

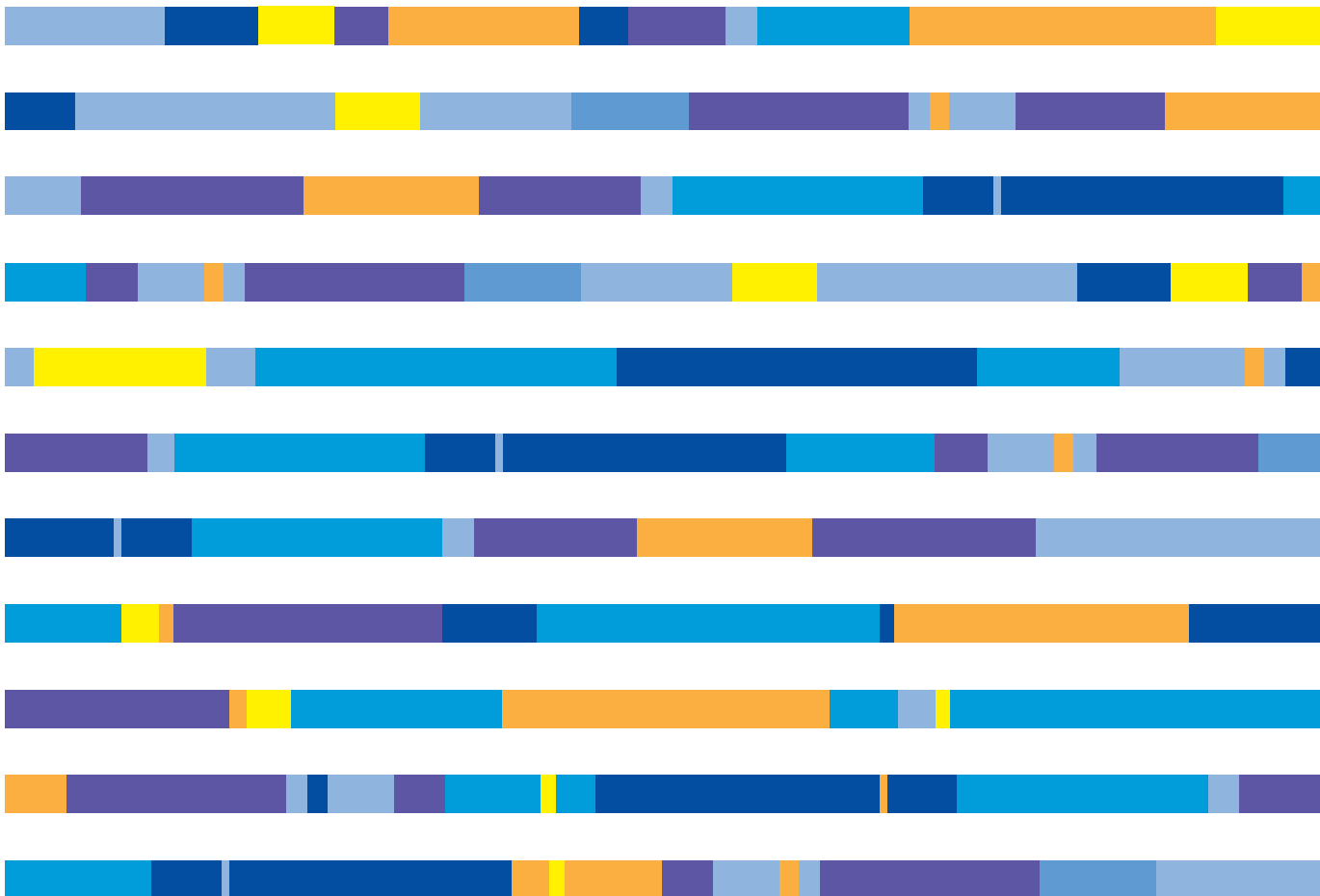


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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **SLOVENIA**

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1 Abstract

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Slovenia is a practice implemented on all education levels for almost two decades. The system is mainly focused on vocational qualifications, supplementary qualifications and higher education qualifications. Validation in the third sector demonstrates good practices and acceptance of validation certificates by employers and educational institutions. The validation tools in adult education reflect the ever-demanding needs of the labour market and therefore digital tools have been developed, such as e-Portfolio and digital badges.

The validation procedures are prescribed by laws, rulebooks and guidelines, and are defining different elements within the system that guarantee quality, and thus build trust in users.

Transparency in the process and accessibility to information is ensured by several portals/databases: Slovenian Qualification Framework (SQF) Register; Database of vocational qualifications and catalogue of vocational knowledge and skills; Database of guidance counsellors; Database of validation providers.

The recent results of the evaluation of the SQF and its implementation send a clear message that further efforts need to be done in informing and promoting the SQF Register, among professionals and the general public. It is also recommended that some functionalities of the SQF Register should be improved, and a terminological dictionary of all terms used in the SQF Register should be made available for a better understanding of the topic to the wider public.

2 Introduction

In Slovenia, validation arrangements are regulated by legislation. The most long-standing and comprehensive system is the system of national vocational qualifications legally embedded in the National Professional Qualifications Act from 2000 (with several amendments, the latest in 2009). According to this law, national vocational qualifications can be fully awarded based on the validation of non-formal learning. Additional to the system of national vocational qualification, which allows the acquisition of complete national qualifications based on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible in all education subsystems since 2006, regulated by sector-specific acts and regulations.

The backbone of this system is the national register of national vocational qualifications (NVQ) that is fully integrated into the Slovenian Qualification Framework (SQF).

The labour market needs for certain qualifications are addressed through the so-called supplementary qualifications. A supplementary qualification is a qualification that supplements an individual's competences at the level attained and in a specific professional field and is tied to the needs of the labour market. The Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act provides that an application for the inclusion of a supplementary qualification in the SQF may be submitted by an employer, a group of employers or by the Employment Service of Slovenia. The validation of non-formal learning process applies to supplementary qualifications as well, and there are good practices in different sectors that reflect the ongoing specific needs of the labour market.

There have been no significant changes since 2018 within the legal framework that would govern and determine new approaches and directions for validation. However, several ESF funded projects managed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education

developed new guidelines for validation practice in the field of adult education. It can be noticed that the practice is looking forward to implementing different ICT tools in the validation process, such as e-Portfolio and digital badges.

The existing practice of validation of national vocational qualifications in general, and in particular, in the domain of adult education, is gaining importance because the validation arrangements are measured against the learning outcomes of education programmes in VET, higher education and general education, included in the SQF. The practice includes the elements of the identification of an individual's prior knowledge; it documents the knowledge in the form of portfolios; implements assessments conducted by the committees and awards certificates. A similar procedure of the four individual steps can be found within the validation approaches on the higher education level that are described for some universities in specific Rulebooks governing the procedure.

The validation procedures are supported by databases of the catalogue of standards for vocational knowledge and skills that is available online on the portal of the National Reference Point (NRP). There are several databases on the NRP website: vocational standards, a database of individuals holding licenses for validation, vocational qualification catalogues, a database of validation contractors, and a database of counsellors.

The recent results of the evaluation of the SQF and its implementation send a clear message that further efforts need to be done in informing and promoting the SQF Register, among professionals and the general public. The concept of supplementary qualifications needs to be given additional visibility within society.

It is very positive that the SQF and the validation system are accommodating to the particular needs of specific target groups, such as deaf, blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind candidate or committee member in the verification and validation process because their validation costs are paid by the National Examination Center.

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

Slovenia has more than 20 years of a long tradition and experience in the validation of non-formal learning which leads to national vocational qualifications and which can be described as the national system of validation regulated by the National Professional Qualifications Act (2010). This experience and ongoing practice are an integral part of the SQF. In addition, the popularity, visibility and easier access to the information relevant to all actors involved in the validation (such as individuals, counsellors, validation practitioners, and institutions conducting validation) of vocational qualifications has gained in importance. Several portals are kept up-to-date with relevant databases and general information, about which more details will be provided in the sections below.

In 2017, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education published a Report on Strategic and legal foundations for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Marentić et al., 2017). The publication presents a comprehensive overview and a detailed description of the legal basis and also developments at the national level. It provides an analysis of validation at all educational levels mainly since 2000 when the Act on national vocational qualifications was introduced. A systematic overview of the Slovenian system and practice of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been recently presented in a national Report from 2020 (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, 2020). Both publications are very

informative documents for readers who would like to gain a broad overview and understanding of activities and results in the legal aspects and also in the projects that were conducted.

As stated in the 2018 Report (Pavkov, M., 2019)), recognition of prior learning is designated to educational institutions. These are autonomous in their specific operational procedures. Recognition of prior learning is applicable in the case of enrolment to educational programmes or to obtain exemptions / credits for part of the educational programme (for a single subject, a module, or a study year).

In the recent Resolution on the National Programme of Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2022-2030 (National Assembly, 2022), five priority areas for the development are defined: general informal adult education, education to obtain a degree, professional training and training for work purposes, research and development, and activities in the adult education field.

The third priority area, Professional training, and training to meet the demands of the labour market, highlights the importance of the new systemic tool, Competence Forecasting Platform, for predicting the skills needed in the labour market. The platform will be developed within ESF funded project 2021-2023. At the national level, this platform will be important for the development of appropriate training programs for adults and for providing effective measures in developing other policies. The third priority area also focuses on the National Professional Qualifications (NPK) system, i.e., the recognition and certification of the validation of informal and non-formal learning. An individual can acquire a national vocational qualification, certified by the public document (NPK certificate), which is transferable amongst various work environments and enables greater mobility of workers between sectors and companies within the country, as well as internationally. This provides greater employee flexibility and mobility at the same level of education.

The fourth priority area, Research, and development, foresees one of the actions as the further development of systems and procedures and validation processes of previously acquired knowledge and its monitoring.

The legal framework on validation consists of several sectoral acts that regulate the possibility and right to the recognition of prior knowledge. For the purpose of clarity, the acts reported in the 2018 Report are also presented here and are updated with the new or revised regulations.

General Legislative Acts:

- National Professional Qualifications Act (2010) is the basis for a formalised system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs), where the knowledge and experience gained by candidates is compared to occupational standards defined at the national level. In the NVQ verification and validation procedure, candidates demonstrate their skills and knowledge for the effective performance of specific occupational tasks. Through verification and validation of NVQs, the skills and knowledge of the candidate are ascertained with regard to a specific occupational standard and a catalogue of standards of vocational knowledge and skills.
- Rulebook on validation of prior knowledge and higher vocational education (2010) – the document defines procedures for validation and recognition of prior knowledge, as well as criteria for validation of knowledge and skills, which were obtained by the students of higher vocational schools either by formal or informal education. The rulebook regulates the procedure for determining, checking, evaluating and recognising previously acquired knowledge criteria for recognising knowledge and skills that students of higher vocational schools have acquired through formal but also informal education or work

- Rulebook on the method and procedure for validation of national professional qualifications (2015, 2020, 2022): the rulebook defines the procedures for the verification and certification of national professional qualifications in more detail to bring transparency to the procedures and the validation system. It further describes the role of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and clarifies the procedure for the payment of expenses.
- Rules on assessing knowledge in secondary schools (2018) do not mention validation per se but prescribe the possibility for adult learners taking part in the programmes for acquisition of secondary level qualifications to develop a personal educational plan. The personal educational plan contains at least data on previously acquired and recognized formal and informal knowledge, as well as the planned method and time course of education, defining the content, methods, and deadlines for checking and evaluating knowledge, which are determined by the curriculum or knowledge catalogue.
- Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act (2015, 2022): establishing the Slovenian NQF – the SQF, referencing to the EQF, establishing local offices for delivery of the SQF, inclusion of all levels of education and recognised on the labour market. The 2022 revision links the 2015 Act with the Act on Professional, Scientific and Artistic Titles.
- Vocational Education Act (2017): The changes that were implemented in the Vocational education Act in 2017 based on the Act from 2006 addressed validation of non-formal learning of VET students and will be further discussed in this report.
- Adult Education Act (2018): The aim of the Act was to define the organisation and financing of adult education institutions and the provision of publicly funded services in adult education; those are the provision of primary school education for the adult population (including the possibility of validation and recognition of prior learning), provision of guidance and counselling for adult learners in all levels of education and counselling for the identification and documentation of prior learning). The Act stipulates that one of the activities in the field of adult education is the identification and documentation of knowledge, skills, and competences, acquired through non-formal and informal education based on documentation, for personal development, further education and integration into the labour market. However, the validation procedures are not defined in the act and neither it is stated who could be responsible for the implementation of validation within the system of adult education in the broader sense, not just with reference to national vocational qualifications. The Act defines that the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education is responsible for preparing the guidelines for the implementation of counselling as a public service.
- Guidelines for implementing adult education guidance as a public service (2020): The aim of the guidelines is to ensure quality performance of guidance, so they were adopted by the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Adult Education. Guidance in adult education encompasses three areas of guidance: enrolment in education and continuation of education, identification and documentation and organised self-directed learning. Guidance on identification and documentation refers to professional support provided by counsellors to adults on identification and documentation of their previously acquired knowledge and skills.
- Higher Education Act (2012): changes since 2009 include the KLASIUS classification as part of compulsory evidence of higher education institutions; it administers entrants and students in relation to the right of validation of prior knowledge and obliges institutions to prepare measures for validation and to form a commission for validation.

- The Labour Market Regulation Act (2017): The act defines the national-level electronic portfolio of knowledge, experience, and competencies that students acquire in performing temporary and part-time work (called student work).

The Individual Learning Accounts do not exist in Slovenia yet.

The database of the catalogue of standards for technical knowledge and skills is available online on the portal of the National Reference Point for Occupational Qualifications (NRP). There are several databases on the NRP website: vocational standards, licenses, catalogues, qualification structure, a database of contractors, a database of counsellors.

The four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) are included in the validation procedures and they will be elaborated on in more detail in the following sections of this report.

Skills audits

As reported in the 2018 country report, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education launched a website “*Moja Izbira*” (My Choice) in 2008 whereas in 2014 it was redesigned, refreshed, updated (by means of ESF funds) and is kept up-to-date with the information of new professions as they develop over the years. The portal is dedicated to professional orientation targeting pupils, students, parents, adults and counsellors (school counsellors, career advisers, and counsellors in lifelong learning). It includes the most important information on professions and education. The main aim of this website is to provide a one-stop shop for all target groups with easy and effective access to information that will assist them either in deciding on a further career, education, or life-path/orientation. Nowadays, the database contains textual descriptions of professions and video presentations for more than 500 professions. The information on educational programmes that offer education and training for professions from the database is linked to the description of professions. The data in the database is collected and updated from the databases of different stakeholders: Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the Chamber of Craft and the Employment Service of Slovenia. Moreover, data on schools are continually updated by all secondary schools in Slovenia.

The Student Organisation of Slovenia (SOS), is a national organisation of all students in Slovenia that represents the interests of more than 75.000 students of Slovenian universities, colleges, high schools, and Slovenian students of vocational and higher education institutions abroad. With the support of ESF funding, the SOS developed *EviDEnca*, a record of student work and experiences, recorded as competences. The purpose of the *EviDEnca* is to: improve the employment opportunities of young job seekers, improve the awareness of young people and employers about the competences acquired through temporary work, encourage young people to acquire competences that are sought after in the labour market and strengthen the participation of stakeholders in the labour market. The competences can be recorded in an online portal, are exported and printed on a statement. The record of student work is an official record that is kept by the Student Organization of Slovenia with the authority given in the Labor Market Regulation Act (2017).

The programme *Competence Centers for Human Resources Development*¹ (*KOC*) is focused on bringing together companies to create partnerships for human resources development in the same sector or priority area as defined in the Slovenian Smart Specialisation Strategy S4 (Sulič et al. 2022). The first *KOCs* were established in

¹ Programme is co-financed by the Ministry of labour, family, social affairs and equal opportunities and the European Union under the European Social Fund

2011. The main aim is to improve the skills and competences of employees by providing structured training opportunities. The programme contributes to the skills audits concept because competence profiles and competence models are developed within each of 10 competence centres, in collaboration between human resources managers of the companies and external providers. Online questionnaires, 180-or 360-degree assessments and interviews are used to document competences (CPI, 2020).

The practice of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education and its *adult education guidance centres* can also be linked to skills audits, but it is still worth mentioning here because the users are adults seeking employment, education and career opportunities and thus their skills play an important role when providing them advice. At the moment, according to Guidelines for implementing adult education guidance as a public service, a total of 35 regional centres are in the public network. The centres offer, amongst other activities, free guidance for making decisions and choosing appropriate education and learning; planning further educational paths; and validation of prior knowledge. In that sense, the counsellors analyse acquired skills and competences by adults and present them with the possibilities of further educational paths, including opportunities for validation.

Quality assurance

Quality in the national vocational qualification system is assured at the system level, at the institutional level, and at the level of the individual experts carrying out various roles in the competences and knowledge assessment, and certification and counselling processes.

The key criteria pursued in quality assurance are as follows (CPI, 2020):

1. Ensuring the transparency of procedures with a clear distribution of responsibilities among the institutions and experts involved in the processes.
2. The procedures to document all stages of validation are prescribed, and documentation in the procedures is comprehensible and publicly available.
3. Ensuring up-to-date and publicly available information for candidates, counsellors and institutions.
4. Ensuring professional competences of the counsellors and the members of the panels validating and assessing NVQ candidates.
5. Monitoring and evaluation of procedures, institutions and persons involved in the NVQ system.
6. Ensuring continuous expert support to counsellors, panel members and providers of NVQ verification and validation procedures.

Further details on quality assurance approaches are provided in the following sections of this report.

3.2 Validation in education and training

Validation of non-formal learning has covered all education subsystems, regulated by sector-specific acts and regulations since 2006.

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education has implemented several projects related to the validation of non-formal learning in the field of adult education. As the result of their developmental work is adult education guidance as a public service, which brings education and training closer to adults who have not acquired formal qualifications that would enable them to find employment more easily. Main aim of adult education

guidance is to allow participation in education and training. In addition to that, adult education guidance enables documentation and validation of adult knowledge and experience to provide greater flexibility in the labour market, personal growth, and development of key competences.

Vocational education and training

The 2017 and 2019 amendments of the Vocational Education Act formulate the possibility for the VET student to be graded and to progress through educational levels by implementing validation of non-formal learning. The Amendment stipulates that schools or educational organisations that perform part-time education can adapt the educational programmes to the needs of each student, considering the achieved credit points or previously acquired knowledge, which is proven by a public document, or non-formal knowledge which is proven by examination or some other way. The Amendment also states that in the process of awarding a grade to a VET student, non-formal knowledge, evidenced by a public document, an examination, or any other way, should be considered. When VET students are progressing to the next study year, non-formally acquired knowledge should also be considered. The Minister responsible for education shall prescribe in detail the method and procedure for examining and assessing knowledge, obtaining credit points, validating non-formal knowledge, as well as the form and content of public documents certifying completion of education (Pavkov M., 2019).

Vocational qualifications can be acquired either through the formal education system (vocational technical and higher vocational education) or through the validation process. The Vocational Education Act links the two systems by stipulating that the basis for either of the routes are occupational standards.

The Rules on assessing knowledge in secondary schools (2018) create the possibility for adult learners to taking part in the programmes for the acquisition of secondary-level qualifications to develop a personal educational plan. Amongst other information, the plan contains data on previously acquired and recognized formal and informal knowledge, as well as the planned method and time course of education, defining the content, methods, and deadlines for checking and evaluating knowledge, which are determined by the curriculum or knowledge catalogue. The providers are responsible for planning and the implementation of the procedure to recognise previously acquired knowledge (CIP, 2020).

Adult education

In Slovenia, validation on national level has two main purposes: to enable participation in formal education programmes and to gain national vocational qualifications. Providers of validation procedures to enable participation in formal education are educational institutions and providers that carry out formal education programmes. Providers of national vocational qualification procedures are different, i.e. they are educational institutions, employers, chambers, folk universities, etc. (Pavkov M., 2019).

More recently the third purpose of validation is to make progress towards providing better flexibility on the job market and achieve personal growth and develop key competences. Documenting and assessing individuals' knowledge and experience (competences) is an important factor. The project of Slovenian Institute of Adult Education was entitled "Professional support to information and guidance activities and validation of non-formal knowledge 2016-2021". Within the project, attention was given to the continuation of activities in the provision of information and counselling as well as validation and recognition of previously acquired knowledge in adult education. The target group were adult workers, in particular those with low-level skills, those educationally inactive and those over 45 years of age. The overall objective of the project was the development of professional materials, programmes, and new approaches for the implementation of information and consulting activities,

cooperation with social partners and stakeholders and implementation of expert advice.

The main results of the project are ten expert materials: a developed approach to validation in the workplace, an e-tool and a guide for the validation of social and civic competences, a guide to validation with the use of two new media, guide to measuring the effect of counselling, e-tool and a guide for the validation of cultural awareness and expression competences, manual, guide for the use of new tools, quality indicators (also for validation procedure) and process of guidance and guidance tools for employed adults.

The result of the validation procedure within the project is a prepared portfolio for an adult candidate and opinions which are awarded to individuals. The opinion is prepared by the counsellor and external expert (when it is needed) and describes non-formal knowledge acquired, experience and competences that have been evaluated, and the possibilities of using the results for further formal validation, for participation in further education or for employment. An opinion does not have formal value but anyway fulfils the quality criteria of good validation evidence (authenticity, actuality, and adequacy). The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education prepared expert guidelines for the preparation of opinions.

Higher education

Approaches to validation at the higher education level are prescribed by the Act on Higher Education (2012) which defines the right to validation of prior knowledge and obliges institutions to prepare measures for validation and to form a commission for validation. The legal background is described in more detail in the 2016 Country report (Košmrlj K., 2016) and is based on the Rulebook on the Recognition of previously acquired knowledge in Higher Vocational Education (2010).

Based on the guidelines and standards prepared by the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and accepted by the accreditation commission, higher vocational schools set more detailed criteria for the process of recognising previously acquired knowledge.

Even though there were no significant changes in the legal framework since 2018, there is evidence that universities are creating frameworks that enable the implementation of validation measures. As reported in the 2018 country report, the example of the University na Primorskem demonstrates the inclusion of validation in regular university activities. The Rulebook on the procedure and criteria for the recognition of formal and non-formally acquired knowledge was developed at the university level in 2009 (Senate of the University of Primorska, 2009). Individual faculties thereafter developed their own Rulebooks with individual and specific rules on validation of formal and non-formal knowledge concerning the subject of the study programme. The validation is performed for students who would like to enrol at university and for those who are already enrolled in studies. The validation leads to accepting the knowledge which, in terms of the content, scope and complexity, corresponds in whole or in part to the general or subject-specific competences determined by the study programme in which the student would like to enrol or is already enrolled in it. Examples of faculties that have developed their own Rulebooks are the Faculty of Health Sciences (Rulebook developed in 2018) and Faculty of Management (Rulebook developed in 2017). The University of Ljubljana also developed in 2007 Rules on the procedure and criteria on the recognition of the knowledge and skills obtained through informal learning. The approaches and methods to validation are different and will be reported in more detail in further sections of this report.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

As described in the 2018 Report, the legal framework for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning for the labour market also provides the already mentioned National Professional Qualifications Act that falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Validation applies only to professions and vocations for which the catalogues of standards for technical knowledge and skills (hereinafter referred to as: catalogue) are adopted by the Minister of Labour. The occupational standards and catalogues are proposed by social partners and therefore should reflect labour market needs. The database of the catalogue of standards for technical knowledge and skills is available online on the portal of the National Reference Point for Occupational Qualifications. The vocational standards catalogue is available on the same portal.

The Rules on the method and procedure for the validation of national vocational qualifications and the Rules on keeping the register of providers of national vocational qualifications assessment and validation guide the validation process. These rules aim to improve the validation procedures of assessors (the rules specify more detail about the validation procedure) and assessment centres (limit and raise the quality of assessment centres and institutions).

Some good practice examples of the benefits of validation of vocational qualifications are presented on the website of the National Vocational Qualifications portal. However, data on validation practices and procedures conducted for the needs of companies are not publicly available and there is limited information on the institution that would be responsible for collecting and sharing this information.

Case study 1 – Addressing the needs of DM Drogerie Markt d.o.o. for a specific qualification needed on the labour market²

In Slovenia, employers can provide their employees with a certain qualification that is specific to the work requirements of the company. The qualification can be formally recognised at the level of the Slovenian Qualifications Framework. The company DM Drogerie Markt d.o.o. submitted an application for the recognition of a supplementary qualification³ in the field of sales, namely perfumery. The commission for additional qualifications recognised this supplementary qualification as DM Parfumerist (DM Drogerist)⁴ and included it in the Slovenian qualifications framework in 2019 at the initiative of the proposer, namely at the level of SQF 4 for a period of five years. For the mentioned supplementary qualification, 16 certificates of obtaining the additional qualification were issued in the last two years.

In 2021, on the initiative of the social partners (Union of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, Chamber of Commerce of Slovenia), the National Professional Qualification Parfumerist (Drogerist) was also prepared. Upon adoption, it was placed in the Slovenian qualifications framework, at the level of SQF 4. As of 1st March 2023, 39 certificates have been issued for the mentioned NPK.

² Information shared by the interviewee from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

³ More information about supplementary qualifications is described in chapter 4 of this report

⁴ <https://www.nok.si/kvalifikacije/dm-drogerist-dm-drogeristka>

3.4 Validation and the third sector

The relevant text from the 2018 Report states that the Resolution on validation and recognition of youth non-formal education was issued in 2013. The Resolution includes other groups (e.g., young couples, single young people and people after dismissal from the educational institution and foster care) and also gives recommendations for measures needed to implement the system-wide regulatory framework for the recognition of all aspects of non-formal education. The existing connection between education and the labour market is weak and young people do not always acquire the competencies required by employers in formal education but may acquire them through non-formal learning and experience.

Since there were no significant legal changes in relation to validation in the third sector, this report examines some of the existing practices further.

The *Nefiks* is a unique nationwide system for recording non-formal knowledge that allows young people to systematically collect in one place (in a digital format or in the form of booklet) all non-formally acquired and certified competences. The purpose is to record the evidence of the knowledge that could be used for the needs of continuing education or the needs of employment. The approach to developing the system was to take into consideration all relevant developments and instruments on the EU level, such as Youthpass and Europass, as well as creating an alignment with the Rulebook on validation of non-formal learning at the higher education level.

The tool collects knowledge and competences in six thematic areas, based on the Scandinavian model, which are the following: active citizenship and participation in projects; employment-engagements through the student service; knowledge obtained in organised forms of education (e.g., seminars and courses); knowledge gained as scouts and in volunteering; experience acquired abroad and other ways of acquiring knowledge. The knowledge and competences can be recorded either in the e-Nefiks online tool and/or in the Nefiks Booklet. They can be printed in the format of Europass CV. Once an activity is recorded, it is confirmed in the system/tool by the education provider or the employer in the form of an electronic confirmation. If the activity is recorded in the booklet, it is then confirmed with a stamp and signature, or in the e-form it is an electronic confirmation.

The University of Ljubljana recommended the Nefiks as a possible tool for recognising informally acquired knowledge.

There are some other good examples of already existing practices of validation of non-formally gained competences within the youth sector. The existing practices of the Slovenian Association of Scouts (Woodbadge system; TaPas – Taborniski PASsport) have been described in the 2018 Country report (Pavkov M., 2019).

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The main principles of the Slovenian Qualification Framework (SQF) are described in the 2018 Report and have remained the same: learning outcomes can be used for validation of prior learning for study programmes up to ISCED level 5. In the higher education sector, validation processes are not yet systematic. In vocational education, validation is available for parts of courses, single courses or modules and it can also lead to awarding a national vocational qualification. In general, in secondary education and in higher education, single courses, parts of courses or modules can also be obtained through validation; degrees however can only be obtained through enrolment and completing at least part of the study programme at the given institution.

The National Coordination Point (NCP) of the Slovenian Qualifications Framework has the main role of coordinating the work of the expert commission of the National Coordination Point which is appointed for a term of four years. The NCP operates

within the Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI). The expert commission is comprised of seven members and is appointed by the minister in charge of labour, as follows: three members proposed by the ministry responsible for labour; one member by the ministry responsible for education; one member by the ministry responsible for the economy; and two members by the Economic and Social Council. Among the tasks allocated to the expert commission, the two most relevant ones in relation to supplementary qualifications are setting the criteria for placing additional qualifications within the SQF and preparing proposals for the placement of additional qualifications in the SQF.

Register of qualifications of the SQF, which was proposed in the SQF Act, was operational by the end of 2016. This register contains publicly available information on all qualifications (educational qualifications and national vocational qualifications) that can be obtained through state-approved education, study programmes and catalogues of standards of vocational knowledge and skills. The SQF Register is linked to the EQF Portal thus enabling comparability, transferability and transparency of the Slovenian qualifications compared to EU-wide qualifications. The qualifications contain the following information: name and type of the qualification, type and duration of education, credit points, conditions for enrollment, ISCED, SQF and EQF level, learning outcomes, assessment and completion of education, education providers, the possibility of transferring to further education.

The National vocational qualification certificate can be awarded at SQF levels 2,3,4,5, and 6 (corresponds to EQF levels 2-5) and is linked to the validation procedure described in the following sections of this report. In brief, the committee for the verification and validation in the relevant field assesses the candidate's portfolio and concludes on the catalogue content of the qualification in part or in full. In cases when the committee is not able to recognise all skills, knowledge, and competences from the catalogue for a certain qualification, the candidate is assigned tasks for verification.

Verification and assessment are carried out by committees for the verification and validation of national vocational qualifications, appointed by the National Examination Centre (NEC). Committee members must be licensed by the NEC.

As described in the 2018 Country Report, the SQF, in addition to regular/formal qualifications obtained through the formal education system, includes the possibility of inclusion of a "supplementary qualification". The supplementary qualification is a qualification that complements the individual's competence at the level achieved and in a specific field of expertise and is related to the needs of the labour market. These qualifications are awarded by private providers and companies and are not regulated by national laws (a good practice example is provided in section 3.3 of this report). The Act states that the application for the placement of a supplementary qualification within the national qualification framework may be filed by an employer, a group of employers or the Employment Service of Slovenia. Supplementary qualification can be obtained after completing the prescribed training programme and passing the defined assessment procedure. In the procedure for the acquisition of supplementary qualifications, there are no predicted systematic measures for validation, as they can be obtained through the completion of the corresponding training programme.

The costs of the procedure are covered by the applicant of the additional qualification and are regulated by the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for vocational education. Since July 2016, the Centre has determined that the costs amount to EUR 1,000.

The functionalities of the **portal NVQ – National Vocational Qualifications** were described in detail in the 2018 Country Report (Pavkov, M., 2019). The portal is managed by the Slovenian Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and

the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The website is available in both Slovenian and English and contains the following information on vocational qualifications and additional qualifications: name and type of the qualification, period of validity of additional qualification, conditions for obtaining the qualifications, ISCED, SQF and EQF level, learning outcomes, assessment and completion of education, proponents of additional qualifications, and contractors for professional qualifications.

The NVQ portal is also dedicated to employers and aims to actively engage them not only in the process of validation but also in the process of putting forward proposals for new NVQs, by defining competences, skills and knowledge required by companies.

The National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training is responsible for the management of databases linked to validation within the system of NVQs. There are different databases: demographic data on candidates for NVQs (those who applied for it, those who were successful and those who did not pass the validation process), number of NVQs issued, data on assessors, assessing institution, etc. (Some examples of databases presented in more detail are mentioned in different sections throughout this report).

There are no micro credentials in the Slovenian Qualifications System.

The qualifications are not based on modules or units. Therefore, there are no partial qualifications in the system.

5 Standards

In terms of standards development, there have been no significant changes since 2018. As described in the 2018 Country report, the SQF defines a standard of qualification as a description of the qualification that sets the learning outcomes, the level of qualification, the conditions for obtaining a qualification, and the procedures for checking the learning outcomes.

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training is a central development institution in the field of vocational and professional education in charge of the development of vocational qualifications, occupational standards and catalogues of NVQs. In addition, the Institute contributes to the acquisition of professional qualifications for new professional and vocational areas, and the development and monitoring of the system of national vocational qualifications.

The occupational standard determines the content of the vocational qualification at a certain level of complexity of work and defines the required knowledge, skills, and competences which are based on learning outcomes. They are developed based on an analysis of jobs and specific tasks, including development trends in a given sector. Using occupational standards as a basis, educational programmes for professional, vocational, and higher vocational education as well as catalogues of NVQ are developed. The occupational standards are also the basic document for the validation and verification of vocational qualifications acquired through the validation of non-formal learning. The occupational standard is therefore a link between vocational education and the system of national vocational qualifications⁵. The basis for the validation of vocational qualifications is the catalogue of occupational standards (knowledge and skills). The occupational standards are drafted by experts, the representatives of different stakeholders, such as chamber of commerce, employers, trade unions, professional associations, ministries.

⁵ https://www.gzs.si/skupne_naloge/izobrazevanje/vsebina/Javna-pooblastila/Poklicni-standardi/Razvoj-in-priprava-poklicnih-standardov

The validation initiatives are driven by labour market needs. This is visible in the reform element of SQF that was introduced as a supplementary qualification – a qualification that supplements an individual's competences at the level attained and in a specific professional field, linked to the labour market needs. Placement of supplementary qualifications into SQF and EQF levels is determined by a decision of the Minister responsible for the labour market.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

In terms of the profile of institutions involved in validation arrangements, there have been no significant changes since 2018. The 2018 Report provided an overview of the main institutions involved in the validation arrangements.

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education (CPI) oversees validation in the CVET sector at ISCED levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. It is responsible for the development of the system, providing information and helping to raise awareness. Professional associations and social partners are involved in the process through the development of standards and catalogues since awarded qualifications enable candidates to participate in the labour market. The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education oversees the certification system based on occupational standards and catalogues which are the basis for validation. The National Examination Centre is responsible for assessors and assessment centres in accordance with the National Professional Qualifications Act. It also appoints assessors who validate candidates in the validation centres.

The CPI is also in charge of the SQF and the SQF Register, which includes various qualifications in a uniform qualification system and classifies them into SQF levels according to the learning outcomes. The SQF Register represents publicly accessible information on Slovenian Qualifications Framework and provides insight into all individual qualifications that can be obtained in Slovenia.

At the higher education level, each educational institution is autonomous in determining and pursuing its own process of the validation of prior learning.

The Ministry for Education is responsible at the national level for the implementation and coordination of validation at all levels and sectors of education but does not interfere with the daily work of the above-mentioned institutions.

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education is involved in organising and conducting training for assessors that act as validation practitioners within the system of the validation of National Professional Qualifications.

The minister, responsible for labour, has appointed the NCP SQF-EQF Expert Panel. The Expert Panel consists of seven members, nominated by the ministry responsible for labour, the ministry responsible for education, the ministry responsible for the economy, and the Economic and Social Council (of which one is a representative of the employers and one the representative of the employees).

Its tasks are:

- defines criteria for the placement of a supplementary qualifications within the SQF;
- prepares proposals for placement of a supplementary qualifications within the SQF;
- monitors the development process of the Slovenian and European Qualifications Framework and Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area;
- performs other tasks required for the placement of qualifications.

The validation procedures are described in the National Vocational Qualifications Act and can be carried out by the intercompany educational centres, schools, adult

education providers / organisations and chambers implementing publicly valid educational programmes, meeting the material and personnel conditions laid down in the catalogue of national vocational qualifications. For the national vocational qualifications for which the conditions are not guaranteed with these organisations, contractors are selected in the process of public tender. The validation procedures can be carried out by both private and public institutions entered in the register of contractors of the National Examinations Centres. The contractors can charge a maximum of EUR 157 for the validation process and the funds are obtained from public or private sources⁶. The contractors act freely on the market.

7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

As described in the 2018 Country Report, the approach to raising awareness of validation amongst different target groups, such as counsellors, educational and training providers, employers, employees, trainers, young people, and adults, etc., was the creation of the website of the National Reference Point for national vocational qualifications and their validation. The website contains well-structured information for future candidates, for the potential members of the commission, for counsellors and for institutions conducting the validation process. The information is kept up-to-date and several important databases can be searched: database of occupational standards; catalogues of vocational knowledge and skills; database of institutions conducting validation; database of licenced members of the commission; and database of counsellors/validation practitioners.

The other previously mentioned web portals also contribute to awareness raising and visibility since they can act as reference points of information for any individual looking for guidance and information on validation opportunities.

The website dedicated to National Vocational Qualifications promotes NVQ by presenting different short videos that are categorised as follows: videos about the NVQ and how to acquire them; declarations by NVQ holders; experience and opinions of users with an acquired national vocational qualification. This is a very good example of raising the visibility and attractiveness of NVQ and validation opportunities.

A recent evaluation of the SQF and the register of qualifications of the SQF (Ermenc, Mikules, Biloslavo 2020) reported that, among the respondents participating in interviews, general public and employees are familiar with the SQF, with the Internet sources (over 52%) and certificates or diploma supplements (almost 26%). Most general public respondents have knowledge of where to place their qualification on the SQF, but less than half knew the aim of the SQF, and half of the respondents stated that they are familiar with the SQF levels. A more detailed knowledge of the SQF's content is reported by the representatives of the professional public, who encounter it in various ways in the course of their professional work. However, not enough experts (various consultants) at the operational level and direct users are familiar with it. Although the information is available online, the need for information is particularly emphasized among the stakeholders.

In adult education web portal *Counselling for knowledge* is established by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education. Portal contributes also to raising awareness of validation amongst different target groups: counsellors in public service, employers and adults. It includes information about adult education guidance as a public service,

⁶ Interview with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport representative

publications, tools and methods (also for validation) and map of providers of guidance as public service.

Private providers (especially for national vocational qualifications) are highly motivated to promote qualifications for which purpose they use social networks, advertising, and other promotional activities, as they bring them income⁷.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

According to the Rules on Method and Procedure for the Assessment and Award of National Vocational Qualification, the provider or the institution who undertakes validation is obliged to provide information and counselling to the applicant on possibilities and requirements for the acquisition of NVQ, which was reported in the 2018 Country Report.

During the counselling procedure, the applicant together with the counsellor collects documents and other evidence needed for the award of vocational qualifications and elaborates on the personal portfolio. The evidence in the form of public documents or data from official records issued by state authorities, local communities and bodies exercising public powers is gathered. In addition to the personal portfolio, the assessment and award procedure also includes the preparation of documents forming a mandatory and constituent part of the documentation in the procedure. They are prescribed by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and published on the web site of the National Reference Point for Vocational Qualifications.

The National Vocational Qualifications Act stipulates that the providers of the procedures must provide candidates with advice on the validation procedure and assistance in the composition of the personal portfolio.

As one of the results of the project Professional support for informational counselling activities and the evaluation of informally acquired knowledge 2016-2022, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education published a manual (Gladek N.A., 2021) with an updated professional framework for planning and carrying out the counselling process in adult education. Related to validation procedures, counselling is related to the career planning and development, to learning, and to validating acquired knowledge and skills. The publication describes the four phases of the validation process and also lists the counselling methods and tools that the consultant can use in all phases.

The Slovenian Employment Service has developed a web portal *eSvetovanje* (eGuidance) which enables self-assessment of competences (general and specific) through different questionnaires and by obtaining results of the analysis. The tool also enables assessment of the compliance between the existing competences and the occupation in which the individual would like to be educated. The employment service counsellors record identified competences of unemployed individuals in the ZPNet application. This information can then be used for the selection of appropriate candidates for the appropriate job vacancies. The assessment of competences is also based on a competence interview and unemployed person's self-evaluation (CPI, 2020).

⁷ Interview with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport representative

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The profile of validation practitioners has not changed since the description provided in the 2016 Report (Kosmrlj K., 2016). The conditions for becoming a validation practitioner have not yet been further developed.

The validation practitioners are employees in the school or institution or members of the association where the validation takes place. They are either professionally involved in lifelong learning or education as teachers or researchers or they are administrative workers in the field. Often, they are teachers or academics who do not necessarily research the topic but have acquired a strong personal interest in the subject.

In the system of National Professional Qualifications, the assessors are professionals in the specific field of qualification for which they perform the assessment. They usually work in companies as practitioners but if they are teachers, the assessors typically have a proven professional background and practical experience in the occupation concerned. By the National Professional Qualifications Act, the assessors are selected by the NEC and must fulfil the requirements specified in the catalogue.

In adult education guidance as public service the conditions for adult education counsellor are stipulated in the Adult education Act. They must meet the following conditions: (1) perfect command of the Standard Slovenian language, (2) an educational qualification from a second-cycle study programme or a level of educational qualification corresponding, in accordance with the act regulating higher education, to the educational qualification of the second cycle, (3) a pedagogical andragogical educational qualification pursuant to the act regulating the organisation and financing of education, (4) passed professional exam in education. It is recommended that the adult education counsellor has knowledge of andragogy, pedagogy, psychology, organisation, staff and education system management and staff management. Adult education counsellors must constantly upgrade their professional competence and are also provided with supervision as part of their professional training. (Dovžak, 2020)

Commonly, more than one practitioner is involved in the validation process. This procedure is followed so that an expert in the field, an education expert (pedagogy, andragogic) and/or an employer representative and an administrator manage the application, assessment and awarding of qualification or part of study programme (i.e. exemptions through awarding ECTS).

However, it is important to mention that there is a set of ethical guidelines that need to be followed by the counsellors and assessors which is also an integral part of the training and examination process for the NVQ counsellors and assessors. The ethical guidelines refer to the principles of respect, impartiality, transparency, confidentiality and accuracy/diligence.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

As mentioned above, training is organised for the validation practitioners and counsellors involved in the system of National Professional Qualifications. The training for assessors is delivered by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education in cooperation with the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and the National Examination Centre. The training for counsellors is delivered by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education.

A training programme for validation practitioners for verification and validation of vocational qualifications was developed in 2002. It was changed in 2010 based on the assessments and evaluations of the efficiency of the training programme as described above. As a further result, the need to supplement the content and objectives of the programme was clearly identified.

The Act on national vocational qualifications also prescribes that a candidate for a commission member may obtain evidence of possession of the appropriate competences by direct verification of the basis of the knowledge and skills catalogue determined by the minister responsible for labour. Because of this, a proposal was developed in 2017 for the Competence Standard and the Catalogue of Knowledge and Skills for the direct examination of candidates for members of the commission of national vocational qualification was developed.

In 2017, a new programme was developed that connects modules of the Training for Counsellors for national vocational qualifications with the modules of the training for candidates for commission members for verification and validation of NVQs. This approach makes it possible for individuals to apply the principles of reciprocity and transparent recognition of individual modules within the training programmes. The training programme lasts 32 training hours. The knowledge is assessed based on the competency approach in written form or by the method of interview. Candidates for the members of the commission take the exams at the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the training provider.

In the 2021 revision of the training programme, it is made possible for the candidates to validate their previously acquired knowledge. The previously acquired knowledge is recognised if the candidate proves that it corresponds in content and complexity to the objectives, content or modules and complexity of the training program for members of the commissions for obtaining a license for verification and certification of national professional qualifications. Recognition of previously acquired knowledge takes place according to a procedure which is determined and carried out by the training provider. The candidate proves previously acquired knowledge by submitting relevant evidence, e.g. certificates of completed the program for consultant for national professional qualifications at the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, a certificate of completion of the pedagogic-andragogical programme, participation in the preparation of the professional standard and the catalogue of standards of professional skills and skills for a specific national professional qualification, etc.

The National Reference Point for Vocational Qualifications manages the database of licenced counsellors.

The 2018 Report provides further insights into the evaluation of the analysis of the profile of counsellors involved in NVQ certification in the fields of pharmacy, production technologies, ICT, services for households, technique, stone industry, health sector. Overall, the analysis further showed that the counsellors spend one hour in providing information to potential candidates and in helping them to create their portfolio. Most counsellors use the available databases mentioned earlier in this report, including the catalogue of standards of vocational knowledge and skills when analysing the entry conditions for candidates.

8.3 Qualifications and experience

As stated in the 2018 Report, being a validation practitioner is not typically a self-standing qualification or position in Slovenia. It is more of an additional task, assignment, or function (depending on the organisation of validation) within a given job. Validators on all levels must fulfil the relevant legislation and internal regulations

and meet the requirements of the qualification system and field in question. No significant changes have occurred in this respect since the 2018 Report. Occasionally, seminars on the topic are organised but there are no mandatory administrative requirements. Commonly, the validators are people professionally involved or interested in lifelong learning as teachers, trainers and facilitators.

However, the exception is the system of National Vocational Qualification which has established that counsellors are of different profiles, such as school counsellors, adult education organisers, teachers of different subjects and many other individuals acting in education, training, and adult counselling service, and that they have completed a necessary training programme provided by the National Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (twice a year). They are usually employed at organisations examining individual National Vocational Qualifications or at counselling centres for adult education.

The preconditions for obtaining the license for assessor / committee members are clearly stated on the website of the National Reference Point. Individuals who have a qualification determined by the catalogue of professional knowledge and skills, at least 5 years of work experience in the profession and a completed training program provided by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, which is determined by the minister on the proposal of the competent expert council can obtain the license. Candidates for committee members can also obtain proof of competence through validation based on the catalogue of skills and knowledge determined by the minister.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

There have been no significant changes regarding the funding of validation since 2018. The volume of public funding allocated to validation in any of the sectors is not known publicly.

With regard to institutions such as universities and schools, validation is funded by individual applicants. Individuals pay a validation fee that covers the cost of work undertaken by the committee or validator and for issuing a certificate. Some examples will be provided in the following section.

The funding of the individual validation process of employees is covered by the individual or the employer.

Concerning at-risk groups, such as long-term unemployed people, marginalised groups, and minority ethnic groups, the Employment Service of Slovenia has a budget for additional support. The Employment Service also organises training as a method of informing and advising participants about the opportunities for learning (including validation) that are available to them.

As described in the 2018 Report, costs for validation of formal or non-formal knowledge, skills and competences that are conducted at the 'University na Primorskem' are covered by the candidate and are determined by each member of the University, i.e., Faculty. The Faculty of Health Sciences exempts from the payment non-regular students who claim recognition of professional practice, clinical training or practical training. The costs of the procedure are paid by the candidate after the submission of the application, based on the price list determined by the Faculty. Both the Faculty of Management and the Faculty of Health Science state that the fee for the application for recognition of formal knowledge and skills is EUR 46.80, whereas the fee for the application for recognition of non-formal knowledge and skills is EUR 175.50.

In the NVQ system, the price for the assessment and recognition process is determined at the national level in the Rules on method and procedure for the assessment and award of national professional qualifications. The revision introduced in 2020 and 2022, redefined the methodology for formulation of the price for obtaining a national vocational qualification certificate. Overall, costs for candidates have increased. The cost of the validation procedure is determined by the assessment centre/institution and can include:

- up to EUR 157 for administrative costs of assessment centre/institution, advisor (guidance counsellor) and other costs;
- between EUR 34-76 for the assessment commission;
- EUR 15 can be charged in the event of a candidate's justified absence, for the review of evidence.

For adults, validation within the guidance as a public service is free of charge, due adult education guidance as a public service financed by the Ministry of Education.

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

The number of NVQ certificates issued from 2019 to 2022 varied with the lowest number of awarded certificates during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 (3126 certificates). The highest number of certificates was awarded in 2019 (4709), followed by 2021 (4228) and 2022 (3713 certificates). From the NVQ certificates awarded, it is not possible to identify trends in certain sectors. However, it can be observed that the number of certificates awarded before 2019 was somewhat higher in the period 2015-2018.

As reported in the 2018 Validation Report, the number of certificates in 2018 and 2017 was significantly lower than those issued in 2015 and 2016 (2015: 4 758 NVQ certificates; 2016: 4 674 NVQ certificates; 2017: 3 996 and in 2018: 3 840 NVQ certificates). However, as stated in the conclusions of the evaluation of the analysis of NVQs certification procedures in certain fields (Drofenik K., 2017), it is not possible to identify trends from the number of certificates issued in each area of certification, because they vary considerably in terms of the volume and number of certificates issued.

9.2.2 Validation users

The profile of the validation users can be assessed in general terms as described in the 2018 Report.

Information about users of validation is not publicly accessible. For national vocational qualifications, applicants are mostly practitioners that did not complete secondary education or are looking for a higher level of qualification or are changing field or occupation. In other cases, unemployed people, especially long-term unemployed people are selected to take part in validation by the employment service consultant to improve their employability.

In the higher education sector, applicants are mostly students who enrolled in a study programme and wish to validate their prior knowledge and experience for a given course or part of the study programme. Some are also drop-outs looking to re-enrol to continue their studies or students trying to change institutions or study programme.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The 2018 Report describes that in 2017 a Decree on conditions and methods for ensuring the rights of persons with international protection was adopted. This Regulation specifies the terms and conditions for ensuring the rights of refugees and persons granted subsidiary protection (hereinafter: persons with international protection), among other, namely to education. It enables the integration of persons with international protection for whom formal education is not proved by documentation into secondary, higher professional education and higher education programmes.

The Decree defines the enrolment in the first year of programmes of lower and secondary vocational education, secondary vocational education and general education for persons with international protection for whom formal education cannot be proved by documents. Enrolment is possible based on a certificate of successful completion of the examination, issued by the Institute of Slovenian Education, and if the person fulfils the specific enrolment requirements set by the educational programme. The examination includes testing of general knowledge in the disciplines of social sciences, literature, arts and humanities and mathematics literacy and communication in English. The detailed contents of the examination and organization of the implementation of the examination are prescribed by the minister responsible for education based on professional platforms institution. The costs of examination relating to the preparation, organisation, execution, and evaluation of the examination is determined annually by the Institute in agreement with the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for care and integration of migrants (hereinafter: Office). The candidate can perform an examination three times for free.

The Decree also defines enrolment in the first year of programmes of higher professional education for persons with international protection for whom formal education cannot be proven by documents. Enrolment is possible based on a certificate of examination, issued by the National Examinations Centre (hereinafter: RIC) and passing a test of special talents, skills, and psychomotor performance if it is determined by the educational programme. Also, they can enrol in the first year of higher education study programmes based on a certificate of satisfactory completion of examination issued by the RIC and passing a test of special talents and mental and physical ability if it is determined by the study programme. The examination comprises two exams that comprise a written examination in mathematics and written and oral examinations in English. Examination, which can be executed in the English language, is the test of a basic level of general secondary education following the catalogue of knowledge for the exam in each subject. The Catalogue of knowledge is prescribed by the minister responsible for education based on a RIC. The costs of examination relating to the preparation, organization, execution, and evaluation of the examination are determined annually by RIC in agreement with the Office. The candidate can repeat the examination twice for free, each time with the option of overwriting one exam, he or she had failed. The costs in this case are borne by the Office.

The updated Decree in 2021 prescribes the possibility for inclusion of individuals with international protection, who cannot prove formal education with documents, in the validation procedures and confirmation of national vocational qualifications (Article 34).

The Rules on the method and procedure for the validation of national vocational qualifications (2022) define that the costs for validation which occurred as a result of ensuring the equal participation of a deaf, blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind candidate or committee member in the verification and validation process are paid by the National Examination Centre.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

The procedure for validation under the National Professional Qualifications Act was described in detail in the 2016 Report, and in the 2018 Report where the focus was on the method of the portfolio in validation.

The NVQ portal describes the definition and the aim of the **portfolio** (consolidated folder) which collectively attests to the applicant's competence acquired through learning (formal, non-formal, informal) or experience (work, life). Documents demonstrating the applicant's learning achievements, work, or other experience, acquired competences and qualifications are systematically structured in respect of vocational standards and catalogues of expertise and skills standards when National Vocational Qualifications are assessed and awarded. In the National Vocational Qualification assessment and award procedure, the portfolio serves as a tool helping the commission to form an opinion about the applicant, his/her work experience, education and training and as an assessment method. Counsellors have to consider this when they are helping the applicants compile their portfolios.

The applicant's portfolio consists of the documents in which and by which the applicant demonstrates his/her work experience, education and training programmes attended (certificates, diplomas, licences, certificates issued by a company) and other supporting documents demonstrating the completion of study obligation; CV; and references. It is described that a certain type of document could be taken into account, such as evidence about performed practical work in the workplace; written documents the applicant elaborated on in the workplace; description of services provided in the workplace. In addition, the following supporting evidence is also taken into consideration: authorship and co-authorship of books and other publications, competition awards, articles, products, etc.

As described in the One-off Report on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Slovenia (CIP, 2020), the assessment of a candidate's non-formal and informal learning is in most cases a combination of validation of the portfolio and direct assessment. In cases when the NVQ verification committee decides that candidates' evidence partially conforms with occupational standards, it then defines the knowledge, skills and competences that are required to be assessed directly. In that case, the knowledge assessment methods defined in NVQ catalogues are implemented to identify the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by candidates in various learning environments. The NVQ catalogue describes and lists various combinations of assessment methods, such as written test, practical assignments in real work situations or simulated situations, roleplay, product and project presentations. It is important to mention that NVQ verification committee must have a very good knowledge of knowledge assessment methods and must be capable and flexible enough to adapt the assessment methods to the type of knowledge to be assessed. The adjustments should be focused on individual candidates' needs by considering the quality performance of the procedure.

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education intends to implement **digital badges** for documenting the knowledge, skills, and competences of adults as one of goals of ESF project, funded by the Operational Program for the implementation of the European Cohesion Policy in the period 2022-2027. In addition, they also developed the **electronic portfolio** as a result of the project funded by the Operational Program for the implementation of the European Cohesion Policy in the period 2014-2020. The project was implemented through 2016-2021. The aims were to develop effective information and counselling approaches for the inclusion of working adults, especially

less educated and educationally inactive and older than 45 years. The project was also focused on validation of non-formal and informally acquired knowledge of employees, with the aim of maintaining employment, enabling greater flexibility in employment and further development of employees' careers, related to inclusion in further education and validation and certification of previously acquired knowledge.

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

The Slovenian Institute for Adult Education published “Guidelines of identifying and documenting the knowledge, skills and competences of adults in the form of digital badges” (Mlinar, V., 2019). The report is providing step by step description of the process introduction, design and of issuing a digital badge as a tool for recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, skills, and competences. The process follows the four-step approach to validation as recommended by CEDEFOP.

In addition, the Centre developed the e-Portfolio (ESF funded) – the main tool for the validation of non-formal and informal knowledge, skills and competences. The e-Portfolio is used for the identification and documentation and development of competences of the individual.

The National Reference Point (NRP) manages the following databases: educational programmes, a list of consultants, a list of valid licenses of committee members, a catalogue of vocational standards, a catalogue of national vocational qualifications, list of contractors. All of these are publicly available and are used in the validation process by different users, based on their needs: the individuals / candidates, the contractors performing validation, the committee members, employers, etc.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

The quality assurance at all educational levels is described in detail in the 2016 Report (Kosmrlj K., 2016) followed by a more detailed description of the quality assurance on the level of national vocational qualifications in the 2018 Report (Pavkov M., 2019).

The 2018 Validation Report describes that quality assurance is ensured by awarding the accreditation of assessment centres/institutions for national occupational qualifications. The licence is awarded by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and it enables performance of assessment and accreditation procedure of national occupational qualifications. There is also an online database, managed by the National Examination Centre, that is publicly available on the website of the National Reference Point, which includes a database of accredited centres/institutions, such as inter-company training centres, schools, adult education organizations and chambers that carry out publicly valid educational programmes and fulfil the material and personnel conditions set out in the catalogue of standards of professional skills and other acts. These institutions have obtained permission to conduct procedures for verifying and validating the NVQ. This is regulated by the Act on Verification and Certification of NVQs. In cases where conditions in the organisations are not fully given, the National Examination Centre selects the person performing the procedures for establishing and certifying professional qualifications on the basis of a public tender. The detailed procedure for the inclusion into the database is governed by the Rules on keeping a register or providers of procedures for verifying and validating national vocational qualifications.

In addition, a comprehensive overview of how the validation system ensures quality in all four individual stages of the validation of non-formal and informal knowledge is presented in the CPI report (CPI, 2020). Here, a short overview is presented. Namely, the quality of the system is ensured with the availability of information to the public (web portals); counselling services offered through a public network of counselling centres for adults; timely inscription of qualification standards in the SQF, including additional qualifications; the procedures to document all validation stages are prescribed. In addition, the identification and structuring of a candidate's evidence are done following the required structure of portfolios as prescribed by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and published at the website of the National Reference Point for Occupational Qualifications – NRP. Procedures for NVQ verification committee members are specified and are transparent; committees are autonomous and independent in their decision-making; assessment methods and evaluation criteria are prescribed in catalogues for each NVQ, and committee members must respect ethical principles.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

In general, there are no regular monitoring and evaluation practices to assess the success of validation practices. However, an evaluation of the SQF and the Register of qualifications of the SQF was conducted in 2020 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and the CPI (Erasmus+ financed research). The research implemented semi-structured interviews, focus groups, questionnaire for general public and questionnaire for expert public.

The key findings are as follows:

- the level of awareness of the SQF Register among the studied general public is low even five years after its establishment, as four-fifths of the Slovenian respondents are not yet familiar with it;
- the level of awareness of the SQF Register among the studied general public is relatively low. Nevertheless, respondents using the SQF Register indicate that it generally facilitates access to information on education and training, provides a clear and transparent overview of the country's qualifications system, provides relevant information on the learning outcomes of qualifications and clearly presents the types of qualifications;
- the use of the SQF Register is widespread among the professional public, but is rare, as it is most frequently used by the latter only once a year or several times a year;
- the use of the SQF Register is widespread among the professional public, but is rare, as it is most frequently used by the latter only once a year or several times a year;
- understanding of the SQF Register among the professional public is good.

The recommendations of the research study mainly focus on the efforts to be done in informing and promoting the SQF Register, among professionals and the general public. It is also recommended that some functionalities of the SQF Register should be improved, and a terminological dictionary of all terms used in the SQF Register should be made available.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

The Slovenian approach to transparently present the SQF structure and aims to lead to the acquisition of three categories of qualifications: education (demonstrated by a public document); vocational qualification certificate; and supplementary qualification certification; is well acknowledged in the society. This is supported by a number of good practice examples presented throughout this report, including good practices of validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is positive that validation is enabled at all levels of education thus allowing every citizen, at any age, to acquire additional skills and competences throughout life.

The recent report (Ermenc, Mikules, Biloslavo 2020) on the evaluation of the SQF and the register of qualifications of the SQF shows that stakeholders recognise the transparency and order that the SQF brings to the whole education system. The stakeholders shared the opinion that the reform of the SQF role was not performed well in terms of including new types of qualifications in the SQF and therefore stressed the significance of quality assurance of qualifications as the most important for the further development of the SQF. The report also states that the stakeholders primarily use the SQF to provide information for the needs of their employees and to inform partners and users, which includes the gradual integration of information on the SQF (and EQF) in different documents. Concerning the general public, the findings point out that the general public is still trying to understand the logic of the SQF.

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

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

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

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

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