Skills Certification System (SNCP) is a system that regulates the access to professional activities in the labour market. The SNCP is being reformulated under the developments of the ongoing Vocational Training reform. The SNCP certifies independently the way in which the professionals acquire the skills — vocational training, work experience or training in another country for example. The Vocational Aptitude Certificate (*Certificado de Aptidão Profissional*, CAP) is the certificate that allows people to perform a specific occupation; it certifies that a person has the necessary skills to pursue a specific occupation. A Certifying Body issues the certificate for a set period of time (established case by case). In order to renew the certificate, individuals have to prove that they have up-to-date skills. Individuals with professional experience can get a CAP through the process of RVCC.
Costs	The national financing programme POPH (*Programa Operacional Potencial Humano*) - partly supported by the ESF structural funds - is the main source of funding for validation processes at the basic and secondary level, developed in New Opportunities Centres under the national coordination of ANQ . This financing covers most of the expenses of a NO centre (human resources, facilities and equipment and current expenses). It is not possible to obtain specific information about the budget allocated to validation within the POHP – it is simply part of the work of the NO centres and is not allocated ring-fenced funding. According to ANQ information, the cost of an adult certification in a NO centre increased from 1000 Euros in 2008 to 1600 Euros in 2009, approximately. Shortage of human resources, cash flow difficulties and the nature of the process are identified as barriers faced by the validation centres. HEI's use their own financial budget to develop validation processes. Institutions determine specific fees for the validation and crediting processes, which vary largely. Since HE institutions are autonomous, they can determine their own procedures and fees. There are institutions where candidates pay on a basis of number of credits awarded and others where candidates pay for the process as a whole, regardless of the number of credits claimed.
Benefits	The survey carried out by CIDEC in 2007 reinforces the results of the 2004 CIDEC survey — essentially the positive effects of the RVCC process on the individual selfesteem, self-worth and self-knowledge, reconstructing life plans, facilitating employability (the process seems to reduce discouragement and has an impact on the motivation to find work, bringing the unemployed closer to the labour market) and raising motivation to continue studies. The influence of having a diploma on the transition from unemployment to employment is limited, more specifically in the lower group of certification (6th grade of schooling). Although the percentage of people that returned to formal studies is very low, the RVCC process seems to motivate people to pursue formal education, at least in terms of raising expectations. In the group of lower level certification, RVCC also seems to be associated with pay rises (for 25% of employees). According to Fernandes (2009) the results of the two CIDEC studies emphasised the capacity of the RVCC process to activate the unemployed: around one third of unemployed adults who acquired a certificate found a paid job after six months of completing the process. Case studies developed in the external evaluation published in 2009 provide further and up to date evidence of the benefits to individuals: the development of competences (such as literacy and ICT competences) with impact on their personal and social lives, the reinforcement of self-esteem and motivation towards future learning. The improved sense of responsibility and participation in civic life is also a perceived benefit for individuals. However, individuals certified at the basic level do not have

	expectations towards a professional improvement, while individuals certified at the secondary level have developed expectations towards new educational pathways (in HE or specialised training) and towards new professional opportunities (mainly greater professional mobility). Other academic research also reinforces the evidence that the main benefit of the process is related to the personal dimension.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Development and implementation of the comprehensive NQF in Portugal aims to further develop the national system of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC) and to give new impetus to promote attractiveness of vocational training. It is now fully integrated into the national qualifications system and framework.[121]
Role of social partners in validation	The private sector is involved in the delivery of validation, but at different levels. The NO initiative has developed more than 500 protocols linking private enterprises, associations and federations, including public entities and enterprises. The aim is to improve the qualification of workers within the framework of the SNQ through qualified training; to identify training needs in enterprises and to improve the content of National Qualifications Catalogue; and to facilitate the professional insertion of young people in the labour market. A group of large enterprises — mainly belonging to tourism, telecommunications and distribution sectors — have created internal validation centres under the NO initiative.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation is comprehensive, but in HE there is a considerable diversity regarding validation and institutions are free to determine their own validation practices
Validation statistics	According to ANQ data 324,370 adults had been granted a certificate through RVCC processes by April 2010. Since 2007, 55 % of those granted certificates were women and 45% were men. The age-group 35-44 years is the most represented (39%), followed by the age-group age 45-54 years (25.8%) and by 25-34 years (23.2%). In April 2010, there were more than 1 million adults enrolled in the New Opportunities Centres; and nearly 150 000 were attending Adult Education and Training Courses. In the HE sector, the widening of tertiary education to new sectors of the population through the new access regime students aged over 23 years is increasing: the number of adults entering tertiary education (mainly at first degree level) by this means has risen to 11,775 in the academic year 2007-2008, compared to 10,850 in 2006-07.

Romania[122]	
National strategy on	Not mentioned.

[121] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

[122] Carmen Juravle, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Romania* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77479.pdf

validation	
Legal situation of validation	In Romania, there is a legal framework in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to professional competences. More specifically, Law 253/2003 which widened the duties and competences of the National Council of Adult Training (CNFPA), made reference to the assessment and certification of competences acquired through CVET organised in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. Later on, the Governmental Ordinance 76/2004 laid down the foundation for the validation centres as institutions accredited by the CNFPA to conduct assessments for the recognition of a professional competence based on occupational standards. The Ordinance also made reference to the importance of evaluating and recognising competences gained through non-formal and informal learning. Order No. 4543/468 of 23 August 20042 of the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family (completed and amended by Order No. 3329/81 of 23 February 2005) finally laid down the procedures for the assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning.
Institutions involved in validation	The CNFPA has the role of National Authority for Qualifications, with responsibility for the coordination of the National Registry of Qualifications. The CNFPA also has the overall responsibility for validation of non-formal and informal learning at the national level. More specifically, the CNFPA is responsible for the authorisation of validation centres and for the certification of individual assessors of professional competences. CNFPA is also responsible for issuing formal certificates which record the achievements of an individual following the assessment procedure. A new Law of National Education of 12 April 2010 stipulates that the CNFPA will be merged with the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic Environment (ACPART), to form a National Authority of Qualifications. It is envisaged that this will provide for a better link between validation and the qualifications framework at the national level. As of July 2010, there were 52 validation centres in the national registry of centres authorised by CNFPA, dealing with the assessment of competences for 112 qualifications in various fields, e.g. social work, agriculture, construction, administration and public services, ICT, tourism, hotels and restaurants, the retail trade, food industry, forestry and wood processing, and welding. The Centres can be specialised departments in private companies or training centres, as well as recruitment agencies or other types of organisations that meet the authorisation criteria laid down by the CNFPA.
Validation procedures	Professional competences are defined as *"the ability of a person to use theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and specific attitudes to carry out the activities required at the workplace"*. These competences can be either vocational or general. As a result of the validation process, individuals can earn competence certificates, which may be used (in principle) by beneficiaries to be admitted to a course either in compulsory education or in HE (requiring certain qualifications as entry requirements).The competence certificates can also be used to request an exemption from attending a certain unit of a formal study programme. However, no practical examples have been identified to support these statements. Also worth noting is that a person can only acquire complete qualifications. The methods used in the evaluation of professional competences include "self-evaluation, direct observation, oral test, written test, project-based evaluation, simulation or structured observation, reporting or evaluation by others".
Costs	Validation centres must pay an authorisation fee to CNFPA for each occupation or qualification they wish to be able to deliver, ranging from 140 to 412 EUR. Other costs borne by validation centres are operational costs as well as personnel costs. The resulting revenues go into the state's budget. The greatest majority of the revenues of validation centres come from charges to beneficiaries, as well as ESF funding for cofunded projects. There are no rules regarding payment for validation services. In some cases, the beneficiaries pay a fee based on the level of certificate.
Benefits	Stakeholder mention various individual benefits of validation, such as enhanced

	employability, professional credibility and self-esteem. It should be also be noted that in the labour market, the qualification certificates based on the validation and certification of competences have the same value as certificates for participation in formal training.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The system of validation of non-formal learning has been set up as a parallel system to formal VET. The link to formal system has not been established yet and the results of validation of non-formal and informal learning are not recognized in the formal system (i.e. certified competences through validation can not facilitate entry or mobility in the formal education system). However, the new Law of National Education adopted in 2011 provides for better integration of validation and national qualifications framework at the national level. According to this Law, professional qualifications awarded via validation can be related to all levels of the NQF.[123]
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners are involved in the development of the NQF and Romanian employers have generally become more interested in validation of non-formal and informal learning. In the private sector, there are a few examples of Romanian private companies that have made efforts to develop their own validation methodologies.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation has so far mostly been confined to non-academic sectors and recent validation projects mainly show a focus on professional/vocational skills targeting specific groups. Validation can be related to higher education qualifications but this area is still in its infancy. One validation centre (*Centrul de Pregatire in Informatica)* offers HE level qualifications in the IT field for various occupational standards. No examples of university-led projects on validation were identified.
Validation statistics	Between 2006 and 2009, the 72 assessment centres authorised by CNFPA have issued over 25, 000 certificates for 150 occupations or qualifications. In October 2010, the total number of certificates was up to 28,000. Certificates were issued for different occupations, the most common being construction, social assistance, agriculture and commerce.

Slovakia[124]	
National strategy on validation	Not mentioned.
Legal situation of validation	The main emphasis of the Slovak approach to recognising non-formal and informal learning, as set out in the law on lifelong learning (568/2009 Z.z). The law addresses a) quality assured non-formal further learning recognised at national level through a register of accredited further education programmes; b) recognition of non-formal and informal learning in view of achieving full or partial qualifications by accredited education and training institutions.
Institutions involved in	The Ministry of education in cooperation with representatives of: employers,

[123] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

[124] Daniela Uličná, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Slovakia* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77480.pdf

validation	employees, regional authorities, education and training institutions and central public administration is in charge of definition of qualifications in the qualifications system and design of standards Assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning according to (full or partial) qualifications standards are done by assessment commissions organised by education and training institutions (schools or higher education institutions) accredited specifically for this procedure. Only education and training institutions who are accredited to provide formal education and training leading to the specific full qualification can also be accredited for recognition of NFIL for this full qualification.
Validation procedures	There are three main ways in which non-formal and informal can be validated and recognised in Slovakia: Assessment, validation and recognition in view of achievement of a full or partial qualification (referred to in this text as recognition of non-formal and informal learning in view of full or partial qualifications);Validation of learning activities that are not undertaken as part of full time school participation in the form of individualised education plans; and recognition of professional competences to deliver a trade licence. Individuals can only achieve full or partial qualifications that are a maximum of one level higher than the level of education they have achieved through formal education and training. Qualification (both full and partial) is defined in relation to the practice of professional activities and access to an occupation. Consequently, not all certificates delivered after the successful final assessment following the participation in an accredited further education programme are qualifications in this sense. Some certificates are not related to an occupation or are too small in scope to correspond to all activities of a profession. Therefore there can be nationally recognised certificates of non-formal education and training that are not qualifications. It is up to the accredited education and training institutions to choose the exact assessment method to be used in line with the occupational activities for which the qualification prepares and the assessment standard. The law on lifelong learning defines that there has to be a theoretical and a practical part and these can take form of written, oral or practical assignments or their combination. Given the very early stages of the implementation of this process it is not yet clear what the actually used assessment methods will be.
Costs	The approach to recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as the accreditation of non-formal learning and the design of the qualifications system and its register is planned to be funded through the ESF Fund and the Operational Programme for Education. The accredited education and training institutions accredited for recognising full or partial qualifications can raise fees from participants. The maximum amount is stipulated in the law on lifelong learning: maximum EUR 300 for the first assessment and maximum EUR 100 in case the learner has failed the first assessment and requested a second additional assessment. This fee is meant to mainly cover the human resources and possibly material needed to carry out the assessment. Accredited institutions have to be able to provide the technical equipment and other material resources needed to carry out the assessment. Education and training institutions wishing to obtain an accreditation will have to pay a fee that will cover the costs of the accreditation process.
Benefits	The procedure is only in a very early stage of implementation. The direct benefits expected are related to the enhanced possibilities of individuals to practice professions where a qualification is required.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning was completely unrelated to the qualifications system or the formal education and training until the law on Lifelong Learning. The aim of the NQF is to create a system environment that will support comparability of learning outcomes achieved by various forms of

	learning and education and to enable recognition of real knowledge and competences independently of the way they were acquired.[125]
Role of social partners in validation	The private sector, as organised in employers' and sectoral organisations, has an important role in defining the qualifications system and the qualifications standards. Private companies can also become accredited providers of non-formal learning under the law on lifelong learning. In fact, in Slovakia, currently the majority of requalification courses as well as continuing vocational education and training are provided by private institutions. Such accreditation gives their certificates issued after final assessment national value.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	In theory, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning defined in the law on lifelong learning applies to both vocational education and training, and higher education. The practical aspects of how it will apply to higher education still need to be defined. One of the obstacles to the application to higher education is the fact that higher education is based on accredited programmes and not on full qualifications based on qualifications standards as such. There is a willingness to ensure that at least components of Bachelor degrees should be achievable through recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
Validation statistics	No data is currently available with regard to recognition of non-formal and informal learning in view of full or partial qualifications as the implementation process has only just started.

Slovenia[126]	
National strategy on validation	In Slovenia, validation of non-formal and informal learning is an important element of the National Strategy for Life Long Learning.
Legal situation of validation	The National Vocational Qualification Act (NVQA), adopted in 2000 (last revision 2009), makes it possible for individuals to obtain a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in recognition of prior learning and experiences through the assessment and verification of vocation-related knowledge, skills and experiences acquired outside of formal education.
Institutions involved in validation	The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs is responsible for National Vocational Qualifications, for the coordination between social partners and for continuing vocational education and training. The Ministry is responsible for the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning and publishes occupational standards, verifies educational and training institutions and finances the NEC for the assessment and certification of non formal and informal learning. Several institutions are involved in validation. The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education trains accredited assessors and vocational advisors for the validation of prior learning (in relation to adult learning). The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (NIVET) is the National Reference Point for national vocational qualifications which includes databases on vocational standards, catalogues of standards of subjects of specialisation for assessment as well as providers of procedures for the assessment of national vocational qualifications. The National Examination Centre (NEC) is responsible, among

[125] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

[126] Veronika Tašner , *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Slovenia* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77461.pdf

	other things, for developing methodologies and procedures of assessment and validation of professional knowledge and competences, in relation to all types of qualifications. It is also the main body responsible for monitoring the work of the examination bodies for validation and assessment of national vocational qualifications. When in 2007 rules on the assessment of knowledge in vocational education and continuing vocational education were connected into the same system, it became obvious that the education field needed an interdepartmental body. The validation procedures that require nationally agreed learning outcomes, regardless of the way they were acquired, obliged the institutions that cover vocational education and adult education to cooperate and formulate common criteria for the validation of non-formal learning. This task is performed by the National Council of Experts for Technical and Vocational Education.
Validation procedures	The NVQA established a certification system and regulates the procedures, bodies and organisations for approving standards for different vocational qualifications, which are approved by specific committees. Assessment and validation of knowledge and skills in the vocational qualification system is provided by a relevant commission, which examines the documents submitted and other evidence or the candidate's portfolio and determines whether the candidate meets all the requirements defined by the catalogue of professional knowledge and skills. In HE, a national system of recognition does not exist. Recognition in the field of HE is very loosely regulated and it is up to HE institutions to define in their accredited study programmes "the criteria for recognition of knowledge and skills gained before enrolment into the study programme".
Costs	There is no overall budget for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovenia. In 2008, the project introducing renewed VET programmes in VET schools (including setting up a framework for validation) started with the financial support of the European Social Fund. The main responsibility for implementation and financing of the National Plan of Adult Education is in the Ministry of Education and Sport and by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. On average 50 MEUR are allocated each year to the National Plan of Adult Education (150.000 participants annually). For example, *Project learning for young adults* is co-financed to the value of EUR 1.2 million a year. According to the 2007 OECD National Report, individuals who file an application for NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) acquisition are obliged to pay the costs of the procedure for obtaining the certificate, ranging up to 140 EUR (in 2004).[127]
Benefits	The 2007 OECD national report for Slovenia[128] gives some information based on experiences from NVQ assessments on the benefits of validation of non-formal learning for individuals. Positive effects of NVQ certification have been recorded at individual, local, entrepreneurial and national level. Employers praise a possibility of speedier adaptation of the labour force to new needs of the employers, as well as highlighting reduced time and lower costs of NVQ acquisition in comparison with school education programmes. Recorder benefits include: - young drop outs from formal VET programmes have a new and quicker chance

[127] New OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Draft Country Background Report Slovenia 2007 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/4/23/41680347.pdf

[128] Ibidem

	of achieving a qualification - people with no qualifications or low qualifications and work experience have the opportunity to gain a qualification and improve their employability – a study on the benefits of NVQs for social caretakers shows that the certificate enabled long term employment, higher pay, better professional knowledge, better communication skills, especially with their employer, and improved self esteem – analysis dealing with the implementation of a system of national vocational qualifications shows that successfully acquired NVQ stimulates people to continue their education, improves employability, affects self-esteem and promotes personal growth.
Integration of validation within the NQF	The NQF is under development. The national professional qualifications and the validation of non-formal knowledge in Slovenia are based on assessment qualifications catalogues (catalogues of standards for professional knowledge and skills).[129]
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners participate in the development and delivery of the validation of informal and non-formal learning by planning vocational and professional training at all levels, defining occupational standards, and adopting and implementing training programmes.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	There is currently no national system of validation covering all sectors/levels of learning. The concept of validation of non-formal learning was introduced in VET schools in 2007.
Validation statistics	In the youth sector, by 2008, more than 3,000 young people had used the Nefiks record book which is can be used to describe non-formal and informal learning. In addition, over 5,000 young people had signed up to use the electronic version of the record book.

Spain[130]	
National strategy on validation	Not mentioned.
Legal situation of	There are a number of Acts which make up the legal framework for validation of

[129] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

[130] Noel Alonso, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Spain* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77452.pdf

validation	non-formal and informal learning in Spain. In 2009, the Royal Decree on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience established the procedures and requirements for the validation of professional competences acquired through work experience and non formal learning processes. The Qualifications and Vocational Training Ac (2002), established the creation of a National System of Qualifications and Vocational Training. The Act introduces flexibility, allowing vocational education and training to be linked more closely to the labour market and allows the accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, although it does not specify how the latter should be carried out. In addition, the Act enables the Catalogue of Professional Qualifications to act as an observatory of the economic sectors. The catalogue is a compendium of the standards of professional competences in the labour market, and serves as a reference in the design of VET qualifications and professional certificates. A new decree to regulate validation procedures in Higher Education has been drafted and will be finalised by the end of 2010.
Institutions involved in validation	The government is responsible for establishing the procedures and prerequisites for the validation of professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. As a result, the State Public Employment Service Ministry of Labour and Immigration, the General Directorate of Professional Education and the Ministry of Education; have put in place a joint Committee to guarantee the development of the validation process. Also, the General Council for Professional Education acts as an advisor in the process and evaluation of results. The Committee works together with the Autonomous Communities to regulate the evaluations of professional competences. The competent authorities at regional and local level (Education Departments, Education General Directorates, etc.) set up the calls for examination and requirements and inform the Committee, as well as carrying out the validation process. The evaluation and accreditation of professional competences must relate to modules or qualifications in the Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. The National Institute for Qualifications (INCUAL) is responsible for updating the Catalogue. In June 2010 the Catalogue included 454 vocational qualifications from 26 educational and training areas, according to INCUAL. The National Reference Centres on Vocational Training are some of the authorised centres for the instruction and implementation of validation procedures.
Validation procedures	The reference points for evaluation and accreditation are the competence units of the Catalogue of Professional Qualifications which are also used as references for the official diplomas on vocational training (and occupational aptitude certificates. In HE, since the 1970s individuals aged over 25 without upper secondary education have been entitled to access HE upon satisfactory performance in 'over-25s' HE access exams – although without receiving a secondary school qualification through this process. Later, from the early 2000s new measures were put in place at national level in order to further recognise competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Today there are some opportunities for validation in relation to HE and now also professional competences (up to a certain level). There are standards in place to support the implementation of validation, although not in relation to Higher Education, since HEIs are autonomous and at the moment devise their own standards for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. At Higher Education level the Ministry of Education is currently working on a new regulation on validation. The new regulation will establish the procedures to validate non-formal and informal learning up to 15% of an undergraduate degree or master degree. The VET Decree of 2009 is restricted to only some levels of competence and the calls for examination will only apply to certain economic sectors each year. The first joint call for validation of professional competences will be carried out in 2011 and will only cover some competences. It is planned that other competences will be included in the calls launched in the following years.
Costs	The Spanish central government has made a commitment to fund the new

	validation process for professional experience, with the CCAAs (Some Autonomous Communities) providing partial funding in the future. At the moment, there is no private funding or funding from the third sector, but the private sector can support individuals in their applications. In addition to the CCAAs' initiatives on validation, many regional, local and EU-funded initiatives have been set up in parallel. In 2008, the budget for the Roadmap planned to allocate over EUR 30 million to the evaluation and accreditation of non-formal learning associated with professional competences for the period 2009-2010. However, there was a delay on the implementation of the process and the figures for the first year of implementation changed. Nevertheless, Spain is one of the few European countries with specific funding designated for validation. The central administration now funds the first call for applications in 2011. According to the Ministry of Education's calculations, training costs for each practitioner will be EUR 300, as well as each application. During 2010, 3.000 practitioners will be trained and it is expected that 8,000 individuals will apply to the 2011 call; which in costs is MEUR 3.5.
Benefits	No specific study on benefits is referred to in the European Inventory Country report. Assumed benefits include: Individuals validating their professional competences will be able to prove their experience and will acquire a formal qualification in a specific module or unit. The counselling will also provide individuals with information on the requirements of other modules to complete a full qualification. Formal qualifications provide individuals with a comparative advantage in the labour market compared to those without any qualifications.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Spain is currently developing a NQF based on learning outcomes.The framework will include qualification, obtained in compulsory education, in post-secondary and higher education (academic and VET) and integrate validation non-formal and informal learning processes.[131]
Role of social partners in validation	Social partners provide information regarding the validation process and the most representative social partner at regional level will be able to request official announcements (calls for application) for particular private sector needs.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	In Spain, some limited forms of validation of non-formal and informal learning have been recognised in the national legal framework for decades and today there are some opportunities for validation in relation to HE and now also professional competences (up to a certain level). Some Autonomous Communities have also established procedures for validation. In other areas more work remains to be done.
Validation statistics	Data on validation is limited. However, take-up of some of the validation initiatives currently available is relatively high: Between 2004 and 2005 the number of people who made use of the registered university entrance examinations for over 25s was 19,853 and the number of students who accessed VET via entrance examinations at intermediate level was 12,267, while at higher level the number was 7,796. The first round of validation of professional competences under the new regulatory framework at national level will be carried out in 2011, covering modules included within the Catalogue on children's education and medical care sectors. It is expected that 8 000 people will take part in the process in 2011.

[131] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

Sweden[132]	
National strategy on validation	The work of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is intended to result in overall policies for validation. No other kind of overall policy or strategy for validation is planned.
Legal situation of validation	In Sweden, validation of non-formal and informal learning has been considered as an important issue on the political agenda for some time, although there is still no overall national legal framework to regulate individuals' rights to validation or clearly established organisational structures and financial responsibilities. There are various situations in which individuals are granted the right to have their knowledge, skills and competences recognised and valued. The decree on HE states that all higher education institutions are obliged to assess prior and experiential learning of applicants who demand such an assessment and who lack the formal qualifications.
Institutions involved in validation	Sweden does not have a fully developed system for the validation of informal and non-formal learning with roles, organisational structures and financial responsibilities clearly stated and established. In December 2003, the Swedish government appointed the "Swedish National Commission on Validation" for the period 2004-2007 to promote and further develop validation methods and enhance (regional) cooperation. The work initiated by the Swedish National Commission on Validation, to establish common processes and methods for validation is now being continued, coordinated and supported by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. The work is still, to a large extent, based on project-based government validation initiatives where the agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service are the main coordinators. Cooperation with education and training providers, sector organisations, the social partners, universities and municipalities is an essential part of this work. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has, since it was established in 2009, been given the responsibility to support a national structure for validation and in cooperation with relevant authorities promote the involvement of educational institutions and business sector and trade organisations when strategies, methods and information regarding validation are being developed. Other official agencies, such as the Public Employment Service, the Swedish National Agency for Education, the National Agency for Higher Education, the National Council of Adult Education (third sector education covering liberal adult education including folk high schools, study circles, etc.) and the Agency for Higher Education Services all have separate minor responsibilities or governmental commissions to work on validation within their areas of responsibilities.
Validation procedures	Validation can be used as a way to gain entry to different educational pathways, usually following upper secondary education. Validation processes inclyde: 1) *Särskild prövning,* in which an individual's real competence is examined in order to receive credits and qualifications used within the elementary and secondary level of the education system. Primarily used to meet general or specific entry requirements to further/higher education. 2) Folk high schools which provide non-formal education determine their own

[132] Ida Thomson, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: Sweden* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77476.pdf

	entrance requirements and often use validation to determine the individual's ability to fully complete their education. 3) The so called 25:4 rule, which automatically gave adults aged 25 or more who had a minimum of four years of work experience and a knowledge of Swedish and English, general eligibility to HE. Universities and university colleges could decide themselves their selection criteria to be used for up to one third of their places. This rule has now been replaced by a change that gives applicants the possibility to apply to higher education on the basis of real competence.
Costs	At the beginning of the decade much validation was project-funded through EU-initiatives such as the Lifelong Learning Programme and the European Social Fund. Over the last couple of years, however, more focus has been placed on making validation a common and integrated part of both formal and non-formal education and training and activities for the unemployed. Since the national commission on validation was appointed in 2003, much of the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been funded by the national government through the Ministries of Education and Research, and Employment. Today funding is channelled through the Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the Public Employment Service. One validation is estimated to cost on average EUR 1 550. Approximately EUR 7254 000 to 1 0354 000 will be allocated each year specifically to support the coordination and development of a national structure (i.e. standardised methods and approaches, standardised quality assurance methods and also clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved) for validation. It should however be noted that much of the validation taking place in Sweden today is performed within the funding framework of the formal education and training system. This makes it difficult to assess the total amount of resources used for validation. The individual is usually not required to pay a fee for going through a validation process. *Särskilt prövning* is, however, one exception where the individual pays a fee for his or her validation. The exception is when the individual has previously failed the course and wants another chance; it is then for free. Usually the cost is about 500 SEK per course or subject validated.
Benefits	No solid evidence on benefits to individuals of validation has been established. There are however several "success stories" available, in which individuals who have gone through validation testify to the benefits they have experienced both on a private and professional level. Basic studies on societal economic effects of validation (national cost-benefit analysis) are also being performed by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education.
Integration of validation within the NQF	Validation is a key element in planning and developing the NQF with the anticipation that the framework will help in structuring and clarifying the standards against which validation could be made.
Role of social partners in validation	There is a national network consisting of approximately 25 business sector organisations and 130 trades, representing both social partners and business sector organisations. The Public Employment Service also participates in this network of organisations which provide information, advice and guidance (although this is not their main, or only activity). The participants of the network meet two to four times a year but have regular contact in between meetings. The Agency for Higher Vocational Education organises the network meetings. The purpose of the network is to spread information about validation initiatives, projects and ongoing validation. The network also discusses the development of methods, models for validation and future needs in the validation area. No major initiatives or projects on validation in the private sector are presently known. Separate systems of validation are rare.
Is validation comprehensive or	Validation is comprehensive, but mainly used in order to gain entry to different educational pathways following upper secondary education.

sectoral?	
Validation statistics	A national database for individuals going though validation is currently being developed. Estimates of the number of applicants or persons actually going through validation are hard to obtain, since the term validation is used for many different kinds of activities and end results. Validation is also performed in many different institutional settings. The number of validations performed are today only available at project level. The Public Employment Service has, during 2009 and 2010, undertaken initiatives to increase the use of validation as a tool to enhance individuals' employability. Funding was earmarked to support approximately 3800 validation processes and about one third of the funding had been used at the time of writing this report.

UK England, Wales, Northern Ireland[133]	
National strategy on validation	In the UK, there has been a devolved system of governance for lifelong learning (education and training) and many aspects of the skills agenda since 1997. Each of the devolved administrations has developed its own strategy for skills and lifelong learning.
Legal situation of validation	Not mentioned.
Institutions involved in validation	There is currently no national approach to the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning in the UK. There are methods / guidelines in place in relation to the national qualifications framework and within specific sectors of learning (e.g. adult and continuing education, higher education) but in general the application of validation is devolved to the learning provider, or at times to departments within the learning provider. As such, there is a great deal of differentiation in the approaches taken to validation, both between different providers and within providers themselves. In addition to the range of methodologies / initiatives in place, there are a number of different terms / acronyms in use. These range from Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) to Accreditation and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (ARPEL) and Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA). It has been suggested that this lack of consensus on terminology leads to confusion, lack of understanding and inconsistency, even within institutions. In England, Ofqual has responsibility for the qualifications framework. Ofqual became a legal entity in April 2010, independent of the curriculum and government. Ofqual recognises a range of awarding organisations, which can award credits and qualifications. However, Ofqual operates a 'light touch' approach to its role and does not provide guidelines on assessment methods, nor does it categorise learning according to whether it is formal, non-formal or informal. Thus, in essence, any qualification awarded by a recognised awarding organisation could be attained by proving non-formal / informal learning equivalent to the required learning outcomes, since Ofqual does not impose any restrictions on how the learning should take place. The only requirement is that

[133] Jo Hawley, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77661.pdf

	the learning outcomes necessary to achieve the qualification can be assessed in a robust way. In Northern Ireland, the qualifications regulator is the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which regulates external qualifications. In Wales, the qualifications regulator is the Welsh Minister. This work is wholly delegated to the Department for Children, Education Lifelong Learning and Skills. The Guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework sets out principles to help individual awarding organisations to develop or review their own RPL policies. It promotes a system-wide provision of RPL. In relation to higher education, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) publishes guidelines – in the form of a Code of Practice applicable across the UK – to help institutions develop effective systems. Nevertheless, the actual responsibility for implementation of accreditation of prior learning lies with the individual HEIs. In England, the former Learning and Skills Council (LSC) launched the RARPA system. The Learning and Skills Council has been split into the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency. The coalition government, elected in May 2010, has not at the time of writing this report confirmed if these two bodies will remain in place and thus it is not clear where the responsibility for RARPA will lie in the future.
Validation procedures	A significant national-level development in recent years, which has the potential to provide considerable support for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, is the introduction of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The QCF is not yet fully embedded at the time of writing; the scheduled implementation date is September 2011. It provides the relevant supporting structure to facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, on a par with formal learning. The QCF Regulatory Arrangements use the term 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) and set out the following definition of RPL: "A method of assessment that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning". There are also national-level guidelines to help Higher Education Institutions relating to the accreditation of prior learning. In the adult and continuing learning sector, there is a methodology entitled Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA) for informal recognition of the learning outcomes of non-accredited courses. In relation to vocational education, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were designed so that the award of credit in the qualification should be independent of the mode, duration, and location of learning. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning was therefore identified as one means of generating evidence for the (accreditation) units which comprise the qualification. For further and higher education, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which emerged in the early 1990s, are used for both admission and for awarding credit. In spite of the methods and guidelines in place within specific sectors of learning (e.g. adult and continuing education. HE), the application of validation is still in general devolved to the learning provider.
Costs	From 2009–10 the Learning and Skills Council introduced new funding arrangements for England, explicitly aligned to the QCF (Qualifications and Credits Framework). These new funding arrangements included specific support for RPL, based on the principle that, within limits, providers would be able to claim Learning and Skills Council (now Skills Funding Agency) funding leading to the award of credit through RPL, in the same way as they would for a taught programme leading to the award of credit towards the same qualification. In relation to higher education, there is no national-level budget specifically

	allocated to validation of non-formal and informal learning. A number of projects acquire funding through European programmes such as the Lifelong Learning Programme and the European Social Fund. In Wales, the HEFCW circular on funding the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) confirms that funding will be provided for institutions awarding APEL. Funding is made against specific APEL module(s) within a programme of study and also against other modules within a programme of study. It has been suggested that the cost of assessing learners through APL (e.g. for NVQs) can be as high as those associated with delivering a formal courses. In the HE sector, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is costly to deliver AP(E)L procedures, mainly because it is frequently based on the assessment of a portfolio and is therefore more costly in terms of staff time. A study conducted by the Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium found that APEL was considered to be complex and expensive in terms of staff time. There is no national guidance or regulation in relation to the costs which can be charged to individuals for validation procedures. Costs vary across providers and sector. The element of the validation process which is charged for can vary as well as the amount charged. Some HEIs might set charges according to the number of credits applied for / awarded, while others charge per hours of advice and guidance received. Specific examples of costs are GBP 75 (EUR 90) for the assessment of an APE(L) portfolio at one HEI.Nevertheless, the cost of AP(E)L is generally lower than taking a course in full, plus the individual saves on time by not having to repeat learning already achieved, which is an indirect cost saving.
Benefits	A number of potential benefits to individuals of the Recognition of Prior Learning are identified in the literature. However no data was identified through research, which specifically demonstrates the benefits of RPL to individuals. The potential benefits include for example: Reducing the time required to complete a qualification; Reducing the cost of acquiring a qualification; Receiving recognition of skills and competences already acquired, for example in the workplace; Avoiding the need to study things the learner already knows. In the voluntary and community sector, validation projects often aim to increase the employability of their participants. In the Higher Education sector, APL /APEL is used to facilitate access for non-traditional learners. In further education, RARPA can be used to support learners to make the transition from non-formal learning to formal learning. Case studies in the 2007 OECD Country Report show that participants grew more confident and attained a higher level of job satisfaction threw different life-long learning and validation initiatives.[134]
Integration of validation within the NQF	The QCF is an additional regulatory framework that, at present, operates alongside the preexisting National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF contains general and vocational qualifications; some, but not all, have credit values assigned to them. The QCF contains only credit-based qualifications composed from units and conforming to rules of combination for qualification achievement. The QCF recognises skills and qualifications by awarding credit for qualifications and units. The QCF is expected to be fully implemented by 2011. The QCF is by many presented as a 'mature' NQF and as such influencing later framework developments in Europe and beyond.[135] The QCF is intended to be inclusive and should recognise the achievements of all learners at any level and in any area of learning.

[134] OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal learning: Country Background Report United Kingdom 2007 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/19/4/41782373.pdf

[135] Jens Bjornavold, *Development of National Qualification Frameworks in Europe 2011*

Role of social partners in validation	Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are involved in developing the occupational standards used for vocational qualifications in the UK. The Guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework suggests that they may play an active role in supporting awarding organisations and approved centres (i.e. learning providers) to develop plans for the implementation of RPL. The Guidance suggests that the SSCs can help for example by identifying the market needs/targets of the workforce and the sector.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	Validation exists across the educational sector, but practises are determined by individual institutions.
Validation statistics	Data is not collected at national level in relation to validation in any of the sectors. Furthermore, it has been observed that even within institutions, data is not always collected centrally, rather at the level of the department. Some trends however have been identified and it is also possible to provide information on the number of participants in some of the validation projects: • By 2006, around six million NVQs had been awarded in the UK since they were introduced in the 1980s. • It is suggested that there has been an increase in the number of APEL applicants in the HE sector, although neither the actual number of applicants there are currently, nor projected numbers have been identified.

UK – Scotland[136]	
National strategy on validation	The 2007 Skills for Scotland Strategy noted the importance of using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to encourage the recognition of informal learning. In 2010, *Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth* was produced to refresh and supplement the original Strategy. IThe new Strategy also refers to the role of the SCQF Partnership's Recognition of Prior Learning network in developing tools, supporting organisations and sharing best practice that supports the recognition of learning that individuals may have completed.
Legal situation of validation	Aside from guidelines, there are no formal regulations or requirements for the provision of RPL and thus implementation varies.
Institutions involved in validation	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership was established in 2006. This partnership consists of: Scotland's Colleges; The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); Scottish Ministers; Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and; Universities Scotland. Although it receives funding from government, the partnership is a registered charity and also a company limited by guarantee. The structure of the company, in which the government is a partner on the board of directors, ensures that the development of the SCQF is focused on the learner and is not influenced by changes in policy. The SCQF Partnership has responsibility for maintaining the quality assurance and integrity of the SCQF, as well as its further promotion and development, whilst maintaining relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and Internationally. The SCQF Partnership also offers advice and support for all

[136] Jo Hawley, *European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2010, Country Report: UK (Scotland)* http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77662.pdf

	types of stakeholder involved in RPL. There is also a Quality Committee for the SCQF, which advises the SCQF Partnership on the quality and integrity of the Framework. Only SCQF Credit Rating Bodies can formally award SCQF Levels and Credit Points through RPL. These are the organisations responsible for allocating a level of learning and number of credit points to a qualification or learning programme. Credit rating bodies include colleges and HEIs, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and other organisations approved by the SCQF Partnership.
Validation procedures	Accreditation of prior learning (APL) or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is not a new concept in Scotland, although in the past it has been predominantly implemented in HE. 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) has been linked to the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and guidelines on RPL were developed by the SCQF Partnership in 2004, then finalised in 2005. In Scotland, RPL can be used for the award of credits towards qualifications or in the admissions process (to assess applicants to education and training courses and also to grant exemptions from course units). It is also recognised as a method of supporting personal development planning, career development and to form bridges between nonformal / informal learning and formal education and training. Responsibility for RPL is held at the level of the provider and thus there is considerable diversity in the way it is implemented. In addition, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) *"do not specify the way people doing the qualification have to become competent — just what they have to be able to do to get the SVQ".*
Costs	There is no national funding framework for RPL. It is funded at the level of the sector, provider or by the individuals themselves. Also, employers or employer bodies often cover costs to show their commitment to workforce development. Organisations can charge costs for the provision of RPL. These are decided at the level of the organisation and there are no national level rules on how much providers should charge. In HE, there is generally no charge for RPL which takes place as part of the admissions process but RPL claims for credit tend to be subject to a fee. These fees vary across institutions from a proportion of or the full cost of the module applied for. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these fees start at around GBP 50 (EUR 61). However, at the UHI Millennium Institute, no fees are charged for RPL relating to admissions as charging at this point is felt to be against the University's participation strategy, since it would present a barrier to entry.
Benefits	As is the case in many other European countries, data on participation in RPL is scarce. The SCQF handbook indicates that RPL can be for personal or career development, or to gain credit towards other qualifications or learning programmes. The handbook suggests that RPL helps learners make "clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning and/or career opportunities". It can help the learner to improve his / her confidence; recognise the skills/knowledge he/she has acquired through experience and / or identify ways to further develop these skills/knowledge through further learning. The evaluation of the SSSC project found that learners involved had increased their confidence and motivation and benefited from the opportunity to "learn how to think and write reflectively". This can help to reduce any negative perceptions of participating in formal education and training opportunities as well as giving the participants greater confidence in the workplace. The evaluation of the RPL profiling tool for the community and development sector found that the tool had the potential to support youth workers to achieve work-based qualifications and to support further professional development. The process was also felt to help to raise the confidence and self-esteem of participants. Several employers using RPL to deliver SVQs report that their workforce has developed increased self-esteem resulting from the recognition of

	their experience and competence. This gives individuals a sense of empowerment to take on new responsibility, as well as confidence that the external recognition of their skills has a currency within their industry or sector as a whole.
Integration of validation within the NQF	RPL has been linked to the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This Framework aims to be all-inclusive and to take account of all types of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning across all sectors (public, private and the voluntary sector). The SCQF was referenced to the EQF in February 2010 as a part of the overall UK referencing process
Role of social partners in validation	The national-level RPL network, which has been established by the SCQF Partnership is made up of representatives across different education and training sectors, including employers, professional bodies and the Scottish Government. The network's programme of work is based on activities to support the use of RPL within formal education and training, in the workplace, in the community and in relation to careers guidance.
Is validation comprehensive or sectoral?	APL/APEL has in the past it has been predominantly implemented in the HE sector. Today, work is ongoing to identify ways of using the SCQF to support RPL and to enable individuals to benchmark their attainments and achievements to the SCQF, throughout the educational sector. This work spans the different learning environments from HE through to the workplace and the community.
Validation statistics	No data is available at national level on the number of people who have undergone RPL in Scotland. It has been suggested that national-level data would be hard to produce, since beneficiary numbers would be produced at the level of the individual learning provider. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that RPL has been taking place for several decades and is now on the increase.

8.4. Annex 4: Cost/benefit analysis

The benefits of validation

Benefits for individuals[137]:

Economic benefits:

- Enhanced employability;
- Career gains (short term and longer term);
- Increased wages;
- Saved money for formal education and training;
- Earned money on the labour market for the time not spent in formal education and training;
- Saved time for formal education and training that can be invested elsewhere.

Educational/personal benefits:

- A second chance to obtain a qualification on the basis of experiences;
- Return to the formal system without the formal qualifications (e.g. school dropouts);
- Obtained credits (exemptions) for prior learning;
- Avoided unnecessary formal education and training for things the learner already knows, understands and is able to do;
- Increased self-confidence;
- Increased awareness of one's own abilities;
- Enhanced motivation to learn (engagement in further learning).

Benefits for employers and for the economy at large:

- An up-skilled and re-skilled labour force (needed in the knowledge economy), making it possible for companies to attract well qualified staff;
- More visibility of what individuals know, understand and are able to do. This may lead to a better skills match in individual companies and in the economy as a whole as it allows human capital to be deployed across the economy more productively by giving people access to jobs that better match their true skills.
- On the company level a better skills match relates to:
  - Recruitment: decisions can be taken on the basis of full, not partial, information on individuals;
  - Staff allocation: a better match can be reached between the abilities of workers and the tasks to be performed;
  - Competence development of staff: better decisions on staff training needs can be taken if they take into account the complete information on individuals' knowledge, skills and competences;

[137] *European Inventory 2010*, op. cit., P. Werquin (2010), *Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning, Outcomes, policies and practices*, Paris: OECD

- Possibilities for validation make it more motivating for staff to develop their skills;
- Increased competitiveness of companies and of the economy through an increased productivity;
- Migrant workers: if their knowledge skills and competences can be validated, they can be employed more appropriately (e.g. trained school teachers working as cleaning staff or taxi drivers);
- Improved adjustment of the knowledge, skills and competences of staff in fast-changing professions.

Benefits for the society at large:

- Successful validation schemes contribute to making lifelong learning a reality;
- Bridging training and the world of work;
- A better qualified population and workforce;
- The potential of individuals (knowledge, skills and competences) can be fully used;
- A better access to further education for disadvantaged minority groups, disaffected youth and older workers who did not have many opportunities for formal learning when they were younger;
- Validation contributes to realizing an inclusive labour market;
- Validation offers possibilities for redirecting people to other sectors as adjustment to changes in the demand and supply for labour.

The benefits of validation for individuals, the economy and the society at large do not only concern the benefits related to the fact of obtaining a qualification; they also concern validation limited to the steps of identification and documentation, which already give clearer information on the knowledge, skills and competences of individuals.

Costs of validation:

Costs of validation can be divided in two categories:
- Direct costs of validation systems;
- Opportunity costs;

Direct costs of validation systems:

Setting up and further developing validation arrangements asks for important investments in human and other resources. Comprehensive arrangements for validation entail costs related to the following items:
- the design of validation systems and procedures;
- setting up and maintaining infrastructure;
- running of validation procedures;
- guidance and support;
- assessments;
- training of guidance counsellors and assessors;
- awareness raising campaigns;
- setting up and maintaining quality assurance systems;

– time spent by organisations and individuals in validation procedures (on the individual level this mainly concerns the time invested in documentation).

Opportunity costs:

Costs of forgone earnings and other resources (time) by individuals for periods during which they are engaged in formal education and training. For employers this can mean lost working days of staff members, thus reduced productivity or replacement costs. For the economy at large a lack of possibilities for validation might not lead to the re-skilling and up-skilling needed and reduce economic growth in the long term.

How is validation financed in the Member States?

According to the evidence provided by the European Inventory for none of the Member States there is comprehensive information available on the costs of validation. Earmarked validation budgets are the exception rather than the rule and if they exist they usually concern one part of the validation system. Luxembourg and Spain are the only countries were budgets on an aggregate level are available. The Spanish budget available for the validation of non-formal learning associated with professional competences amounted to 30 million EUR for the period 2009-2010. In Luxembourg a validation budget was awarded to the Lifelong Learning Centre with an allocation of 4.5 million EUR for the period 2009-2010.

The available evidence suggests that in most countries validation initiatives are to a large extent publicly financed[138], both from national/regional sources and from European resources, (mainly from the European Social Fund and also from the Lifelong Learning programme). Also employers and individuals pay contributions. The wide variety in validation policies and practices in the Member States is reflected in the wide variety of financing mechanisms for validation which are detailed in annex 3.

Within the public sector a large number of actors are funding validation, e.g. ministries, public employment services, education and training institutions. Many national reports of the European Inventory indicate that activities on validation of e.g. centres for vocational guidance and of education and training establishments (to recognise prior learning experiences as part of the admission procedure) are financed from their normal budgets, and therefore their costs for validation are not separately visible.

In some countries the validation system is to a large extent financed by the European Social Fund. This is the case for the Portuguese validation system. Other countries where the ESF is an important financing source for the validation system are Austria, Cyprus, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Some cost indications are available for several countries concerning individual formal assessments. For example in Portugal, the costs of adult certification carried out by a New Opportunities Centre were 1,600 EUR in 2009. The costs for validation, in particular relating to assessments, depend usually on the level and the nature of a qualification. In Belgium (Flanders) assessment centres in charge of providing the certificate for vocational experience receive 960, 1,200 or 1,440 per assessment depending on the occupation. In the Netherlands

[138] Antonio Giménez Plaza, Jo Hawley and Manuel Souto Otero (2010), "Thematic Report: Costs and Benefits of Validation", *European Inventory 2010,* op. cit.

obtaining an experience certificate by the Knowledge Centre on validation, consisting of a formal advice on an individual's skills, knowledge and competences, costs between 800 and 1,300 EUR for EQF qualification levels 3 and 4 and between 1,000 and 1,500 EUR for higher vocational qualifications. For the period 2009-2010 the Dutch government made available EUR 57 million for the validation scheme. In Romania the total fee for obtaining a qualification on the basis of prior learning experiences costs between 140 and 410 EUR, usually paid from by professional associations, employers and public authorities. For Sweden the average costs of validation are estimated at around 1,550.

It is not possible in general to indicate how much setting up a comprehensive validation system will cost. The total costs will depend on many factors such as:

- The readiness of the current system: if validation arrangements can be developed within the existing institutional set up and if existing standards can be used, the costs will be higher than if hardly any infrastructure exists.[139]
- The scale of validation arrangements: In a well functioning education and training system with an appropriately qualified population and workforce, the need for a large scale validation programme will normally be lower than in a country where the overall qualification levels of the population are lower. Both France and Portugal have a comprehensive validation system, but the scale is different. Whereas in France 53,000 people, on a total population of around 60 million, applied for a qualification on the basis of validation of past experiences in 2008[140], in Portugal more than 320,000 people, on a population of about 10 million had been granted a certificate through the validation process by the year 2010[141].
- Target groups of validation: if validation is targeted to vulnerable groups, the costs for guidance and counselling are expected to be much higher than validation of already well qualified people who validate their knowledge, skills and competences in order to get a higher qualification level. On the other hand for higher qualified people the costs of assessment will be higher (based on country experiences), but the costs for guidance will typically be more limited. Which groups are targeted in particular will typically depend on policy choices made.
- The type of validation: if validation is limited to the stage of documentation it is less costly than if full qualifications are awarded.

In short, there is a large amount of factors that determines the costs of a validation system and there is a large variety between Member States in the way the costs for validation are distributed among different actors: central government funding, European funding (in particular by the ESF), regional local government funding, formal education and training institutions, employers, social partners and finally individuals. Especially in the case of vulnerable groups many countries apply a policy of exemption from fees and validation is largely funded through public means in this case. And although there are examples on unit costs for assessment given for some countries, these are specifically related to the way in

[139] Peer Learning Activity on the costs and benefits of validation of non-formal and informal learning, 12-13 February 2009.

[140] Anne-Marie Charraud (2010), "Country Report: France", in: *European Inventory 2010*, op. cit., http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/bibliographies/18212.aspx.

[141] Ana Luisa Oliveira Pires (2010), "Country Report: Portugal", in: *European Inventory 2010*, op. cit., http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/bibliographies/18212.aspx.

which validation has been set up in the countries concerned and they do not provide a solid base for an EU wide extrapolation.

Ratio between costs and benefits

For a ratio between costs and benefits it is important to consider several elements:

- An important consideration is that the costs of validation should be compared to the costs of formal training (either the full or the part from which the person is question is exempted), in terms of direct costs as well as in terms of opportunity costs (forgone earnings for the individual). Under the participating countries of the OECD study of 2010 all assumed that for a given individual the costs of validation of learning outcomes are lower than the costs of following a formal education or training programme[142]. If validation systems have been developed by Member States so far, they confirm the assumption that validation is, in principle, beneficial.
- A second consideration is that benefits can only be measured in monetary terms to a limited extent and that only a part of the costs can be measured in monetary terms. Therefore a full quantitative picture of both costs and benefits is missing.
- A third consideration is that the cost-benefit ratio depends each time on the individual. The higher the currency value in the labour market for qualifications obtained after validation, the more probable it is that the financial benefits of validation outweigh the financial costs. *A contrario*, the lower the currency value of a qualification obtained the higher is the probability that the costs will outweigh the benefits. However, a full picture of costs and benefits also needs to take account of other, non-monetary, costs and benefits. Whereas for specific target groups in society, it is probable that the benefits of validation in monetary terms (e.g. low currency value of validation results on the labour market) are lower than the costs of validation (which include intensive guidance), including social costs and benefits might very well change the trade off. The latter are of a decisive value in considerations to establish validation systems focused on enhancing the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

[142] P. Werquin (2010), op. cit., p.88.