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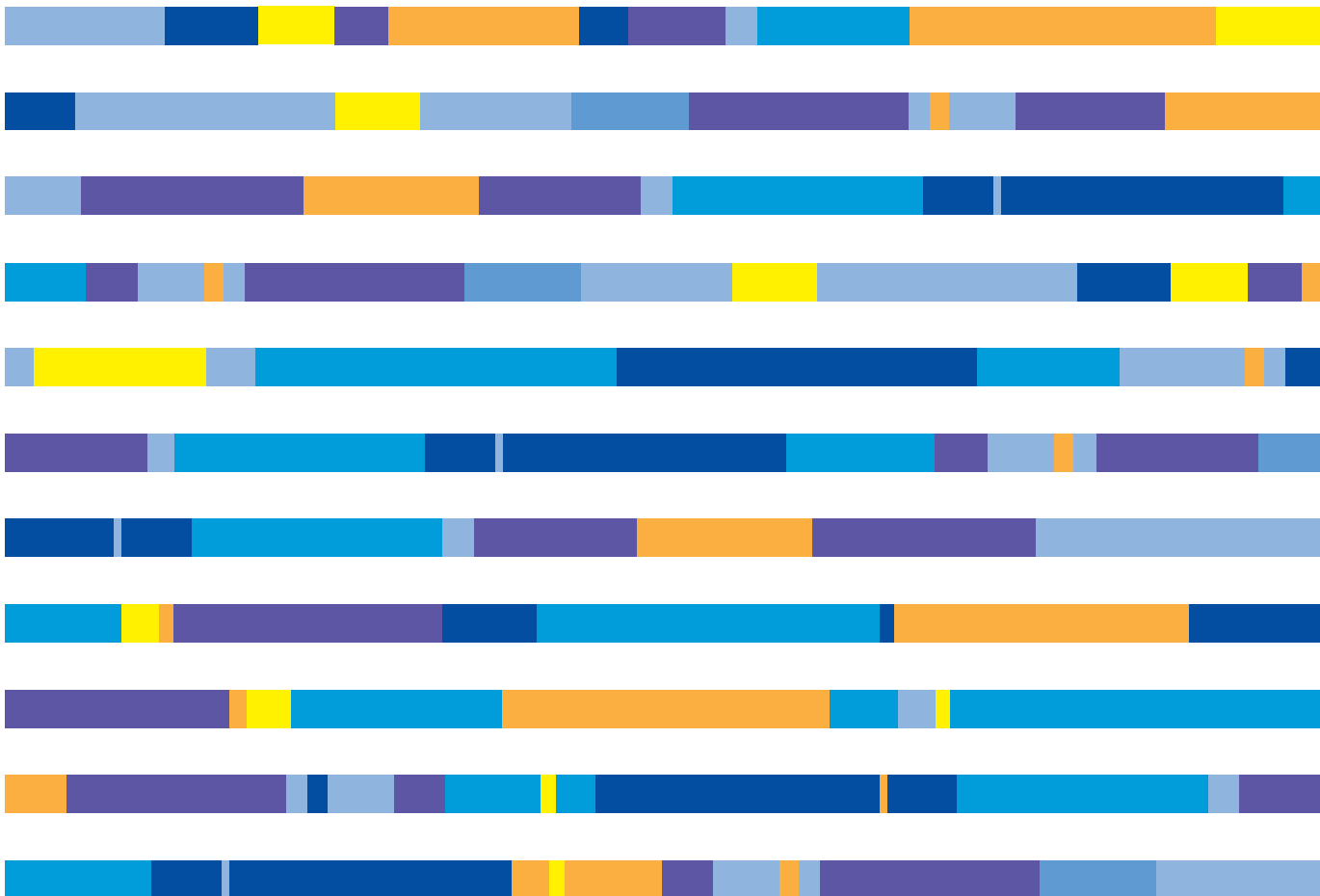
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **BELGIUM- WALLONIA**

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1 Abstract

In French-speaking Belgium, the skills validation system is structured in four specific sectors being: (i) validation of skills (VDC - *validation des compétences*), (ii) valorisation of acquired experience (or VAE) in high schools, (iii) valorisation of acquired experience in universities, and (iv) valorisation of acquired experience in social advancement education (*enseignement de promotion sociale*).

While a Skills Certificate can be obtained through VDC leads, VAE only leads to validation of learning units/access or exemptions from certain parts of a study pathway. Both Validation of skills and Valorisation of acquired experience are free of charge to candidates, regardless of the success of the application.

Since 2018, VDC and VAE have been significantly strengthened, addressing a political will and demonstrating support for the recognition of skills acquired by individuals outside of formal education.

In particular, VDC has experienced increasing success with more than 60, 000 skills certificates (*Titre de compétence*) delivered in more than 70 occupations since 2005.

Validation of skills (VDC) and Valorisation of acquired experience (VAE) are solid mechanisms, recognised by employers, social partners, and participating individuals in terms of recognition of their skills, experience, and knowledge - thus contributing to their insertion in work and society.

Key challenges remain. This includes the absence of common structure and continued need for a common professional certification recognised by the legitimate authorities in terms of professional certification. This need is currently tackled by the implementation of the Professional Skills Certificate.

2 Introduction

In French-speaking Belgium, the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning has undergone important developments since the early 2000s. This is the result of initiatives supported at national level and is framed by important pieces of legislation. VNFIL was first developed in adult education (*Enseignement de promotion sociale: EPS*) in 1991, followed in 2003 by the CVET sector, with a focus on individuals with no formal qualifications.

There are two types of VNFIL in Belgium: the validation of competences (VDC) leading to the award of a Skills Certificate (*Titre de compétence*); and the valorisation of prior experience (VAE) in adult education and higher education, leading to the validation of learning units/access or exemptions from certain parts of a study pathway.

Since 2018, French-speaking Belgium has maintained the validation of competences high on its policy agenda. Among other strategies, the Strategy for the Walloon Region (*Déclaration de Politique Régionale 2019-2024*) mentions the willingness to strengthen workers' recognition of skills, notably by developing a system of attestations for all training received, being formal or informal. Among the ongoing projects, the Walloon Region is developing the Professional Skill Certificate (*Certificat de competency professionnelle – CCP*). The goal is to create a professional certification common to the five authorities legitimate in terms of professional certification. This end goal is to make the certification information clear to companies when assessing candidates' skills, and to support the up skilling of Walloon citizens. The project also foresees to deploy access to validation of skills thanks the Consortium of validation of skills (CVDC).

In terms of legal progress, a new cooperation agreement for validation of skills was adopted in 2019. It confirms the importance given to the system and the support of its stakeholders.

Close cooperation between EPS and VDC through the Consortium has proved highly beneficial and eased the connections between the two sectors. The numbers of beneficiaries are rising (of 42,7% between 2016 and 2021), and validation seem to fulfil its aims of providing assistance and empowerment to the low skilled adults, being employed or unemployed. Quality assurance mechanisms in the two sectors are well in place, transparent and well-functioning.

Less progress seems to have been made in VAE in Universities and *Hautes Ecoles*. However, they all propose a VAE-counselling service as the legislation stipulates.

Additional work remains to be done in the field of focusing on disadvantaged groups, such as migrants and refugees. There are no specific legal provisions in place that could initiate further coordinated efforts.

As the trust of the labour market is increasing towards validation procedures, notably VDC and EPS, there remains additional work in promotion and information to all groups of society.

The third sector provides a large area yet to be covered as there seem to be very few validation initiatives in the sector, without any centralised support and legal frameworks.

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

In French-speaking Belgium, known for the current matter as *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, the skills validation system enables one to obtain an official recognition of professional skills and acquired experience (*acquis de l'expérience*). The system is structured in four specific sectors being: (i) validation of skills (*validation des compétences*), (ii) valorisation of acquired experience (or VAE) in high schools, (iii) valorisation of acquired experience in universities, and (iv) valorisation of acquired experience in social advancement education (*enseignement de promotion sociale*).

Several laws and regulations have been major in implementing the skills validation system. The program-law of 30 December 2001 has recognised the individual right for workers to have access to a “skills assessment”. This law is federal and therefore, applicable to the whole Belgium state. In order to implement this law, which is a matter shared by Regions and Communities, Walloon Region, French community and French community commission (*COCOF*) co-signed a cooperation agreement on 24 July 2003 related to validation of skills in the sector of continuing vocational training. This Cooperation Agreement aims, in particular, to establish mechanisms that will allow the recognition of competencies acquired by individuals through daily life experience, professional life or professional training. It was formalised through three decrees¹. In 2019, a new cooperation agreement² was signed between these same actors to confirm the support to the validation of skills system. This new cooperation agreement abrogates the 2003 one and replaces it.

¹Décret communauté française du 22 octobre 2003: mb 1.12.2003
Décret région wallonne du 13 novembre 2003: mb 23.01.2004
Décret cocof du 7 novembre 2003: mb 03.05.2004

² Décret D. 03-05-1029.

Current regional strategies and policies³

Since the development of this legal basis for the validation of skills, several strategies have been developed (including post-covid relaunch strategies), some of which with a focus on the validation of skills. However, there is no specific policy or strategy dedicated to validation in French-speaking Belgium. Several Decrees, laws, and cooperation agreements act as the legal basis for the system, as displayed previously.

The **Strategy for the Walloon Region**⁴ (*Déclaration de Politique Régionale 2019-2024*) mentions the willingness to strengthen workers' recognition of skills. This should be concretized through the development of a system of attestations for all training received, being formal or informal; the creation of an individual right to validation of skills acquired during work; and the support to skills assessment enabling professional reorientation. This strategy also aims at supporting recognition of skills for individuals benefiting of the integration program. Additionally, the strategy aims at developing a training offer in the use of basic computer tools for job seekers, with the aim of validating skills.

The **Strategy for the Brussels Region** (*Déclaration de Politique Régionale 2019-2024*) mentions the will to support the development of a certification for all sorts of qualifying trainings and the validation of skills organised by French-speaking training providers.

The **relaunch plan for the Walloon Region** (*Plan de relance de la Wallonie*) developed an important number of projects to support the Region and relaunch in the aftermath of the covid-19 crisis. Several projects were in line with the landscape of training. The box below illustrates one of the ongoing projects.

The implementation of the Professional Skill Certificate

To contribute to the relaunch of Walloon Region in the aftermath of the covid-19 crisis, one of the projects is the implementation of the Professional Skill Certificate (*Certificat de compétence professionnelle – CCP*). The goal is to create a professional certification common to the five authorities legitimate in terms of professional certification. This end goal is to make the certification information clear to companies when assessing candidates' skills, and to support the up skilling of Walloon citizens. The project also foresees to deploy access to validation of skills thanks the Consortium of validation of skills (CVDC).

Project budgetary envelope: 8.980.000 euros.

Supportive ministers: Mrs. Christie Morreale, and Mr. Willy Borsus.

Responsive organism: *Consortium de validation des compétences*.

The different systems of validation

As briefly mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning in French-speaking Belgium is separated into different systems (or *dispositifs*).

Validation of competencies (*Validation des compétences – VDC*) is highly standardised and benefits from formal recognition by central authorities. It is carried

³ In Belgium, only Flanders has implemented a National Skills Strategy. French-speaking Belgium did not implement this strategy yet.

⁴ This document is the Walloon government' official statement. It sets out the programme agreed by the parties forming the government majority. This statement concerns a large range of topics and is, therefore, not focused on education, lifelong learning or validation.

out by continuous vocational training centres under the remit of a Consortium⁵, positioning VDC in the public service sector.

VDC enables a candidate to officially obtain a credential (*titre de compétence*) that is recognised in the education system. This credential can also enable the student to obtain exemptions in other training paths.

Every five years, the CODA (*Commission consultative et d'agrément*) identify the strategic orientations enabling the improvement of the VDC system. In its latest strategic orientation note, the Consortium highlights the necessity to contribute to economic, social, and civil insertion of individuals who master unrecognised professional skills. In line with the core ambition to improve validation of competencies, the four current strategic priorities for VDC are the following:

- Improving reactivity of offer to better answer the different publics skills needs.
- Strengthening the service to the validation public.
- Developing the use value of credentials.
- Strengthening the governance of *Validation of competencies*.

Practically, VDC is implemented through the validation of competencies consortium (*Consortium de validation des compétences – CVDC*) and the accredited validation centres (*Centres de validation agréés*). These are organised by the five public institutions for education and continuing vocational training that are situated in French-speaking Belgium: FOREM, Enseignement de promotion sociale (EPS), Institut de Formation en Alternance des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (IFAPME), Bruxelles Formation, and Service de Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (SFPME).

The mission of the CVDC is to organise the steps aimed at verifying the mastery of knowledge, skills and professional aptitudes in order to obtain a Title of Competency recognised by the associated partners.

In terms of figures, as of March 2022, 175 credentials were delivered by the CVDC. These credentials are related to 68 jobs grouped in 20 sectors of activity⁶. The box below gives an example of a job and the available credentials delivered by CVDC.

Technology industry sector – “Automation technician”

The job of “automation technician” can be validated by CVDC. More precisely, CVDC organises the validation for the obtention of five distinctive credentials being:

1. Assemble, from a drawing, mechanical elements of mechanical, hydraulic, or pneumatic assemblies.
2. Carry out on an electromechanical assembly a diagnosis of malfunction with repair and functional check.
3. Carry out on an electropneumatic assembly a malfunction diagnosis with repair and functional check.
4. Carry out on an electro-hydraulic assembly a malfunction diagnosis with repair and functional check.
5. Carry out on a multi-technology equipment a diagnosis of malfunction to identify the defective element in the technologies of mechanics, pneumatics and pneumatic and hydraulic technologies.

⁵ Known as *consortium de validations des compétences*.

⁶ The 20 sectors of activity are: administration-economy-management; arts and culture; automotive; chemistry; trade and distribution; construction; electricity; environment; food industry and trade; technology industry; it; intersectoral; logistics; waste management professions; public authorities; wood sector; textile sector; hospitality sector; personal services; tourism, sport and leisure.

The CVDC website⁷ informs, for each job, the credentials that can be obtained as well as the centre of validation accredited for these credentials and the dates of future information sessions and validation tests.

Valorisation of experience (*Valorisation des acquis de l'expérience – VAE*) is a process of evaluation and recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through professional and/or personal experience, and/or training. It enables an individual to access to further education.

VAE enables adults to access one or several teaching unit(s) (*unité d'enseignement – UE*), to obtain exemptions (for courses or traineeship), or to confirm the success of one or several teaching unit(s).

VAE can lead to the obtention of a certificate of achievement (*attestation de réussite Valorisation*). VAE does not lead to the obtention of a credential. Indeed, the candidate cannot use the valorisation of experience to take the final test (*épreuve intégrée*) leading to the obtention of a credential.

The VAE process is available in three sections of education being:

- Adult education, that is “education for social advancement” (*Enseignement de promotion sociale – EPS*)
- Universities
- High schools (*Hautes Ecoles – HE*).

Regarding VAE, each school is in charge of the process of valorisation of experience. The system is slightly different in adult education and in universities and high schools. Contrarily to VDC, VAE seems more dependent on stakeholders' processes and seems less framed by a single process even though they share similarities.

VAE in adult education consists in submitting a folder documenting the candidate's background, skills and experience. This file must be submitted to the Board of Studies (*Conseil des Etudes*) of an institution offering the course the candidate wishes to follow.

VAE in higher education (universities or high schools) also consists in submitting a folder documenting the candidate's background, skills and experience, both academically and non-academically. In order to benefit from a “valorisation of acquired experience”, the candidate must have a minimum of 5 years of professional (generally understood as full-time equivalent) or personal experience relevant to the choice of study pathway. If the candidate has already undertaken studies in higher education/university, he/she may include in this total of 5 years a maximum of 2 years of successful study⁸. All study pathways are accessible through VAE but medical, dentary and veterinary studies. Once the folder submitted, this one is evaluated by an advisor (for the administrative part) and then by an academic jury in charge of taking the decision.

The VAE process is free. Since the VAE, when positive, leads to an official admission in the study pathway, most universities and high schools communicate a certain date by which the candidate must submit his/her folder in order to be admitted on time.

⁷ See here: <https://www.cvdc.be/metiers>

⁸ These rules are legally framed by the Decree defining the landscape of higher education and the academic organisation of studies (especially, article 119; D. 07-11-2013; M.B. 18-12-2013).

Skills audits

In French-speaking Belgium, the skills audit is dedicated to each individual desiring to take stock of his/her professional and personal skills, aptitudes and motivations regarding a project or future project. Its objective is to (re)define a professional project and possibly a training project as well as a personal and professional (re)positioning.

The skills audit is available to any active individual, being employed or unemployed, with sometimes a focus put on specific workers such as individuals without higher education, 45+, with sickness issues, concerned with a request for psychosocial support, or unemployed individuals. Refugees and migrants are also eligible to skills audit provided by PES such as Forem⁹ (PES in Walloon Region).

The skills audit can be requested by an employer or an individual, the latter case seeming to be the most common one.

Practically, the skills assessment can be carried out either during the employee's working hours, or outside of them, or a mixture of both. If it is carried out in whole or in part during working hours, it must be with the agreement of the employer.

The skills audit is conducted by an independent counsellor, who is subject to strict professional ethics (in particular respect for professional secrecy). No information about the assessment is passed on to the employer unless requested by the individual. The audit usually follows a three- or four-steps process with interviews, tests, and follow-up.

The skills audit does not lead to any credentials, certificate of achievement nor exemptions. But it can lead to starting a process of VAE or VDC.

In French-speaking Belgium, there is no institutional framework for the skills audit.

Several public stakeholders are in charge of conducting skills audits, such as public employment services. For instance, Forem offers a "screening" dedicated to unemployed people. This screening can be organised both physically and remotely (followed by an interview). Actiris (PES in Brussels Region) also offers skills audit via its "personalised support".

Moreover, since 2010, several social funds in the non-profit sector have offered workers in their sector the possibility of a free skills assessment. In the third sector, APEF¹⁰ & FeBi¹¹ are in charge of conducting these audits for workers of the non-lucrative sectors.

In terms of process, the skills audit usually follows three steps¹²:

- Early phase: the candidate confirms his/her commitment, formulates his/her request, assesses his/her needs, and is informed on the methods and techniques that will be implemented.
- Investigation: motivations, competencies, skills of the beneficiary are identified and analysed, and assessed against the opportunities on the labour market and training provision in the region.
- Conclusion: the service provider (skills auditor) clarifies the success factors of the project elaborated by the candidate, as well as the steps necessary for its implementation. The results of the skills audit are communicated to the beneficiary only, in the form of a summary document (which the beneficiary can choose to communicate to a third party).

⁹ <https://www.leforem.be/particuliers/accompagnement-ressortissants-etrangers.html>

¹⁰ Association paritaire pour l'emploi et la formation, that is to say joint association for employment and training.

¹¹ FeBi is an umbrella organisation for several federal and brussels-based training funds, and Maribel funds active in the non-profit sector.

¹² For more information see: <https://www.bilandedcompetences.be/documents-telechargeables/brochure-2018-2020.pdf>

Individual Learning Accounts

With regards to Individual Learning Accounts, these do not exist in French-speaking Belgium.

3.2 Validation in education and training

As explained in the previous section, there are four VNFIL systems:

- **Validation of competencies** (*Validation des compétences – VDC*) in the field of continuous vocational training;
- **Valorisation of experience** (*Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience – VAE*)¹³ in
 - Adult education (Enseignement de Promotion Sociale),
 - Universities,
 - High schools (Hautes écoles).

It is important to note that these four systems are considerably different, in the processes they involve, the actors at stake and the credentials they might or might not offer. Also, this overall system is not yet integrated in a common framework.

The table below summarises the key characteristics of each system.

Table 3.1 Summary overview of the four systems of VNFIL in Belgium (FR)

Name of the system	Date of introduction	Type of VNFIL	Main objective	Outcome
Validation of competencies (VDC)	2003 (effective since 2005)	Validation	Certification	Recognised credential (<i>Titre de compétence</i>) which can be used to access the labour market and/or further training in adult learning or vocational training
Valorisation of experience (VAE) in adult education	1991 ¹⁴	Valorisation	Easing access to education and training	Credits for learning outcomes gained through experience is recognised in view of obtaining access to formal education in EPS. Exemptions to shorten training pathway. Valorisation of teaching units (<i>unités d'enseignement</i>)

¹³ Since the 2013 Decree on higher education, these three sub-systems are partly regulated by the same framework (Universities, *Hautes Écoles* and Adult education at HE level).

¹⁴ Article 8, decree of 16 April 1991. Since then the Government of the French Community has specified the methods for the recognition of competencies for access to education in adult education (latest modifications adopted in 2017).

Name of the system	Date of introduction	Type of VNFIL	Main objective	Outcome
Valorisation of experience (VAE) in universities	1994 ¹⁵ (effective since 2008)	Valorisation	Easing access to education and training	Credit for learning outcomes gained through experience is recognised in view of obtaining access to formal training in universities. Exemptions to shorten training pathway.
Valorisation of experience (VAE) in high schools	1995 (effective since 2009)	Valorisation	Easing access to education and training	Credit for learning outcomes gained through experience is recognised in view of obtaining access to formal training in high schools. Exemptions to shorten training pathway.

Validation of competencies (VDC) in the field of continuous vocational training

VDC aims at recognising professional knowledge and know-how acquired outside of typical training channels. A network of accredited centres organises testing sessions which, when successfully carried out, lead to the issuing of a credential (*titre de compétence*). All candidates benefit from an identical assessment procedure, on the basis of a single set of skills assessment indicators, no matter who is being assessed, where, when or how an assessment takes place. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skill or ability in a given occupation in a situation that is typical for the given occupation, in an approved training centre.

The obtained credential is a legal document recognised by the three French-speaking entities. It may be used either for direct access to the labour market or to establish oneself as a self-employed, or access to further training courses. The credentials can be combined to obtain a qualification in the adult education sector, on the condition of passing an integrated final test (*épreuve intégrée*) organised by EPS (see below).

An important characteristic of validation in Belgium is that the credential delivered is not identical to formal VET qualifications (in other systems, for instance in France, skills validation can lead directly to the award of a formal VET qualification). However, the standards used for validation are the same as those in the formal system. Since 2011, another method of issuing Skills Certificates was developed: the recognition of prior learning (*Reconnaissance des acquis de formation* or 'RAF'). It provides students who have successfully completed training or part of a training course in four of the five public sector training providers (Bruxelles formation, Forem, Ifapme, Sfpme) to automatically receive the Skill(s) Certificate(s) corresponding to their acquired learning outcomes. This mechanism is possible through careful and concerted consideration of the equivalence between the evaluation of the training centre and the evaluation of

¹⁵ In higher education, recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced by the Acts of 5 September 1994 in universities and 5 August 1995 in the *Hautes Écoles* (non-university higher education institutions). Universities were then authorised to organise, under specific conditions, the access, without holding the required degree, to a limited number of second-cycle programmes, as well as to grant exemptions from certain courses (reducing the duration of the studies) in all their programmes. Article 1 of the "Bologna" Act of 31 March 2004 has given a legal foundation to the procedure and introduced the terminology *Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) for higher education, although some initiatives were already in place in some universities since the 1970s. According to Mahieu (2011) it is only since 2008 that VAE is taking place on a larger scale.

the validation centre. This mechanism simplifies learners' pathways, builds bridges between training and promotes learning throughout life, ensuring broader use of the Skills Certificates without altering their value. Since 2011, the number of credentials delivered through the recognition of prior learning reached 33 207 (as for June 2022). This is more than the total of credentials delivered through the integrated final test (28 153 as for June 2022) (CVDC, 2022).

VAE in adult education (Enseignement de promotion sociale - EPS)

EPS offers flexible courses for adults, organised into short modules, taught either during the day or evening/weekends. These courses are accessible to all and allow everyone to combine employment and education.

On the basis of the modular design of EPS and the flexibility available in defining personal study pathways, recognition of prior experience (8th article of the decree of 1991) can allow certain courses to be waived *within* a so-called “pedagogical file”. Recognition can apply to skills acquired in any form of formal education or in other recognised types of training, and to professional experience. Where no certificates or documents are available, or when the study board deems the documents provided to be insufficient, the preliminary required skills (the set of minimum capabilities the student needs to demonstrate the ability to take up a learning unit, to enter a unit) can be verified via a test to access a unit. Pedagogical links have been created between modules in order to create coherence. It also determines the learning outcomes (the set of capabilities – knowledge, work and/or social skills – acquired, assessed and attested on a certificate of achievement for the pedagogical file in question) necessary to achieve it. The aim is the capitalisation of all the certificates of achievement (*attestations de réussite*) of all the pedagogical files in order to be authorised to pass the integrated final test leading to the certificate or degree of the section (*titre de section*).

EPS is organised in modules leading to credits that can be combined to obtain “titles” (certificates or degrees, *titres de section*). These modules are called learning units (UE, i.e. *unités d'enseignement*), which are described in two types of **pedagogical files for learning units** for:

- a whole **section**: once a section's vocational profile is approved by the General Council, this Council sets up a working group with the responsibility of compiling, for each section, a pedagogical file covering all branches. This guide serves as a common teaching reference for all EPS institutes. It lists the *general and specific goals of the section*, its *constituent modules* (identifying the major education modules, *how modules can be used as building blocks within the section* and, for higher education, the associated number of ECTS as well as the *diploma awarded*). Apart from the advantage of having a reference guide common to all EPS institutes, the existence of such a file facilitates student mobility between institutions.
- a single **learning unit**: as with each section, each educational module within the section similarly has its own pedagogical file. Each file lists the *overall and specific goals* of the training module, the preliminary required skills *necessary at the start of the module* and the certificates attesting such, *the module's minimum duration*, the *programme* (i.e. a list of the capabilities to be acquired), the *learning outcomes*, the *profile of the person(s) responsible for the course* (a teacher or outside expert) and practical recommendations for the *constitution of groups*.

All these files are approved by the Government of the French Community.

These files clearly establish the skills necessary to be admitted in a learning unit, the preliminary required skills (*capacité préalable requise*) and the learning outcomes (*acquis d'apprentissage*) to be acquired to validate the unit. All learning outcomes can be recognised through VAE (except the learning outcomes corresponding to the practical work that will be presented for the completion of the studies: the integrated final test)¹⁶. VAE leads to admission or exemption (based on a test or portfolio); it can also be used to validate a unit (achievement valorisation) (*sanction*) based on a test.

Since 2003¹⁷, the regulatory framework allows for the automatic recognition, in all EPS education institutes, of the Skills Certificates delivered by the Consortium. Candidates can thereby be granted exemptions from certain units based on their Certificate.

The 29 November 2017 Government Decree¹⁸ has brought additional improvements: coordinating and unifying practices throughout all EPS institutions; valorisation of prior learning and professional experience; personalised guidance and automatic recognition of training attended in professional training providers (IFAPME, SFPME, Actiris, Forem etc.).

VAE in higher Education

Through VAE, higher education institutions assess and/or recognise knowledge, skills and competencies acquired by an individual who wishes to be admitted to a higher education programme. It does not lead to the award of a certification or qualification.

The Decree of 7 November 2013¹⁹ sets out a common regulatory framework for all HE institutions; the decree allows VAE for admission to all cycles of higher education (bachelor, Master, PhD and continuous education and training).²¹ It specifies certain modalities for VAE: the experience that the candidates wish to see recognised must correspond to at least five years of experience (prior studies in higher education can be taken into account, up to two years, or equivalent to 120 credits).

¹⁶ Transfer of the credits gained in one EPS training body to another is possible to a certain degree. For instance, if a learner has been granted credits for obtaining a UE, he/she can decide to pass the integrated final test (*Épreuve intégrée*) necessary to complete the UE, in another EPS training body. In that case he/she will have to present the documents certifying that the learner has acquired the learning outcomes corresponding to the UE.

¹⁷ Article 20 § 4 of the Decree of the Council of the French Community of 22 October 2003.

¹⁸ Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant les modalités de valorisation des acquis pour l'admission, la dispense et la sanction dans une ou des unités d'enseignement de promotion sociale, 29 novembre 2017

¹⁹ Décret définissant le paysage de l'enseignement supérieur et l'organisation académique des études, adopted on 7 November 2013. Available at :

http://www.gallilex.cfwb.be/document/pdf/39681_002.pdfhttp://www.gallilex.cfwb.be/document/pdf/39681_002.pdf

²⁰ In 2022, this decree was modified and article 117 was changed. This change implies that, from now, the VAE Jury can value more credits than those awarded by the jury of the institution where the corresponding courses were followed, evaluated and sanctioned.

²¹ The Bologna Act (2004) defined VAE as the process of assessing and recognising knowledge and skills of an applicant in the process of accessing higher education. The VAE procedure allowed admission to second cycle programmes or to non-degree granting training programmes, or exemptions in any higher education programme. The Act defined two types of VAE:

1. VAE for admission to second cycle programmes or to non-degree granting training programmes (mostly continuing training). To be admitted to a master programme, applicants had to prove five years of professional and personal experience (prior studies can also be taken into account).
2. VAE for exemptions allow a candidate to be exempted from part of the courses in all first and second cycle programmes, thereby reducing the duration of their studies. However, the duration of the programmes leading to the delivery of an academic degree could not be below 60 credits. Therefore, applicants to this type of VAE could never be granted an academic degree based only on this procedure. This is the reason why the procedure is called 'valorisation' and not 'validation' (which is the term used in the French system).

The jury, based on the examination of the candidate's application, determines the additional courses or exemptions that will constitute the conditions for his/her admission to the study pathway.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

Since 2006, sectoral agreements were proposed to the social partners representing key sectors active in the Walloon Region. The signing of a sectoral agreement is accompanied by proposed actions to improve validation in the sector.²² There are agreements with 16 sectors and more sectors are initiating cooperation.

In the labour market, PES and social partners, among others, are enabling and promoting validation. Moreover, reconversion cells are strengthening and there is better cooperation with enterprises in restructuring.

Since 2019, CDVC innovated while promoting validation of competencies towards companies, notably on-site as illustrated in the box below. In 2019, 31 tests have been organised on-site. In 2020, despite the sanitary restrictions, this number reached 75. In 2021, a total of 92 tests were organised. Therefore, this system seems to meet an increasing success among companies and to fulfil a need.

Unilever restructuring: intensive validation conducted by CVDC

In 2019, Unilever announced the closure of one of its Belgian production sites. A Renault procedure was launched in the wake of this announcement. In this procedure, a dispositive of validation of skills was directly deployed on site.

This on-site validation system was initiated by Alimento (a non-lucrative association of sectoral services run by the social partners which are offered to workers and employers in the food industry), the trade unions and the local Unilever management.

Between December 2019 and February 2020, more than 45 former Unilever workers have been able to have their skills officially certified, in order to help them find a job.

CVDC promotes validation of skills among companies as an opportunity to:

- Improve the professionalism and “brand image” of the company, especially towards clients, other companies, or candidates;
- Improve the management of skills, that is to say the hiring processes, transformation of jobs, development of training programmes, etc.
- Comply with legal and sectorial regulations;
- Develop the company's social responsibility.

The “validation of competencies” supports Brussels-based companies in validating their workers' skills

In order to support companies in implementing skills audits, Brussels regional service developed a “Validation of competencies bonus”.

All companies that have an office in Brussels Region (some sectors are excluded) can be eligible for a grant to cover the costs of organizing skills validation tests.

²² Action 1 Production of occupation profiles and training pathways (SFMQ); Action 2: Production and monitoring of validation standards; Action 3: Communication around the validation of skills, in the specific sector concerned; Action 4: Strengthening the market value of the certificate.

The bonus is 600 euros per test organised every 12 months, with a maximum amount of 15 000 euros per civil year.

3.4 Validation and the third sector

There is no specific validation procedure, tool nor frame for the third sector. However, the Consortium (CVDC) engages in information and awareness-raising activities towards a series of sector, including the third sector.

The 2021 activity report of the Consortium notes that APEF (association for non-lucrative sector) organised a webinar on validation and mentoring for several joint committees in the non-profit sector. Several actions have also been developed with actors of social economy, including several webinars and a project aiming at facilitating access to the validation for people mentoring cleaning staff in the voucher-system sector.

Regarding VAE, voluntary activities can be taken into account in the “relevant experience” presented in the candidate’s portfolio. At ULB university for instance in an online application, the procedure entitles the candidate to translate his/her experience in several forms that enable the committee to assess it on a formal academic level, and to present adequate documents justifying his/her previous experience (including work certificates, certificates of activities carried out in associations, community sector).

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

4.1 The National Qualifications Framework

Belgium is characterised by different levels of authority: federal, regional, community, provincial and municipal. The EQF matter is related to regional authorities (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels-Capital Region), which are responsible in particular for vocational training, and the linguistic communities (Flemish Community, French Community of Belgium), which are responsible for education. Therefore, there is no question of creating a NQF in the first instance. Eventually, Belgium has three frameworks: a Flemish Qualifications Framework, a French Qualifications Framework (CFC) and a German Qualifications Framework. In this section we strictly focus on the French Qualifications Framework (CFC, *Cadre francophone des certifications*).

In 2010, the governments of the French Community, the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission (*Commission communautaire française – COCOF*) entrusted the task of creating and managing the Qualifications Framework to an intergovernmental working group by means of a cooperation agreement.

A Decree was adopted in May 2015²³, operationalising the agreement between the three French-speaking governments on the creation of a French-speaking qualification framework (*Cadre francophone des certifications* - CFC).

The CFC is a double-entry framework allowing the positioning of qualifications delivered on the one hand, by actors in higher education, ordinary and specialised secondary education and social promotion and on the other hand, by the actors of vocational training and validation of competencies. The CFC only positions certifications issued by a competent authority.

²³Décret portant assentiment à l'accord de coopération conclu le 26 février 2015 entre la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire française relatif à la création et la gestion d'un Cadre francophone des certifications, en abrégé « CFC », Available at : <http://archive.pfwb.be/10000000201500e>

The CFC is based on eight levels, consistent with the EQF and compatible with the framework for Flanders (Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur (VKS)).

The Decree defines “certification” as the formal result of an assessment and validation process obtained when a competent authority - in the field of education or vocational training - establishes that an individual possesses education, training or validation of competencies, has the learning outcomes corresponding to a given standard.

The Decree clearly specifies that the CFC aims, among other things, to promote continuity and progressiveness in the learning pathways of citizens, notably by promoting the recognition of both formal and non-formal and informal learning within the pathways. However, the Decree does not specify how this recognition of both non-formal and informal learning is implemented. Moreover, the website of the Instance CFC (that is the agency in charge of running the CFC) indicates that “The CFC does not include qualifications delivered by the private vocational education and training sector. The CFC does not include informal and non-formal learning”²⁴ while, at the same time, clarifying that “Not all qualifications need to be positioned in the CFC. A qualification that is not positioned retains its value”.

The CFC positions credentials that are delivered by different types of recognised actors, being education actors (including social promotion), vocational training or validations of competencies actors. Therefore, credentials obtained through validation (and delivered by CVDC) are recognised in the CFC as other types of credentials. However, there is no possibility to combine credentials in order to obtain a qualification in the CFC. First, because such a combination of credentials is not provided. Second, because the CFC is not in charge of delivering credentials.

4.2 The outcomes of validation of non-formal and informal learning

As explained previously, there are four VNFIL systems:

- **Validation of competencies** (*Validation des compétences – VDC*) in the field of continuous vocational training
- **Valorisation of experience** (*Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience – VAE*)²⁵ in
 - Adult education (Enseignement de Promotion Sociale),
 - Universities,
 - High schools (Hautes écoles).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in each system is likely to lead to different outcomes.

Outcomes of validation of NFIL in VDC

VDC enables a candidate to officially obtain a credential (*Titre de compétence*) that is recognised in the education system²⁶. This credential can also enable the student to obtain exemptions in other training paths.

VDC is the only system that directly leads to a credential. This credential is recognised in the CFC. It is not possible to combine credentials obtained through validation to obtain another credential in the CFC. The credential obtained recognised the certificate of a skill unit (*Unité de compétence*). One job is, therefore, composed of several skill units that have to be validated.

²⁴ <https://cfc.cfwb.be/faq/>

²⁵ Since the 2013 Decree on higher education, these three sub-systems are partly regulated by the same framework (Universities, *Hautes Écoles* and Adult education at HE level).

²⁶ The credential is not identical to the one obtained through formal education. In formal education, the credential delivered is called a certificate (*Certificat*).

Outcomes of validation of NFIL in VAE – Adult education

VAE in adult education (*Enseignement de Promotion sociale*) can lead to three types of outcomes:

- Admission to one or more teaching units (TU) for which the candidate does not have the required qualification;
- Exemptions from parts of a course or internships;
- Success or valorisation of one or more teaching units

No credentials are delivered through this process.

Outcomes of validation of NFIL in VAE – Universities and Hautes écoles

VAE in higher education (Universities and high schools) can lead to two types of outcomes:

- Admission to formal training in universities and high school;
- Exemptions to shorten training pathway.

No credentials are delivered through this process.

5 Standards

Standards used in VDC

A proper “skills validation” process applies only in vocational training in French-speaking Belgium. This process leads to the award of a credential (*Titre de compétence*), which is a legal document, recognised by French-speaking education and training operators and governments (the Walloon region, the French Community and the French Community Commission (Cocof)).

The standards for validation are the same as occupational standards in the formal system. These occupational standards (*profils métiers*) are developed by an external body: the French-speaking Professions and Qualifications Service (*Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications – SFMQ*)²⁷.

The SFMQ is in charge of producing common standards based on occupational standards elaborated by social partners (*Profils métiers*), and corresponding training standards (*Profils de formation*) elaborated by education and training stakeholders. Most importantly, the occupational standards and training standards produced by SFMQ are to be “shared” by the different education and training providers (initial and continuous education, as well as socio-professional integration providers), as well as by the CVDC (Consortium for Validation of Competencies).

These standards are expressed in learning outcomes and a system of units compatible with the ECVET system is intended to enable mobility between different operators and types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal). To ensure that all providers will use the profiles drawn by SFMQ as common reference standards, the job profiles are compatible with those developed by the French ROME system (*Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois*). Qualification and training profiles are developed in close consultation with sector representatives and the unions. These profiles specify the competencies required for each occupational profile, together with associated indicators.

²⁷ A cooperation agreement was signed in 2009 between the three francophone governments to create the service. SFMQ brings together PES, training providers, social inclusion services, and the Skills Validation Consortium. Its objectives are to produce occupation profiles in line with the reality of today's jobs; to produce training standards in line with these profiles, to ensure that all training providers use these common training standards, to allow better mobility between training providers (recognition of prior learning); to establish links between these profiles and PES tools. For more information on SFMQ: <http://www.sfmq.cfwb.be/index.php?id=1436>

CVDC, being the only body in charge of validation of competencies, has developed validation standards that are harmonised with the ones developed by SFMQ. Methodological experts from both bodies established a model to determine the conformity of the validation standards of the consortium of validation with the SFMQ profiles.

For each occupation open to CVDC, a Commission for Skills Unit Indicators (COREF) is set up, gathering employers, labour representatives and education and training providers. The COREF follows a methodology aimed at outlining the necessary criteria for the verification of the acquisition of skills.

Each occupation is divided into several skill units. It is these skill units that are subject to validation. This allows candidates to have their expertise recognised for part or for all of the skills involved in an occupation. Therefore, the COREF defines:

- The Skill Reference Indicators: the key activities related to the occupation and the required skills for its undertaking.
- The Skill Units: each corresponding to a Skills Certificate. Each Unit corresponds to a Validation Reference Indicator.
- The Validation Reference Indicators: these define the testing situation, the task to be carried out, the conditions for testing for each skill unit to be validated and the assessment criteria sheet, with assessment being undertaken via indication criteria.

Continuous improvement is one of the “quality guarantees” of CVDC. Therefore, requests of improvement can be introduced through an online platform (called VALID). Validation repositories can be updated based on these requests.

Standards used in VAE

VAE in Belgium usually does not lead directly to certification. It only grants access to a study programme or exemptions, both in adult education and high education (universities or high schools). However, in adult education (EPS), each “learning unit” linked to a pedagogical file can lead to certification thanks to the study board.

The standards used for assessing the non-formal and informal learning are the requirements (in terms of learning outcomes) of the programme for which the applicant wishes to gain entry or exemption. They are therefore always in line with the current programme.

The applicant asking for a validation of acquired experience must submit an admission file presenting his/her background, skills and experience, both academically and non-academically. The jury takes the decision based on this file.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The French-Speaking Government of the French Community and the Walloon and Brussels Regions are involved in various respects but each system, governed by a specific legal framework, has its own institutional framework. Therefore, there is no overall framework or overarching national institution responsible for the validation systems in French-speaking Belgium.

VDC falls under the responsibility of the governments of the French Community, of the Walloon region and of the French Community Commission.

VAE in adult education (*Enseignement de Promotion Sociale*) falls within the remit of competency of the French Community.

VAE in higher education is highly decentralised as higher education institutions have a large degree of autonomy. ARES is responsible for accrediting all higher education programmes and for coordinating VAE in higher education.

VDC in continuous vocational training

Validation in the field of continuous vocational training has been developed by the Consortium of Validation of Competencies. This consortium gathers the five most important public sector training providers in French-speaking Belgium:

- FOREM (*Service public Wallon de l'emploi et la formation*, Walloon Employment and Vocational Training Service, equivalent to the Flemish VDAB);
- Bruxelles Formation (Public sector training agency in the Brussels-Capital region);
- Enseignement de Promotion Sociale (Adult Education Provider in French speaking Belgium);
- Institut de Formation des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises – IFAPME (Training Agency for the Self Employed and SMEs in the Wallonia);
- Service de Formation des petites et moyennes entreprises - SFPME, (Training Service for Small and Medium-Sized enterprises in Brussels).

The Consortium is a streamlined structure mobilising the largest platform in terms of vocational qualifications in French-speaking Belgium.

This structure is completed by two external bodies: 1) an Advisory Committee which approves the validation centres, in charge of overall direction through Strategic Guidance Notes, overall evaluation based on annual activity reports, accreditation centres, selection of qualifications validated; and, 2) a Board of Appeal, in charge of candidate's appeals and validation centres.

The Consortium is responsible for designing the procedures, methods and approaches that will be implemented in validation centres, thereby ensuring a high degree of standardisation. Furthermore, the Consortium is responsible for providing information to the public (mostly through its website) about validation.

The Consortium oversees the network of centres which carry out the recognition and validation of competencies. It is responsible for implementing the accreditation of the validation centres in the framework of a quality assurance approach.

Validation centres are training providers. They are accredited by a Consultation and Approval Committee for validation centres and receive approval from the government. They are responsible for providing support/ information to potential candidates (although they do not strictly speaking provide 'guidance' which does not fall under their missions). They organise the validation sessions and carry out the assessment. No other actor than accredited validation centres can conduct these validation sessions and assessment. No fee nor application can be made in order to accredit new validation centres. This decision is taken by the government only.

VAE in adult education (EPS)

Adult education falls under the responsibility of the Government of the French Community. The procedures have been harmonised with the new Decree from 29 November 2017.

Ultimately, the decision to grant admission, exemption or certification is taken by the Study board (*Conseil des études*) in charge of each learning unit (UE). The programme of each unit is public and used by all 150²⁸ adult education institutes. These pedagogical files (*dossiers pédagogiques*) must be approved by the Government of the French Community.

²⁸ In 2022, *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles* counted 150 adult education institutes.

VAE in higher education (Universities, EPS and Hautes Ecoles)

ARES and its “Committee for Continuous training and lifelong learning” (*Commission de la formation continue et de l’apprentissage tout au long de la vie – COFOC*) is in charge of VAE, among other missions.

Higher education institutions are responsible for the operational implementation of VAE. Moreover, they also play a major role in the dissemination of information to the applicants and to the other stakeholders involved.

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

VDC

Any person who is over the age of 18, has completed compulsory schooling and is registered in Belgium as country of residence, is entitled to apply for the validation of his/her competencies.

The CVDC’s website is one of the key channels for citizens to get information about validation. The Consortium’s website for the validation of competencies has two entry points: one public and one for “professionals” (counsellors, companies, actors in the validation of skills). One of its pages²⁹ clearly indicates for what job an individual can receive a validation of competencies, where the tests are organised and when.

CVDC deploys other activities to raise awareness about the availability of validation of competencies, some of them in collaboration with PES (Forem or Actiris) or other key stakeholders.

Among the recurring communication strategies, CVDC launches a digital communication campaign every year between October and December to beneficiaries (CVDC 2019, 2020, 2021). This campaign informs individual about validation of competencies and about information session. In 2021, the campaign enabled 1615 individuals to attend an info-session or to ask for more information.

Beyond recurring communication strategies, CVDC tries innovative ways to reach new beneficiaries. For instance, CVDC partners with *Cité des Métiers* in Brussels and reached 304 individuals through this partnership in 2021. Majority of these individuals are unemployed individuals.

The box below gives another example of an innovative collaboration to reach more individuals to validate their competencies.

Project “SPOC and support” to support vulnerable beneficiaries in validation

This project aims at developed a privileged partnership with Validation centers and four local employment offices in Brussels (*Missions locales pour l’emploi*) in order to give access to validation of competencies tests to vulnerable beneficiaries.

In 2021, 507 individuals were informed of the possibility to receive support in a validation procedure. In total, 188 were supported and 186 registered to a validation test. In the end, 87 individuals were granted a total of 127 credentials.

²⁹ <https://www.validationdescompetences.be/metiers>

This project is supported by the Brussels Cabinet of the Minister of Employment. In 2021, it benefits from a regional subsidy of 300 000 euros.

Awareness raising about VDC is also done via information provided by professionals working in PES (e.g. counsellors in the FOREM and Actiris, *Cités des métiers*, *Missions locales pour l'Emploi*) and by targeted information about specific occupations sent to jobseekers.

Counsellors in PES play a key role in informing the persons who might benefit from validation. They provide information about the existence of the VDC scheme, and they provide them with the relevant information (e.g. how to direct them to validation centres). A guide³⁰ for counsellors has been developed by the Consortium for the validation of skills.

VAE in adult education

There is no comprehensive centralised information system available yet. Each EPS institute informs the citizens on their websites.

VAE in higher education (Universities and High schools)

Citizens are informed about VAE in higher education via various channels: individual university and high schools' websites, admission and guidance services in universities and high schools, articles in the media, and higher education fairs for prospective students.

However, similarly to VAE in adult education and contrarily to VDC, there is no centralised system to raise awareness about VAE.

Broadly speaking, disregarding of the system considered, the outreach activities and specific groups they might target depend on institutional strategy and/or regional strategy.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

VDC

Support and advice are provided to candidates by validation centres and the CVDC website.

Information and advice is the first step to any procedure of validation of competencies. This information is provided either online or via a counsellor (at *Carrefour Emploi Formation Orientation* for Walloon Region, or *Cité des métiers* for Brussels Region).

After this first step, the candidate can contact a validation centre to gather more information about the credentials in line with his/her experience, and the procedures. At the validation centre, the candidate will meet a specialist to share about his/her experience, and to receive information about skills that are tested and the procedure to do so. It is also possible that the validation centre recommends the candidate to follow a short training in order to fill his/her possible gaps in knowledge.

Following the interview, the candidate has the possibility to register for a test.

The whole process (information, registration, test) is free and confidential.

Partnerships are established with guidance professionals from PES. These professionals can play a key role, prior to but also after validation. Indeed, the counsellor is also responsible for guidance once the Skills Certificate has been obtained, in particular regarding the recognition of this Certificate by employers.

³⁰Available at: https://www.cvdc.be/sites/default/files/public/uploads/common/guide-conseiller-08_4_01.pdf

VAE in adult education

By decree³¹, each institution has one “reference person” in charge of coordinating activities related to valorisation of experience (VAE). Beside this element, each institute is free to organise the information on VAE-procedures and possibilities. The general website of adult education³² provides general information for individuals and professionals.

It is therefore dependent on the institute to provide this information to possible candidates.

VAE in higher education

By decree³³, each higher education institution (being Universities or *Hautes Ecoles*) must provide an individual guidance to inform individuals about the procedure they wish to start to valorise their experience. Following this obligation, most universities and high schools’ website inform about the contact of the “counsellor” (*conseiller VAE*).

VAE counsellors play a key role throughout the VAE procedure, providing guidance not only to candidates but also to members of VAE juries and programme coordinators. They are recruited directly by universities. Their position has been formally recognised by the aforementioned 2013 decree. Most counsellors hold a degree in social science (psychology, sociology, education science) and were generally previously employed in the guidance or admission services of a university or the employment agency (e.g. FOREM).

The costs of hiring VAE counsellors are borne by universities and *Hautes Ecoles*.

The missions of the VAE counsellors³⁴ are to:

- Support the candidate:
 - to choose his or her course of study,
 - to adopt a reflective attitude with regard to their life course,
 - to formalise the skills acquired to make them visible and assessable by a jury,
 - to build up a file,
 - to identify the evidence to be attached to the VAE file,
 - to prepare for the VAE commission (jury),
 - to proceed with administrative registration.
- Ensure internal and external communication about VAE;
- Support the VAE juries as observers or provide additional information on the application being examined.

According to ARES, on average each candidate to VAE in higher education benefits from three hours of guidance³⁵.

³¹ D. 19-07-21, article 36quater.

³² <http://enseignement.be/eps>

³³ D. 14-12-2022, article 119, alinéa 2.

³⁴ <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/fr/blog/la-vae-en-belgique-francophone-dans-lenseignement-superieur-et-universitaire-comment-ca-marche#:~:text=Ce%20dernier%20comprend%20un%20coordinateur,relev%C3%A9%20des%20indicateurs%20du%20projet>

³⁵ https://www.ares-ac.be/images/midis/presentations/2018-12-06-L_admission_par_VAE_a_l_universite_en_bref_A_Grzyb_et_D_D_Haufayt.pdf

The website “mesetudes.be” dedicated to high education in Walloon-Brussels Federation provides information about the procedure in all the universities³⁶ and high schools³⁷.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

VDC

A panel composed of the examiner (*évaluateur*) and the observer (*observateur*) assesses applicants.

Examiners are trainers, teachers or experienced professionals (with minimum 5 years in the concerned occupation). They are responsible for carrying out the test itself on the basis of the validation reference framework, for providing the equipment and materials and for preparing the candidates' workstations.

Observers are not members of the validation centres. They are external professionals experienced in the relevant occupation.

VAE in adult education

In EPS, the study board (*conseil des études*) is in charge of the assessment of the VAE application. It is composed of the headmaster and professionals – teachers - of education in the field targeted by the candidate.

VAE in higher education

The *Jury de valorisation* is the body recognising the professional and personal experience of the applicants. The jury evaluates and takes a decision on the non-formal and informal learning, subject to recognition. The jury formally transmits the results of the assessment and may give some recommendations regarding the future study programme of the applicant. The department in charge of recognition of non-formal and informal recognition selects the members of the jury.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

VDC

The training of evaluators is compulsory and strongly advised for validation centre managers. A methodological expert provides the training from the Consortium. The Consortium delivers training to evaluators and staff involved in the management of validation.

The Consortium organizes three training for validation centers' employees:

- A “Methodological” training for Centre managers and evaluators. It is focused on evaluation and evaluation tools developed by the Consortium. In 2021, 54 individuals followed this training.

³⁶ <https://www.mesetudes.be/de/enseignement-superieur/organisation-pratique/valorisation-des-acquis-de-lexperience-vae/vae-a-luniversite/>

³⁷ <https://www.mesetudes.be/de/enseignement-superieur/organisation-pratique/valorisation-des-acquis-de-lexperience-vae/vae-en-haute-ecole/>

- A “Quality, accreditation and communication” training for Centre managers and secretaries.
- A “Administration management of a session” training for Centre managers and secretaries.

VAE in adult education

The teachers in EPS benefit from training organised by the French Community, among others. They are regularly evaluated by the headmaster of their centre. The Service of Inspection of the EPS regularly checks the level of the assessment criteria sheets used to evaluate the learning outcomes defined in the pedagogical file.

VAE in higher education

VAE counsellors play a crucial role in the training and support to members of the juries who are examining and assessing candidates’ files.

VAE counsellors are reunited in an informal “FORUM VAE” organised by ARES. This listing email aims at answering their questions and requests. In some cases, it can lead to the organisation of a meeting. This channel is informal.

8.3 Qualifications and experience

VDC

Evaluators are employed by a validation centre or have a temporary contract with the centre. To become an evaluator, one must³⁸:

- Be a trainer or teacher of the occupation concerned with the specific validation; Belong to one of the five public institutions’ members of the Validation Consortium (*Bruxelles Formation, Enseignement de Promotion sociale, FOREM, IFAPME, SFPME*); or,
- Have five years’ experience in the occupation concerned with the validation,
- Not having left the occupation more than five years ago.

Observers are professionals in the occupation concerned with validation. They are appointed by the validation centre and must:

- Have five years’ experience in the occupation concerned with the validation; having left the occupation less than five years ago; and,
- Not have any professional or personal links to the candidate. If such a link exists, the validation centre must choose another observer.

In addition, the evaluator must have followed the training for evaluators organised by the Consortium and have signed the confidentiality and privacy charter.

VAE in adult education

The teachers composing the study board are hired according to their qualifications which are legally determined by the French Community.

VAE in higher education

Generally, there are no specific or explicit qualification requirements for VAE counsellors or members of VAE juries.

³⁸ <https://www.validationdescompetences.be/sites/default/files/public/uploads/common/guide-validation-2015-def.pdf>

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

VDC

The Consortium is co-funded, with the exception of the costs relating to the secondment of staff, as follows: 30% for the Social Promotion Education establishments, 30% for FOREM, 20% for Bruxelles-Formation, 16% for the entity created by the Walloon Region and 4% for the entity designated by the French Community Commission³⁹. It is also funded by the ESF+.

VAE in adult education

Adult education is funded by the Government of the French Community⁴⁰. Extra funding is also found in the ESF-funds and through different contracts with training organisations, PES and sectoral funds.

For example, in 2021, the Government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has decided to grant a support of 2.145,780 euros to adult education to help its institutions and learners to face the material costs related to online education imposed by the Covid-19 crisis⁴¹.

VAE in higher education

In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the financing of higher education depends on the type of institution.

The higher education institutions (*Hautes écoles*) are financed according to the modalities provided for by the "Decree relating to the financing of higher education institutions organised or subsidised by the French Community" of 9 September 1996. In November 2018, the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation approved a new decree⁴² which reorganises the financing system of the *Hautes Ecoles* in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, in order to bring it closer to the financing system applied to universities. The funding granted is composed of a fixed part (13.5%) and a variable part (86.5%) depending on the number of students.

The universities are financed according to the modalities provided by the "law on the financing and control of university institutions" of 27 July 1971. For the most part, Universities are financed by operating grants. Beside these, they are funded by subsidies and funds, notably for research. VAE is not funded by a specific fund.

Costs for beneficiaries

In all four systems of validation, the procedures are free for candidates.

³⁹ 29 MARS 2019. - Décret portant assentiment à l'accord de coopération conclu entre la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire française relatif à la validation des compétences, article 24.

⁴⁰ See Decree organising social promotion education, D.16-04-1991, articles 82 to 93, 102, 111, and 115.

⁴¹ <https://pro.guidesocial.be/articles/actualites/article/enseignement-de-promotion-sociale-2-millions-eur-pour-du-materiel-informatique>

⁴² D. 29-11-18

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

VDC⁴³

According to CVDC's June 2022 report, between 2005 and June 2022, a total of 61.360 Skills Certificates were delivered (28.153 through tests and 33.207 through RAF). More recently, since 2020, 10.247 certificates were delivered.

Since 2004, the validation has been provided for 74 occupations.

On average, between 2019 and 2022, there has been a 76.6% success rate in tests and 87.3% of attendance rates, showing a success in the fight against absenteeism since 2017.

In 2021, 1.423 persons obtained at least one certificate. There were 43 active validation centers, on 89 different sites.

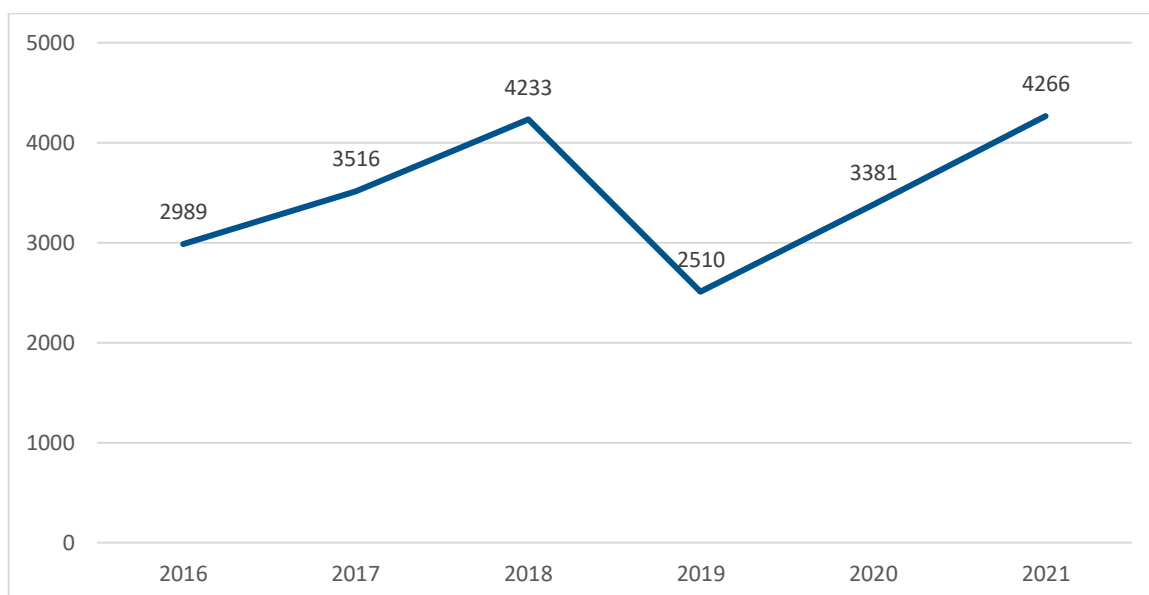
In 2021, 49 occupations were proposed for validation, covering 108 competence units.

The top five validated occupations in 2021 were:

- administrative officer: 652 tests;
- household help: 347 tests;
- forklift driver: 212 tests;
- residential electrician; 163 tests;
- butcher's shop preparer-salesperson; 152 tests.

The figure below shows the evolution of credentials delivered between 2016 and 2021.

Figure 1: Evolution of credentials delivered by CVDC (VDC), 2016-2021



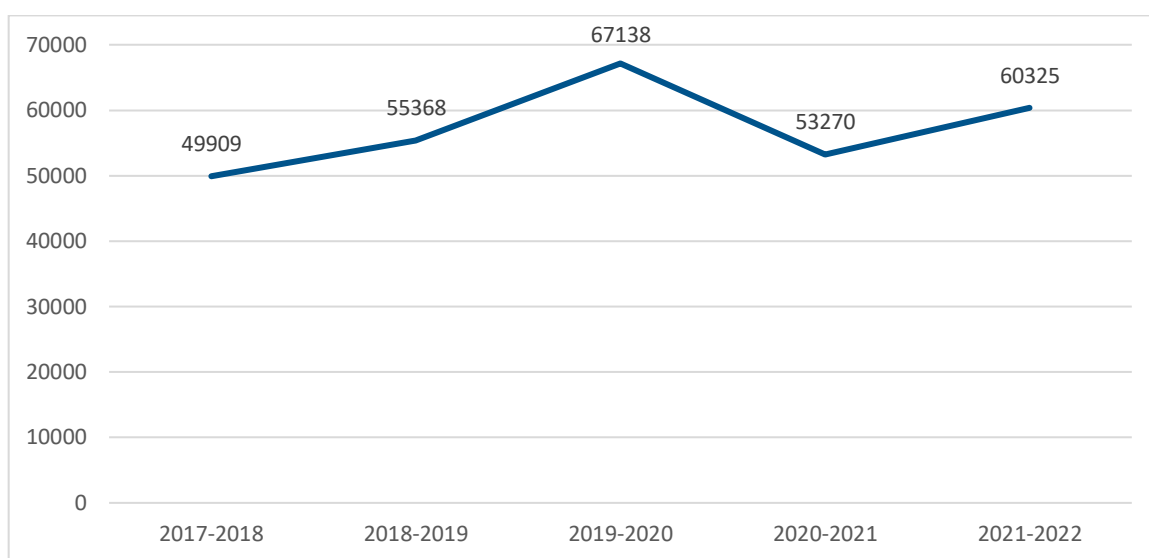
⁴³ Data is from the CDVC "La validation en quelques chiffres : Juin 2019" and "La validation en quelques chiffres : Juin 2022".

VAE in adult education

Since 2017-2018, the number of VAE procedures granted in adult education seem to have known an increase. However, it seems that it was stopped by an important decrease in 2020-2021, which is surely explained by the Covid-19 crisis.

The figure below shows the evolution of VAE introduced in adult education between 2017-2018 and 2021-2022 schoolyears.

Figure 2: Evolution of VAE granted in adult education, 2017-2021



Available public data regarding VAE in adult education seem limited and does not allow to comment more the evolution of VAE in this stream of education.

VAE in higher education

No specific data seems available regarding VAE in higher education.

However, from 2023-2024 school year this data should be collected through SIEL Sup' and then made available through StatSup'Info.

9.2.2 Validation users

VDC⁴⁴

Between 2019 and 2022, men formed the majority of validation candidates (52,9%). This is considered to be influenced by the "type" of the validation offer – most of the professions falling into what are considered to be traditionally "male fields".

Regarding the socio-economic profile, even if they constitute the majority of beneficiaries, the rate of unemployed individuals diminished and went from 59,6% (in 2019) to 43,1% (in June 2022). On average, 52,1% of beneficiaries are unemployed.

Persons in employment are increasing significantly, growing from 28,8% in 2019 to 37,3% in June 2022. On average, 31,3% of individuals are workers. The share of independent workers has risen each year to reach 5,1% in 2022. On average on the period, the rate is 3,8%.

⁴⁴ Data is from the CDVC "La validation en quelques chiffres : Juin 2019" and "La validation en quelques chiffres : Juin 2022".

Regarding age, in 2021⁴⁵, 65,1% of beneficiaries were between 25 and 44. 23% were between 45 and 54. 5,4% were less than 25 and 6,5% were 55 and above.

VAE

No specific data seems available regarding VAE.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

Data on unemployed individuals are included in the sections above.

VDC⁴⁶

The Consortium has a specific project of validation for individuals in a prison environment. In 2021, 6 validation tests were organized, for four different occupations: cook, restaurant waiter; painter decorator and hairdresser.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

VDC

The most commonly used method is the assessment of the candidate in a professional situation. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skills in a practical fashion, in the presence of experienced professionals. This test can be organised in a validation centre or in a company (especially in the case of a company organizing a collective validation test). Either way, the procedure remains the same.

Stages of the standard VDC procedure:

Centre managers appoint one examiner, one observer and one logistical manager for each validation session (based on simulation of a work situation). During the session, an actual professional situation is reconstructed following the Validation Reference Indicators. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their skills in a practical fashion in the presence of experienced professionals who form the panel. Their work is observed by the examiner on the basis of a standard assessment criteria sheet. The observer (representative of the profession) checks that the testing procedure is organised correctly and participates at the end of the test.

Directed by the validation centre manager, a panel composed of the examiner and the observer deliberate on the performance of the test. Candidates are subsequently informed of the test result.

If successful, the Validation Centre may refer the candidate to an information and/or guidance service which can advise him/her on the most appropriate use of his/her qualification.

In the event of failure, the candidate may request an appointment with the Centre manager or the assessor, who will explain the reasons for the failure. Any candidate for a Certificate of Competence who feels aggrieved by the conduct of the validation test or/and its result has access to the Validation Centre's internal complaints procedure, which enables him/her to have his/her complaint dealt with easily and

⁴⁵ Activity report of the Consortium, 2021.

⁴⁶ Idem.

quickly. The specific steps to be taken in case of appeal are fully described on the Consortium website⁴⁷.

VAE in adult education

Candidates wishing to be admitted to a learning unit (UE)⁴⁸ can do so on the basis of competences that can be established and documented via a personal portfolio (access to UE is also possible on the basis of a Skills Certificate delivered by the Consortium, or other certificates delivered by approved training providers or other relevant documents that can prove competences). If the candidate cannot present a portfolio that provides sufficient evidence, s/he can pass a test that will assess whether s/he possesses the minimum competences necessary to access the learning unit.

The procedure of VAE in adult education is covered by the Circulaire 6677 of Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles⁴⁹.

Ultimately, the decision to grant admission, exemption or certification is taken by the study board (*Conseil des études*) in charge of each UE. The decisions of the board are sovereign and based on the content of the pedagogical file.

VAE in higher education

The folder (*dossier*) is elaborated by the candidate after an interview with a VAE counsellor. This folder is then handed in to the jury who will examine the application. Each higher education institution has developed its own folder template, adapted to its own context. However, there is common basis and structure behind all of them (candidate's CV, formulation of the motivations to engage in VAE, competences acquired, etc.).

Although tools and methods vary from one university to another, all universities strive to follow a similar procedure comprising the following six main steps:

- Information, guidance: information sessions are organised to inform and answer questions of potential candidates;
- Support: the candidate may benefit from orientation support;
- Verification of eligibility: University verifies that the candidate respects the criteria to apply for a VAE;
- Admission jury: the jury evaluates and take a decision;
- Communication of the jury's decision: the jury formally transmits the results of the assessment and may offer recommendations regarding the future study programme of the applicant.

As in universities, the VAE jury in *Hautes Ecoles* has full autonomy to decide which experience is relevant, with regard to the study programme in which the candidate wishes to enrol.

The steps followed are the following:

- Candidates choose a Haute Ecole and get information via the admission service and contact the VAE counsellor;
- Candidates elaborate their VAE folder and submit it to the jury (two submission periods per year);

⁴⁷ <https://www.validationdescompetences.be/apr%C3%A8s-%C3%A9preuve>

⁴⁸ See Section 3.2. on the modular system in EPS.

⁴⁹ Circulaire 6677 présentant les Modalités de valorisation des acquis pour l'admission la dispense ou la sanction dans une ou des unités d'enseignement de l'enseignement de promotion sociale.

- The jury analyses the folder and formulates an opinion, potentially after auditioning the candidate;
- A decision is taken by the Haute Ecole; exemption, admission, or re-direction towards another pathway, and communicate this to the applicant via the VAE counsellor.

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

No information was found to cover this point.

In VAE, both in higher education and adult education, each institution is free to develop and use its own tools.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

There is no national framework for QA related to VNFIL in French-speaking Belgium. In the continuous vocational training sector, the Consortium overseeing validation is responsible for implementing the accreditation of the validation centres in the framework of a quality assurance approach.

A stringent and concerted methodology for defining assessment criteria has been developed by the Consortium. These criteria are recognised by the Walloon region, the French Community and the French Community Commission (COCOF).

In terms of validation standards, the Consortium cooperates closely with SFMQ to align their standards. Each year the Consortium develop new validation standards for new occupations in line with SFMQ.

In addition, the following quality criteria should be met in assessment procedures:

- **Transparency:** all candidates receive identical information about the assessment procedure.
- **Fairness:** all candidates benefit from an identical assessment procedure, on the basis of a single set of skills assessment indicators, no matter who is being assessed, where, when or how an assessment takes place.
- **Validity:** assessment procedures are stringent.

The procedures in place during the validation session to assess candidates (e.g. presence of an observer) ensure further quality assurance criteria.

To ensure the quality and consistency of the service of validation, an accreditation mechanism has been implemented. A specific accreditation for each profession is required to validate the candidates' skills.

The accreditation process for the centres is based on the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard, without going as far as certification. Governments grant accreditation on the basis of the recommendation of external auditors and following an opinion from the social partners. The auditors come from organisations approved by Belac (the only Belgian accreditation body) and verify that the requirements of the Consortium and the steps of the accreditation process are respected. Centres are accredited for a period of 2 years.

The accreditation of a Centre proves, in 4 steps, its capacity to organise reliable validation tests. These four steps are:

- **An internal audit:** its purpose is to ensure that the Centre is ready to organise skills validation tests;

- A mock test: it consists in testing the validation test corresponding to the qualification concerned and ensures that the validation centre has all the necessary resources (human and material);
- The centre review: it aims at taking into account suggestions for improvement from the previous stages (internal audit - mock test), to update the action plan drawn up at the time of the application for approval and to prepare the external audit;
- The external audit: its purpose is to have the coherence of the Centre's organisation certified by an independent certification body as specified above. If the Centre is refused, it can appeal to an appeals committee.

In 2021, 49 validation centres were accredited (CVDC 2021).

Moreover, since 2018, the automatic recognition procedure implemented in the EPS institutions have been leading to a significant increase of the number of validations. In order to ensure the quality of this validation procedure, the Inspection service of French community is in charge of verifying the learning outcomes and the testing procedure in each training institutions.

National legislation does not specify any particular quality assurance mechanisms for VAE procedures.

In adult education, the implementation of VAE is controlled by the inspection service of “social advancement training”⁵⁰.

In higher education, assessment of the quality is provided by the AEQES, the common auditors of all higher education’s stakeholders.

No specific information is available about quality control in VAE⁵¹.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

VDC

CVDC displays the key figures in terms of validation of competencies in its annual activity report and in another figures sheet (frequency unknown). According to the last figures sheet⁵² (as date of June 2022), figures are collected on the following indicators:

- Number of credentials delivered (on a 5 years period);
- Evolution of the validation offer, that is proposed occupations, as well as validations centres;
- Results of tests (% failure and % success) and absenteeism;
- Profile of beneficiaries: gender and socio-professional status.

VAE in adult education

⁵⁰ <http://www.enseignement.be/index.php?page=27166&navi=3672>

⁵¹ No relevant information is available for the inspection service; and for AEQES, no activity report has been published since 2017.

⁵²

https://www.cvdc.be/sites/default/files/public/uploads/common/Validation%20des%20comp%C3%A9tences_Statistiques_%20Juin%202022.pdf

Social advancement education (EPS) website⁵³ displays a list of statistics up to date. The numbers related to valorisation are not displayed on the public website. However the administration of the adult education (DGESVR) monitor each type of validation in each institution and the Inspection service of the French Community is regularly in charge of the evaluation of the validation procedure inside those institutions.

VAE in higher education

ARES is the federation of higher education institutions of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. It is in charge of collecting statistics on higher education.

According to their online website⁵⁴, no data is systematically collected on validation⁵⁵.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

Validation procedures are gaining visibility in society, especially through VDC which is becoming more popular through time. Validation seems particularly known by employees.

Nevertheless, reaching out to disadvantaged communities remains a challenge and additional investment and strategies in visibility efforts are to be put in place.

VAE in Universities and *Hautes Ecoles* is a priority but benefits less from a clear direction than VDC.

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⁵³ <https://promsoc.cfwb.be/liens-footer/statistiques/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.ares-ac.be/fr/statistiques/indicateurs#les-contextes-de-d%C3%A9veloppement>

⁵⁵ In the framework of the project "VAE 2020" implemented in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation with the financial support of the European Social Fund, a few key figures were made available. However, the available report dating from December 2018, we do not present these. For more information, see: https://www.ares-ac.be/images/midis/presentations/2018-12-06-Projet_VAE_2020_chiffres_cles_A_Salmon.pdf

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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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