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Country report

Slovenia

2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Disclaimer:

1 Introduction and Evaluation

1.1 Abstract

Slovenia does not have a long tradition in the validation of prior learning; however, the country is taking the first steps towards establishing an overarching national system of validation. In 2016, the national qualification framework, the SQF, was legally adopted. The SQF is referenced to the EQF. In addition to the SQF, the Ministry responsible for education has invited all institutions involved in the validation of non-formal and informal learning (up to the tertiary level) to start developing an overarching, national system for validation that will include common standards, processes and quality assurance. At this point in time, validation is done individually by each institution, even though common practices can be observed. Validation is most developed and implemented in the CVET sector where processes are centralised to some extent at national level. On the other hand, the validation system is completely decentralised at higher education level, where it is performed individually in each school or department. Institutions responsible for validation are public and their core function is funded by the government, while single validation processes are paid for by applicants. The validation process typically includes assembling a portfolio with evidence of prior learning and experience. This portfolio is then analysed by a validation practitioner or a validation committee who may request extra evidence from the applicant either in the form of an interview, a test, a performance or additional documentation. In the CVET sector, whole qualifications may be awarded as a result of validation determined under the National Professional Qualifications Act that provides the legal framework for validation of non-formal and informal knowledge for the labour market. On IVET and higher education level only partial validation is possible, the result of validation can be the award of credits for a single course or a module within a study programme (ECTS points).

1.2 Introduction and main changes since the 2014 update

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has constantly been an important issue for Slovenian education in the last decade, and since 2006 the issue has embraced all educational levels. It is commonly referred to as validation of prior acquired knowledge or validation of prior knowledge. Although this is an informal phrase, it clearly shows a significant shift in terms of the overall understanding of the issue, in that the focus in not on how knowledge is acquired but on the value of knowledge itself.

During the period 2010 and 2014, some developments took place in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the higher education sector. Every higher education institution is now required to validate non-formal and informal learning. This has allowed learners to transfer between institutions which has led to an increase in learning at national level and hopefully improved employability.

The higher education programme and institutional evaluations include informal and non-formal learning validations. However although this is the formal position, this practice is sometimes not understood sufficiently especially by teachers or even by managers. The VET sector (2 and 3-year programmes in Slovenia) is efficient in both practice and theory -- whereas the university sector often does "theory only" meaning that there can be a relatively weak link with the business and employment sectors. One problem is that there are not enough people from the non-university environment to realistically validate such qualifications. Additional effort is thus needed to promote these aspects in curricular development and strategic planning especially in the non-VET sectors of HEI; university admission protocols often struggle in practice with these aspects.

In 2016, the Slovenian Qualification Framework (SQF) was established from a practical point of view. The SQF is now a common framework comprised of all the previously established frameworks for single levels of education: compulsory, vocational and secondary level and higher education. This is seen as a first step towards centralising the field. Thus far, different

sectors and levels of education have organised validation separately and in a decentralised manner even though cooperation existed between lower levels of education and with employers. Higher education institutions (universities) were less centralised and cooperative in this respect, but new initiatives to improve cooperation with the real economic sector have become more frequent in recent years.

Volunteering is also gaining momentum in Slovenia. In addition to a number of well-known projects ran by humanitarian organisations, new initiatives and developments have been relatively successful such as the projects SIMBIOZA, Nefiks and others.

The only significant change since 2014 has been the adoption of the Act on National Qualifications Framework (RS Official Gazette No.104/2015). The Act came into force in January 2016 and took effect July 2016. The Slovenian Qualifications Framework (SQF) comprises all levels of education. It includes qualifications and learning outcomes for each education level and is referenced to the EQF. Each certificate of education issued by any accredited Slovenian educational institution will include information of the SQF and the referencing to the EQF. The SQF is funded publicly while costs of validation are at the expense of the candidate.

In terms of validation, responsible ministries have appointed the public organisations that work in the field of qualifications and validation to start the process of establishing a national system for validation up to the higher education level.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

Validation acquired more importance in Slovenia with the introduction of the Bologna process and the internationalisation of (higher) education. At first, it was mostly limited to recognition of qualifications obtained abroad, but later the validation of prior knowledge and skills from non-formal and informal learning settings started to develop.

With regard to the recognition of formal education, in 2005 the validation procedure of formal education obtained abroad (nostrification) was replaced with two procedures (recognition for the purpose of employment and recognition for the purpose of further education). In 2011, there were new changes determined by the Assessment and Recognition of Education Act. (http://www.mizs.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/directorate_of_higher_education/enic_naric_centr e/).

The body designated for the assessment of (foreign) education is ENIC-NARIC centre, organized within the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The opinion, issued by the ENIC-NARIC centre contains information on different elements of the assessed formal education, such as the educational qualification, the status of educational institution and educational programme, the field of education, the obtained title or degree, a short description of the educational system, a comparison with the educational system in the Republic of Slovenia.. For the purpose of continuing education in the Republic of Slovenia, educational institutions are the competent bodies for the recognition procedure. ENIC-NARIC centre acts as a consultative body when necessary. The applicant can apply for recognition at the educational institution, where he/she will continue education. The recognition procedure is a part of the enrolment procedure.

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 or to obtain exemptions / credits for part of the educational programme (for a single subject, a module, or a study year).

Slovenia has a clear policy on lifelong learning which includes validation (Jelenc 2007). Several organisations and institutions at national and regional levels actively put lifelong learning policy into practice. Significantly, in the last few years validation has played an important role in this field. Awareness of validation has grown amongst the general population and is no longer considered a new or unheard of topic.

There is no single overarching legal framework for validation, however the National programme for youth (2013-2022), accepted in October 2013, is trying to prepare a systematic solution for keeping track of and recognising non-formal education. It is expected that the system will also cover other age groups in addition to young people. Validation is included in other sectors' acts and in subordinate regulations. The Ministry for Education, Science and Sport) and the Ministry for labour, family, social affairs, and equal opportunities are responsible for issues regarding education, classification and validation of education for employment, and for qualification frameworks. In order to better connect education and employment (mainly education-based salary levels in public sector employment, which is centralised in Slovenia), as well as to improve national and international comparability (and validation), the KLASIUS classification system was developed in 2006. KLASIUS is based on eight competence levels which can be used to relate all qualifications to learning outcomes and has been the key national standard for analysing education developments.

The legal framework on validation consists of several sectoral acts that regulate the possibility and right to the validation of prior knowledge:

- Act on National Qualifications Framework (2015): 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.

- Act on Higher Education (2012): changes since 2009 include the KLASIUS classification as part of compulsory evidence of higher education institutions, 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.

- Post-secondary Vocational Education Act (2004): the act does not address validation directly, but administers schools to prepare regulations and organise validation when necessary. A number of changes were proposed by the government and were adopted as amendments and supplements to the Act in 2013. The proposal includes some aspects of validation, especially during enrolment, but does not include detailed regulation. At the time of writing, the proposal is awaiting debate in Parliament.

- Vocational Education Act (2006): validation is not directly addressed by the act but it enables students to progress through school years with respect to the recognition of non-formal learning. Non-formal learning can also be used in the process of forming grades.

- National Professional Qualifications Act (2010) is a 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.

- On VET level: Occupational standards and catalogues and also rules for their implementation in the validation process

2.2 Validation in education and training

A national system of validation in education is not yet in place. However, the minister responsible for education has allocated tasks to the relevant individuals and organisations with the aim of preparing a national system for validation for all levels up to the higher education level. Higher education will keep its autonomy in the next period. The first step in

developing the national validation system is to collect ideas, examples of good practice and working solutions as well as to list the problems occurring in the existing validation practice.

Validation practice is more highly developed in continuous vocational education (CVET sector). This is a good example because the sector has the longest tradition and the best links to the labour market as craftsmen and other professional associations have stressed the importance of (comparable) qualifications since before the founding of Slovenia as an independent country.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

The Employment Service of Slovenia (henceforth ESS) has been active in recent years in the promotion of opportunities for validation and the recognition of prior learning and competences. As part of these awareness-raising activities or stimulated by them, different actors in the private and third sectors (professional chambers, NGOs, non-formal education providers) have become more aware of the existing validation opportunities. These initiatives are primarily oriented towards under-privileged groups, such as long-term unemployed people, individuals with low or no qualifications, older people who are unemployed, those in superfluous professions and others. Group and individual counselling and career-guidance are made available. These measures help to make the best use of existing competences through validation processes which aim for further education or re-qualification. On the one hand, employers are more open to the validation of candidates' competences and qualifications rather than to solely formal education outcomes. On the other hand, training and non-formal education programmes issue certificates that are more "useful" for validation, with better descriptions of the competences achieved, the methods of learning and the extent of knowledge and comprehension. Some companies offer options for skills training and internships.

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.

In 2015, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities adopted two new rules - the Rules on the method and procedure for the validation of national professional qualifications and the Rules on keeping the register of providers of national vocational qualifications assessment and validation. The aim of these rules is 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).

2.3.1 Skills audits

The private sector in Slovenia has become more aware of validation as a means of improving human resource policies and practice in companies. However, this progress does not apply to the whole private sector and is not yet widespread. However, a shift towards valuing competences rather than formal education certificates in the recruitment process can be observed (not yet in the public sector). This is a form of internal validation in companies that is mainly implemented with testing periods lasting between one to three months.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

The Resolution on validation and recognition of youth non-formal education (http://www.mss.si/datoteke/dokumenti/resolucija-Priznavanje_neformalnega_izobrazevanja_v_Sloveniji.pdf) was issued in 2013. The Resolution includes other groups 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. The latter is the hardest to validate.

No significant changes have occurred since the last update in 2014. The main focus of third sector organisations and initiatives has been on encouraging more options and better systems for internships, especially in the sectors of social services and health-care.

Volunteering has become more valued on the labour market but the validation of volunteering as work experience is still individually assessed by each employer or company. Validation of volunteering towards qualifications is even less common.

3   Links to national qualification systems

It was anticipated that the SQF would be fully implemented by July 2016. Prior to this, each of the different sectors were using their own frameworks. At the various levels of education, different bodies are in charge of validation:

- Centres for vocational education for ISCED levels 2, 3 and 4,
- ENIC-NARIC centre for assessment of education (Slovenian and foreign),
- Individual higher education institutions (universities and faculties) for validation in the higher education sector.

Learning outcomes are systematically used for validation of prior learning for study programmes up to ISCED level 4. In the higher education sector, validation processes are not yet systematic. In vocational education, validation is available for parts of courses, courses or modules and it can also lead to awarding a professional degree. In general 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.

Following the legal adoption of the SQF, the ministry in charge of education has invited all bodies in the process of validation to start developing a national system for validation at all levels and sectors of education.

4   Standards

Slovenia has no uniform system for validation at this point in time and standards vary for different levels and sectors of education. In higher education standards may also differ between different institutions. In VET, the Institute of Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education (henceforth IRSVET) has developed occupational standards (the level of knowledge and skills) in cooperation with professional associations and chambers in the different sectors and these standards are comparable at national level as well as between sectors. These standards are closely linked to job requirements. IRSVET is also responsible for occupational standards. An occupational standard is one of the basic documents required for the validation of prior learning in accordance with the National Professional Qualifications Act. The other document is the catalogue that is based on occupational standards. From 2010 to 2016, many professional standards and catalogues have been developed and revised (co-financed by the European Social Fund).

Standards are not generally defined for higher education, mainly because the process is led autonomously by each higher education institution. It is common, however, to compare the skills, knowledge and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning to those that should be acquired through the formal study programme. Validation against learning outcomes is not very common and few higher education institutions have yet

implemented learning outcomes in their study programmes. Standards are usually oriented towards study programmes rather than job requirements and are designed and implemented in cooperation with teachers responsible for the delivery of courses and modules rather than labour market requirements.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

ENIC-NARIC is the institution in charge of the validation of education acquired in a foreign country. It also provides expert opinion on the level of education obtained in relation to its direct application to the labour market. ENIC-NARIC also undertakes validation and collects and provides information on the Slovenian education system.

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

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

The Ministry for Education is responsible at 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.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

During the period when the national validation system was first established, the issue of validation was considered important and worthy of considerable publicity. In recent years, IRSVET has taken actions to raise awareness through different campaigns (also co-funded by the European Social Fund), cooperating with the ESS. These campaigns focused on CVET qualifications. However, in relation to higher education, not much was done to raise awareness about the opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning for enrolment or re-enrolment.

The implementation of SQF also received significant publicity.

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

It is common practice for the institutions who undertake validation to publish all the necessary information on their web-sites. Additional guidance is offered to candidates by advisors. The law requires that advice and guidance is provided as part of the validation process and this rule is adhered to by all institutions providing validation.

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

There are no specific measures to enhance awareness amongst guidance practitioners about validation in general. The ministry responsible for education is involved with different

activities to implement the SQF and validation nationally and across all education sectors. These activities will aim to improve awareness about validation for the benefit of the general public as well as labour market stakeholders.

CVET level is more organised in this respect. The following organisations are not only raising awareness but are also trying to improve the practices of assessment centres/institutions, assessors and advisors through various workshops, conferences and meetings and also different types of training: the NEC (responsible for developing validation methodologies and procedures and training of assessors in accordance with the National Professional Qualifications Act); IRSVET (responsible for training and monitoring the advisors - guidance counsellors in accordance with National Professional Qualifications Act); Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (responsible for organisation of different workshops); and Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (funder and active participant at different workshops organised by above organisations).

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Typically, 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 necessary 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 . In accordance with the National Professional Qualifications Act, the assessors are selected by the NEC and must fulfil the requirements specified in the catalogue.

It is common that more than one practitioner is involved in the validation process. This procedure is followed so that an expert in the field, an expert in education (pedagog, 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).

7.2 Qualification requirements

Being a validation practitioner is not typically a self-standing qualification or position in Slovenia. It is more an additional task or assignment or function (depending on the organisation of validation) within a given job. Validators on all levels have to fulfil the relevant legislation and internal regulations and meet the requirements of the qualification system and field in question.

Occasionally, seminars on the topic are organised but there are no mandatory administrative requirements. Usually validators are people professionally involved or interested in lifelong learning as teachers, trainers and facilitators. Awareness, experience and goodwill are considered informally to be the best recommendations for becoming a validator. An exception is a system of National Professional Qualifications where all validators have formal requirements which have to be fulfilled. Some general requirements are defined in Law together with specific conditions for each Professional Qualification.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Since being a "validator" is not a sole job position but is a task within one's regular employment or job, no specific education or qualification is needed. However, there are regular seminars for existing and aspiring evaluators held by the responsible bodies and these include, to a limited extent, information about the validation of prior learning. Events

described in section 6.3 and debates between practitioners contribute to improving the knowledge and skills of validators. The most important and informative aspect is sharing experience.

In the system of National Professional Qualifications, the assessors are obliged to prove they have competences required to work as assessors. They are also required to attend a four-day training course where they learn how to assess a portfolio and how to prepare practical assessments to test skills performance. The training is mandatory (by law) for validators at CVET level prior to obtaining their licence.

8   Quality assurance

There is no national overarching quality assurance framework for validation. However, with the establishment of the SQF, the legislation introduces quality assurance in the implementation of the SQF but does not include quality assurance of validation practices. This is delegated to the institutions performing validation.

At the present time, a system of quality assessment and assurance exists for each level of education. Quality assessment is performed by state-budgeted bodies (councils, agencies) that are autonomous from the government. These bodies are responsible for training evaluators. Training courses are usually organised on the basis of one or two-day seminars and aim to be informative at a theoretical level rather than at a practical level. Participants are awarded a certificate of attendance and in order to get an evaluator certificate (licence), participants have to provide evidence that they have the knowledge of the topic (quality assurance, legislation, tools).

Each institution has to undertake periodical self-evaluations. Reporting self-evaluation findings to the responsible ministry is compulsory by law. Since they are internal, each institution has their own regulations and methods and findings are not necessarily comparable between institutions. External evaluation, which is also compulsory by law over a period of time, is more centrally regulated and findings are comparable within each level of education.

Each educational level has their own quality assurance framework for institutional and programme evaluation and accreditation. Validation and non-formal education recognition are part of these frameworks. Measures and regulations for validation are checked and so is the quality of the procedure of validation and recognition, maintaining evidence, and the body responsible for validation (type of committee, how members are chosen and appointed, how often they meet, how they work and cooperate, how are validation processes performed). During the evaluation visit, the evaluation committee typically checks the existing evidence, talks to the member of the institutional validation committee and, if available, also to students or other people that applied for validation.

Quality assurance for validation is more developed at CVET level under the National Professional Qualifications Act, where quality assurance is provided through different channels. The exact procedure depends on how the vocational standards and catalogues are adopted. The licence for assessors can be obtained only if one fulfils the requirements specified by legal acts and the catalogue. The same applies to assessment centres/institutions. IRSVET is responsible for monitoring the certification system and monitoring the work of the advisors (guidance counsellors) who supervise candidates in the process of verification and validation of qualifications, as well as their training and the monitoring of the international comparability of vocational training qualifications. The NEC is responsible for monitoring the work of assessors and their training.

A candidate has the right to appeal within eight days following the receipt of the assessment commission's decision. Appeals are submitted to an appeal commission appointed by the minister of labour. The appeal commission has to establish the validity of an appeal within eight days. If the appeal commission establishes the validity of an appeal, a new commission is appointed to conduct the validation procedure. Supervision is provided by the Labour inspectorate.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

There have been no changes regarding the funding of validation since 2014. Policy-making and implementation at national level is funded by the government. The institutions stated in chapter 5 are public institutions working in the public interest and are publicly funded. Part of their funding, however, is obtained through European funded projects. The establishment of both the NVQF and SQF was funded and co-funded by European funds.

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.

The professional or crafts associations are funded by their members and they also participate in tenders for national and EU projects. The funding of the Individual validation process is covered by the applicant or by their employer.

In relation to at risk groups such as long-term unemployed people, marginalised groups, 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 leaning (including validation) available to them.

9.2 Distribution of costs

Costs are distributed between institutions performing the validation procedure and the individual applicant. If validation and recognition is performed as part of enrolment procedures, institutions will often include these costs in tuition fees (or lower the tuition fee respectively).

Cost of the assessment of formal education at the ENIC-NARIC centre is EUR 50. Recognition of foreign formal education for the purpose of further education at educational institutions is free of charge; nevertheless, individual higher education institutions stipulate the costs for recognition (validation) of non-formal and informal learning in the process of enrolment procedure.

In the NVQ system the price for the assessment and recognition process is determined on the national level in the Rules on method and procedure for the assessment and award of national professional qualifications. Rules were subject to changes in 2015 in regard to the validation procedure, selection of assessment centres/institutions and also to the costs of the procedure. Overall, costs for candidates have increased. The cost of validation procedure is determined by the assessment centre/institution and can include:

- up to EUR 132 for administrative costs of assessment centre/institution, advisor (guidance counsellor) and other costs,
- between EUR 64 – 92 for assessment commission,
- EUR 3 can be charged if the candidate cannot attend the assessment due to justifiable reasons.

The aim of these changes is to improve the validation procedure and limit the number of assessment centres/institutions with the aim of raising the quality of validation procedures.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is no national evidence of the benefit of validation to individuals. Benefits can be ascertained by analysing trends in terms of return to education, continuing education and behaviour in the labour market. Thorough research is necessary to properly validate the benefits of validation to individuals at a national level. Single examples of lifelong learning

research can indirectly offer an insight in the topic (see ex. Širok, Košmrlj and Sedmak 2013, Širok and Košmrlj 2010, Trunk Širca and Gomezelj Omerzel 2006).

Indirectly, benefits could be deduced by the outcomes of the European Youth Forum on the influence of non-formal education provided by youth organisations on young people's employability. Research findings show that there are six core competencies employers seek. These include: communication skills, organisational skills and planning, decision making, team work, self-confidence and autonomy, numeracy literacy. It can be argued that in most cases, the first five of these competencies are better gained through non-formal education and informal learning provided by youth organisations than by formal education in mainstream provision. Validation of such experience can prove to be a competitive advantage in the labour market for both job-seekers and employers (MSS 2013).

A recent evaluation of ESS job placement process has shown that candidates with inappropriate competencies could be directed to a vacant job position, while others with appropriate competencies might not be considered. Processing an application for job placement includes a scan of the candidates' competencies acquired in formal and lifelong learning, but often people do not have or do not present the documentation or they forget to mention certain skills that are not directly linked to their existing or aspiring profession. It is up to the ESS counsellor to thoroughly scan the profile, skills and competences of each candidate. However, people with validation certificates have both the documentation and the awareness of their competencies and therefore their employment mediation process is more efficient and, usually, more effective (Širok, Košmrlj and Sedmak 2013).

The benefits of validation can also be highlighted in relation to research into the impact of the Lifelong learning programme on education in Slovenia (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius). Part of the research considered the impact of international activities on competencies and employability. Results show that students, teachers and practitioners participating in international activities develop core competencies to a greater extent compared to peers who do not engage in such activities. Additionally, their employability improves on a self-declarative level as well as in the actual labour market. All activities within the Lifelong learning programme are automatically subject to validation and recognition, so the declared benefits of the programme can be transferred as benefits to the individual too (Širok and Košmrlj 2011).

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

There is no general national evidence on validation, hence it is difficult to assess trends in validation on national level. Data is kept by different actors in the process: by each institution, in electronic form in the national registry called National Reference Point (henceforth referred as NRP). The IRSVET keeps records on professional standards and catalogues, the NEC on assessment centres/institutions and licenced assessors and the assessment centres/institutions on certificate holders. These records are publicly available on the NRO web site (without personal information).The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (henceforth referred to as SORS) keeps records on formal education results, but keeps few records on non-formal education and no records on validation. Some data that may illustrate the extent of further education is data on companies that offer education programmes and training for adults. Available data collected on national level by the SORS is shown in the tables below.

Table 9.1   Number of participants in continuing education programmes by TYPE OF PROGRAMME and YEAR

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Type of programme -	301 790	268 745	291 205	327 020	319 808	308 889	302 340	342 689	360 315

TOTAL									
Verified	38 744	37 839	33 501	49 459	41 572	39 184	35 787	39 194	34 589
Non-verified	235 608	205 101	233 051	255 219	255 274	249 627	247 295	281 229	302 248
Language (verified and non-verified)	27 438	25 805	24 653	22 342	22 962	20 078	19 258	22 266	23 478

Source: SORS

Table 9.2   Share of adults in the age group 25–64 who participated in formal or non-formal education (%) by TYPE OF EDUCATION and YEAR

	2007	2011
Participants in formal education	8.7	2.4
Participants in non-formal education	36.1	34.8
Participants in formal or non-formal education	40.6	36.3

Source: SORS

Table 9.3   Participants in continuing education programs by PROVIDERS and YEAR

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Providers - TOTAL	301 790	268 745	291 205	327 020	319 808	308 889	302 340	342 689	360 315
Folk high schools	30 546	24 339	22 255	25 917	29 135	29 082	34 274	36 336	30 709
Other special institutions	79 441	80 790	66 247	70 368	67 996	55 686	61 632	68 881	80 315
Parts of schools	15 809	14 850	13 297	12 831	13 291	13 875	20 173	15 003	17 004
Parts of enterprises	113 143	90 401	134 486	148 295	134 804	143 592	128 269	141 239	150 121
Educational centres at the Chambers of Commerce or Crafts	9 647	9 076	5 118	5 077	6 779	6 191	9 050	21 747	18 899
Vocational and professional associations	93 04	12 312	12 379	13 812	18 114	21 640	14 132	21 493	26 394
Driving schools	20 216	21 875	23 526	36 531	27 347	26 307	22 784	25 360	21 347
Other	23 684	15 102	13 897	14 189	22 342	12 516	12 026	12 630	15 526

Source: SORS

9.4.2   Validation users

Information about users of validation is not publicly accessible. For vocational qualifications, applicants are mostly practitioners that did not complete school education or are looking for a higher level of qualification or are changing field or occupation. In other cases including unemployed people, especially long-term unemployed people are selected to take part in validation by the employment service consultant in order 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 study programme. Some are also drop-outs looking to re-enrol to continue their studies or students trying to change institutions or study programme.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

There is no specific policy for validation arrangements in relation to disadvantaged groups. Some refugee children are included in primary and secondary education, but these are individual cases and each school carries out inclusion following their own specific protocols.

Special procedures for enrolment of refugees and displaced people are being prepared (validation of their knowledge) in the case of individuals who cannot prove that they have obtained any educational qualifications through the provision of formal documents.

10 Validation methods

There is no typical validation method in Slovenia, with the exception of the validation under the National Professional Qualifications Act, as institutions are quite autonomous in the process. However, the validation process would usually take around 30 days from completing the application to issuing a certificate. Depending on the individual case, the duration may be abbreviated or prolonged. The duration of single steps for the 'validator' is administered in the internal regulation acts, while candidates have more freedom. In several institutions, application and part of the process may be held online, using emails for communication and online tools for delivering documentation.

Usually, validation is performed by a committee or a board of three or more validators. They analyse the application which consists of the lifelong learning portfolio of the candidate (certificates and other attestations of formal, non-formal and informal learning), a CV and an appeal for recognition (this can be a course, part of a course, a module or a full qualification). Validators usually analyse the application individually and then debate on a proposal of recognition or additional auditing. Often an expert in the field is consulted in the event of unclear identification or discrepancies in validation opinions. Candidates may be requested to issue additional attestations of competencies acquired, invited to an interview, subjected to additional knowledge testing or to additional skill performance.

When considering all documentation and evidence, validators prepare a proposal for recognition and pass it to an expert for approval or issue the recognition themselves (IVET level). The final decision is issued as a formal resolution (as a recognised qualification or part of qualification) by a responsible body in the institution (for example, the Senate or Dean in higher education).

Validation methods for CVET are presently determined only by the National Professional Qualifications Act and rules published under this act.

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The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).