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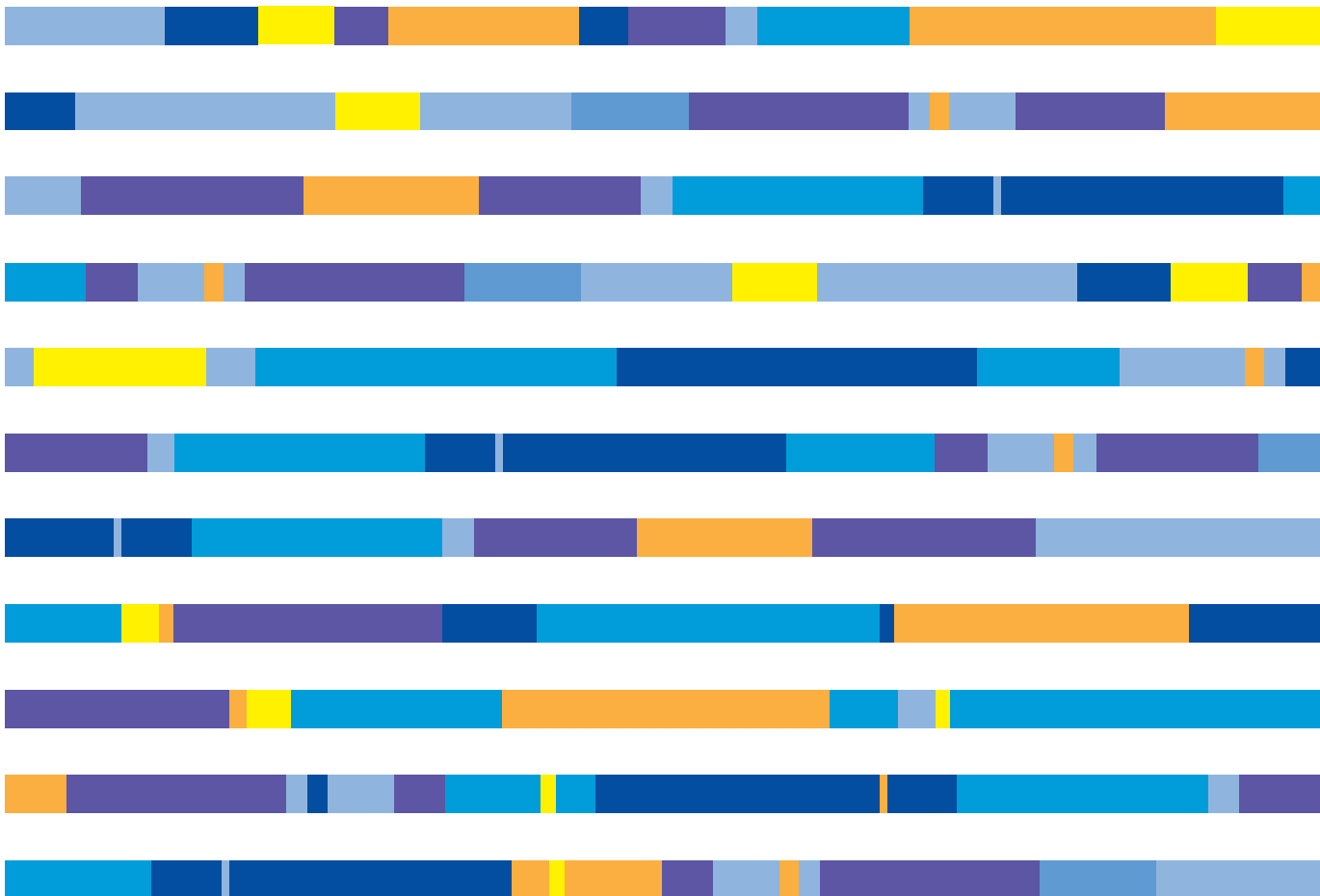


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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT:
BELGIUM- FLANDERS

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1 Abstract

In Flanders, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is supported by the Flemish government and is implemented in several policy domains, albeit with differences across the sectors. With the adoption of two new decrees in 2019 the validation arrangements and systems in Flanders have changed substantially in the last years in the educational and work sector. The two new decrees allow people to obtain a professional qualification and promote an integrated policy on validation in the educational and work sector. They regulate the role of validation bodies and provide quality assurance. Prior to 2019 the procedures were being developed by each policy domain independently, resulting in fragmented validation practices and incoherent procedures. Consequently, validation practices were diffused and not transparent. Though this has improved for the new validation arrangements in the educational and work sector, differences in practices still exist in the third sector and in education. There, several other procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been continued since 2018.

2 Introduction

In Flanders, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is referred to by the term 'EVC' (Erkennen van Verworven Competenties - *recognition of competences*). EVC is supported by the Flemish government and is implemented in several policy domains, albeit with differences across the sectors. With the adoption of two decrees in 2019, namely the Decree on validation¹ and the Decree on common quality framework², the validation arrangements and systems in Flanders have changed substantially in the last years, namely for EVC for professional qualifications³ in the educational and work sector. On the other hand, several procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been continued in the third sector and in the educational sector (i.e. for educational qualifications in secondary education, higher education and adult education).

In 2019 the two new decrees were adopted. They allow people to obtain a professional qualification and promote an integrated policy on validation in the educational and work sector. They regulate the role of validation bodies and provide quality assurance. On the whole, the Decree on validation aligns the Flemish validation system to the 2012 Council Recommendations, and the decree on the common quality framework enables an integrated approach on validation which was not in place previously (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). Prior to 2019 the procedures were being developed by each policy domain independently (work and education), resulting in fragmented validation practices and incoherent procedures. Consequently, validation practices were diffused and not transparent. Though this has improved for EVC for professional qualifications in the educational and work sector, differences in practices still exist for EVC in the third sector and for EVC for educational qualifications in education. Moreover, the new decrees have not led to an increase of participation rates yet. To this end, the government is taking measures to increase outreach, awareness-raising, and provision of information, advice and guidance.

¹ Decree of validation (2019): [wet: Decreet betreffende een geïntegreerd beleid voor de erkenning van verworven competenties \(vlaanderen.be\)](https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/decree-betreffende-een-geintegreerd-beleid-voor-de-erkenning-van-verworven-competenties)

² [wet: Decreet betreffende het kwaliteitstoezicht voor beroepskwalificerende trajecten op basis van een gemeenschappelijk kwaliteitskader \(vlaanderen.be\)](https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/wet-betreffende-het-kwaliteitstoezicht-voor-beroepskwalificerende-trajecten-op-basis-van-een-gemeenschappelijk-kwaliteitskader)

³ The Flemish Qualifications Framework (FQF) makes a distinction between professional qualifications and educational qualifications. "A professional qualification describes the knowledge and skills an individual needs to exercise a profession." <https://vlaamsekwalficatiestructuur.be/en/what-is-fqf/>

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

In Flanders the term 'EVC' is used to refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. EVC means 'recognition of Acquired Competences'. In that sense it extends beyond the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as it also takes into account what was learned in a formal setting but not awarded with a formal (partial) qualification (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). EVC can be used to get admission to an education and training programme, to request exemptions from (parts of) an education and training programme and to obtain a (professional) qualification.

Validation in the broader policy context

The aim of validation is to help individuals to achieve personal development, to contribute to a higher level of employment, to improve access to formal education systems and to stimulate lifelong learning (AHOVOKS, forthcoming)⁴. Validation policies are aimed at the general population, but there are specific measures and initiatives to target groups, for example, low-skilled persons, migrants or unemployed people. Validation arrangements can strengthen the social and labour market position of these groups.

The above aims and measures, however, are not part of a national strategy on validation, nor is there a national skills strategy. This does not mean that there are no measures or initiatives on skills and lifelong learning. At the moment, for instance, the Flemish government has taken the first steps towards an individual learning account⁵ and the department of work and social economy has launched, together with the European Social Fund Agency (Europa WSE), projects to stimulate skills audits for organisations and their employees⁶. Together with VDAB (the public employment service of Flanders), the department of work and social economy also developed the means to do skills audits for individuals (see Box 1). Another government measure is paid educational leave. It is the right of workers from the private sector to follow recognised courses and to be absent from work while retaining their wages. The employer cannot refuse but must agree to the schedule of the leave. After training, the employer seeks reimbursement from the government by filing a claim⁷. Overall, the government aims at increasing skill development through lifelong learning for which the Action Plan Lifelong Learning is set in place as framework (see footnote 4).

Box 1 Skills audits

A sound definition of 'skills audit' has not been developed as such in Flanders and generally the EU definition of skills audit is adopted. In practice, the skills audit focuses on identifying and documenting skills, often based only on self-evaluation.

The Department of Work and Social Economy, jointly with VDAB, the public employment service (PES), focus on 'making competences visible'. This is a process whereby an individual documents his/her competences electronically (based on all forms of assessment, including self-assessment), possibly with support from a professional, such as the PES employment counsellor.

⁴ See for instance the Action Plan Lifelong Learning by the Partnership of lifelong learning [Actieplan levenslang leren. Koers zetten naar een lerend Vlaanderen | Vlaanderen.be](#) and OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Flanders, Belgium (<https://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-skills-strategy-implementation-guidance-for-flanders-belgium-7887a565-en.htm>)

⁵ [Visienota leer- en loopbaanrekening \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

⁶ [Competentiecheck | Europa WSE](#)

⁷ [Vlaams opleidingsverlof | Vlaanderen.be](#)

The platform for matching the competences of an individual to those required by employers, implemented by VDAB in 2013, is still in use. It is based on occupational profiles validated by social partners and stakeholders and is being linked to the NQF. This platform allows individuals to move more smoothly between jobs and sectors, thereby reducing current skill bottlenecks. It should help all citizens to obtain labour market relevant skills, to make their skills visible, or to re-skill to meet the needs of changing labour market demands.

Part of the competence based matching platform is the e-tool 'My Career' (Mijn Loopbaan) which facilitates the identification and documentation of competences. Each individual using the tool can collect their own personal information on acquired competences. All official degrees and certificates obtained are automatically added to the tool.

The practice of EVC in Flanders

The practice of EVC has been well-established for almost two decades in Belgium. Formal legal frameworks for validation have been put in place in both the French- and Dutch-speaking parts of the country. For Flanders EVC is regulated in the Departments for Work and Social Economy, Education and Training, and Culture, Youth, Media and Sports. EVC is thus supported by the Flemish government but is implemented differently across the sectors, resulting, in part, in fragmented validation practices and incoherent procedures. However, since the adoption of the two decrees in 2019, the validation arrangements and systems in the educational and work sector are more integrated, namely for EVC for professional qualifications.

The Decree on validation and the Decree of the common quality framework were adopted in 2019 after a complex and time-consuming process in which several stakeholders were involved (representatives of policy domains, entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, sectors, social partners etc.). The decrees allow people to obtain a professional qualification, which is formally linked to the Flemish Qualifications Framework. The Decree on validation starts with a broad definition of validation, based on the definition incorporated in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation⁸, in which each candidate can choose to go through the four phases of validation i.e., identification, documentation, assessment and certification. But subsequently, the decree narrows its application to the last two steps, namely assessment and certification. There are thus no regulations with regard to the identification and documentation of competences in EVC for professional qualification. Importantly, both decrees regulate the role of validation bodies, provide quality assurance in validation, and promote an integrated policy on validation across the different sectors (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). At the moment the first steps to integration have been taken between the educational and work sector, but not yet with regard to the third sector. The latter, however, is made possible with the decree on the common quality framework.

The procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector and in the educational sector for educational qualifications in secondary education, higher education and adult education have been continued, and are thus not integrated into the new system. Their validation practices differ per domain and per educational level, including which of the four phases are focussed on (see Section 3.2).

⁸ https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf

3.2 Validation in education and training

In Flanders there are several validation strategies in education and training, according to the educational level, and whether or not a (type of) qualification is attained. It depends on the strategy whether identification, documentation, assessment and certification are present. Some strategies are limited to identification, others also include documentation. Assessment and certification can be present if it serves the aim of the strategy. Assessment is always needed for certification, but certification is not necessarily an outcome, as sometimes the validation arrangements are used for other ends, such as exemption from some parts of a training programme.

In general, the validation strategies in education and training contribute to the flexibility of the Flemish education and training system, and they are all linked to the Flemish Qualifications Framework (FQF). The strategies in secondary and higher education have been in place for more than a decade, and they have been unchanged with regard to the previous report of 2018. The main changes have taken place in adult education since the Decree on validation in 2019.

3.2.1 Secondary education

The exam committee focuses on the assessment and certification phases. Those who wish to obtain the diploma or certificate of secondary education (including IVET) can take an exam in the presence of the Exam Committee (there are no limitations with regard to age)⁹. This is possible for a selection of educational programmes offered in secondary education, including General, Technical, Art and Vocational secondary education (ASO, TSO, KSO, BSO). Exams are organised throughout the year. These validation practices in secondary education have been unchanged with regard to the country report of 2018, though the regulation has been updated in 2021¹⁰.

3.2.2 Higher Education

Validation of prior learning in higher education is defined by the Codex Higher Education (11 October 2013). The process of recognising non-formal and informal learning has been in place in universities and university colleges since September 2005.

This system is decentralised with each association¹¹ in higher education elaborating their own rules of procedure within the framework set by the Codex Higher Education (see also Chapter 6)¹². The procedures result in a proof of acquired competences (or in Dutch 'bewijs van bekwaamheid') which can then lead to the appropriate exemptions/shortened study duration and credit certificates and/or a proof of qualification. It is noted however, that the recognition of competences does not automatically lead to exemptions and is at the discretion of the faculty or department of the higher education institutions. There is no legal guarantee that one association will accept the outcomes of validation awarded by another association, but in practice, however, the certificates of competency are mutually accepted.

The procedure refers to the level descriptors included in article II.141 of the Codex Higher Education and the domain specific learning outcomes laid down by the higher education institutions. The procedure starts often from a portfolio and typically

⁹ <https://examencommissiesecundaironderwijs.be> Exceptionally, this system can also be used by (highly gifted) pupils to obtain a diploma quicker than foreseen.

¹⁰ <https://www.examencommissiesecundaironderwijs.be/examenreglement>

¹¹ An **association** is an official entity regulating the cooperation of a **university** and one or more **university colleges**.

¹² For instance, the Ghent University association is developing a Simplified procedure.

includes other elements such as assessments, structured interviews and behavioural observation.

Standard admission requirements for higher education in Flanders include a diploma of secondary education. There is no standard entrance exam except for medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. In order to enrol in the academic Bachelor programmes in the fields of study 'Audiovisual and Visual Arts' or Music and Performing Arts', students must successfully complete the artistic admission test of one of the university colleges (the Schools of Arts).

For those who have not obtained a diploma of secondary education the associations offer a special 'entrance examination' ('toelatingsonderzoek') for bachelor programmes¹³ or an entrance test ('toelatingsproef') for graduate programmes¹⁴ (short cycle). If granted, the person can access higher education without a formal secondary education diploma. The outcome of these validation procedures is not a proof of competences, like for example a diploma of secondary education, but rather a recognition that an individual has the potential to succeed in obtaining a higher education programme degree, even though he or she has not finished secondary education. With regard to the entrance examination, all associations use the same standardised test for the bachelor programmes as an important part of their procedure. Candidates can apply just once per academic year. The procedure is free of charge. Since the 2015-2016 academic year, the 5 associations agreed that passing the entrance examination gives access to all bachelor programmes of their higher education institutions with a few exceptions. All associations also developed a joint entrance test for the graduate programmes in 2019¹⁵.

3.2.3 Adult education

Since the decrees of 2019 there are two types of EVC implementation in adult education. On the one hand there is the unchanged implementation of exemptions, and on the other hand there is the new possibility to obtain a professional qualification through EVC.

The procedure of giving exemptions in centres for adult education was established in the Flemish Decree of 15 June 2007¹⁶, which defines exemptions linked to the modular organisation of educational programmes. All programmes (i.e. modules) in the centres for adult education are developed based on course profiles approved by the Flemish Government. This implies that all (modular) certificates are mutually interchangeable. The centres for adult education provide an evaluation for each module. The way the exemptions are organised is determined in the rules of procedure of each centre. Exemptions can be granted on the basis of credits for prior learning and/or evaluation of competences.

Since the decrees of 2019, centres for adult education also have EVC procedures that lead to professional qualifications. Centres for adult education can act as a validation body (among others, see Chapter 6) under certain conditions, including using instruments which are developed in line with validation standards and accepting regular quality control (see Chapter 5 and 11). The EVC procedure includes the four successive phases of validation, i.e., identification, documentation, assessment and certification. However, the decree on validation narrows its application to the last two

¹³ Specifically for bachelor programmes in which the language of instruction is Dutch. For bachelor programmes in English, the AUGent offers a specific procedure and the AUHA trials a procedure in the academic year of 2022-2023. The AUGent also has a specific procedure for applicants of Arts whose Dutch is insufficient.

¹⁴ [Inschrijving toelatingsproef \(toelatingsonderzoek.be\)](https://www.toelatingsproef.be)

¹⁵ [Toelatingsvoorwaarden hoger onderwijs - voor studenten \(vlaanderen.be\)](https://www.toelatingsvoorwaarden.hogeronderwijs.vlaanderen.be)

¹⁶ <https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=13914>

steps (assessment and certification of professional competences), which means that the centres of adult education can each determine their implementation of the identification and documentation phases.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

The labour market has different procedures to validate informal and non-formal learning. The first arrangement is the oldest one, established in 2004. It aims at the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through the 'Certificate of Work Experience' ('Ervaringsbewijs') created by a decree approved on 30 April 2004¹⁷. In short, people can receive a certificate of work experience if they demonstrate that they have acquired the skills needed to perform an occupation. The certificate of work experience is based on standards, which are developed by the SERV (social economic council of Flanders) in collaboration with the sectoral funds involved and VDAB, the public employment service of Flanders (see Section 5). The standards are used in a test situation to assess whether people have the required competences. If they pass the test, they receive a certificate of work experience, granted by the Flemish government. The organisations assessing applicants are recognised centrally by the Minister of Work after they have fulfilled a procedure. These rules are defined in the decision of the Flemish Government in implementing the Decree of 30/4/2004.

Since the decrees of 2019, the above validation arrangement has been gradually converted to the new procedure of EVC for professional qualifications. Most certificates of Work Experience have been converted save one¹⁸ (see Chapter 5). Public as well as private education and training providers can act as a validation body. Thus, training providers of the labour market can assess and qualify candidates under the same conditions as the public centres of adult education (see Chapter 5 and 11). The EVC procedure includes the four successive phases of validation, i.e. identification, documentation, assessment and certification. However, as stated above, the validation bodies can each determine their implementation of the identification and documentation phases, but not for the assessment and certification phase.

Next to the above two validation arrangements, the sectoral funds organise sectoral tests which may lead to a certification. Though these tests are based on the same competences as the FQF, they are not linked to the FQF and are usually the end of a training. However, the decrees make it possible for the sectoral funds to transform these tests into an accredited EVC instrument (see Chapter 5) and become an accredited validation body.

Lastly, in 2023 the VDAB will start an experiment¹⁹ 'Leerjobs' with funds by the European Social Fund Agency (Europa WSE) to allow unqualified young jobseekers to follow a work-based program which integrates EVC for professional qualifications (with respect to receiving qualifications on the basis of an EVC assessment). The VDAB includes partners such as SYNTRUM and SYNTRA vzw (education and training providers focussing on entrepreneurship and labour market) and sectors for this project.

¹⁷ [wet: Decreet betreffende het verwerven van een titel van beroepsbekwaamheid \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

¹⁸ <https://www.vdab.be/laat-je-ervaring-erkennen>

¹⁹ [Europees Sociaal Fonds \(ESF\) | VDAB Extranet](#)

3.4 Validation and the third sector

As young people and adults develop a variety of competences through volunteering and courses, the third sector also offers arrangements of validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, these arrangements stand on their own and are hardly integrated into the procedures of the other sectors.

Sports and the Flemish School for Coach Education

Sport Vlaanderen²⁰ is the sport agency of the Flemish government and has been part of the policy domain Culture, Youth, Media and Sports since 2006. The Flemish School for Coach Education (VTS) is the institution coordinating the cooperation between Sport Vlaanderen, the Flemish universities and higher education colleges providing an education and training programme in physical education and the Flemish Sports Federation. This institution created a validation guide in March 2009 that describes the procedure that applicants have to go through for validation of prior learning. This validation guide was updated in 2017 and 2021 and will be updated again in 2023 because of changes in the model of coach education. During the update process in 2017, the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) were included in the procedure. This procedure is independent of other policy initiatives for the moment because of the very low number (less than 10 each year) of people starting a procedure.

There is however no legal base for validation in the sports sector. The current validation procedure was developed in 2009 to respond to the demand for exemptions. Applicants who have successfully gone through the validation procedure can obtain either an exemption for a course or training programme or a full exemption which means that a proof of competences equal to a VTS qualification is awarded. Currently, it is emphasised by the VTS that the level of competences required to obtain a diploma is similar between the different sports.

The socio-cultural and youth sector

As stipulated in the report of 2018, in the cultural and youth sectors the focus is only on validation in the sense of 'identification' and 'documentation' and less so on 'assessment' and 'certification'. Overall though, certificates issued to participants in these types of learning or training activities are in general known as 'certificates of participation', which are mainly based on self-assessment practices rather than on institutional or formal assessments. Organisations can define and describe the competences of their training initiatives or of their volunteers by means of a step-by-step plan²¹.

Youth work is an area where non-formal and informal learning often takes place and where this type of learning could lead to a qualification on the NQF. Nevertheless, there is no link between youth work in Flanders and NQF. Given the sector's concerns that a higher degree of formalisation could undermine the voluntary nature of activity, there is no strong support in the youth sector for developing formal qualifications for voluntary youth workers. However, since October 2015²², there is a specific legal agreement with regard to the attestation of training courses for youth workers, delivered by the Department of Culture, Youth, Sports and Media (Youth). The validation of competences acquired through courses including apprenticeships, based on competence profiles, leads to the award of certificates²³. This new system was evaluated at the end of 2018 by an academic institution. The evaluation led to minor

²⁰ Agency for the Improvement of Physical Development, Sport and Open Air Recreation.

²¹ <https://socius.be/sociaal-cultureel-werken/rollen-en-functies>

²² Adaptation of the Decree of January 20th 2012 on youth and children's rights policy.

²³ http://www.sociaalcultureel.be/jeugd/regelgeving_KV/131213_kadervormingstrajecten-memorie-2deprincip.pdf

amendments to the legislation for there seemed to be no need for fundamental adjustments.

The certificates in this sector are mainly acquired through training and not through validation exclusively. They only focus on the identification and possibly the documentation phase. They do not go through an assessment and certification phase as in the other validation arrangements. As a consequence, these certificates are not considered as outcomes of validation in this report.

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The national qualifications frameworks and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

In relation to micro-credentials, there are no micro-credentials²⁴ that can be obtained through validation in Flanders.

4.1 Outcomes of EVC and their links to the NQF

Unchanged with regard to the situation in 2018, the Flemish National Qualifications Framework outlines what kind of training and experiences can lead to a qualification. The Flemish Qualifications Framework (FQF) is a reference framework that allows education and training providers and the labour market to communicate about qualifications in the Flemish community and in Europe. The FQF distinguishes between 'professional qualifications' and 'educational qualifications' - a distinction which is not made in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The professional qualifications in the FQF describe the competences that a professional must possess on the basis of the descriptor elements (knowledge, skills, context, autonomy, responsibility). The competences from the professional qualifications are to be seen as learning outcomes. These competences are used to design various vocationally-oriented education, training or EVC trajectories, e.g. vocational training in adult education, or vocational qualification programmes (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). An educational qualification is 'a complete and classified set of competences with which further studies in secondary or higher education can be undertaken or professional activities can be performed'. Educational qualifications are exclusively issued by educational institutions, which is not the case for professional qualifications (see section 6). Depending on the educational level and the form of education, educational qualifications may consist of one or more professional qualifications, final objectives and/or specific final objectives²⁵. In educational qualifications of levels 1 to 4, attainment targets and specific attainment targets are described as competence-oriented learning outcomes structured by a fixed format. Educational qualifications in higher education (EQF 5-8) describe domain specific learning outcomes which must meet the criteria set out in the Higher Education Codex (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). For both types of qualifications, validation procedures can be used.

Since the decree on validation and the decree on the common quality framework, oth in 2019, a new procedure for EVC is in place. The professional qualifications are the basis for formal vocational education, professional training and validation arrangements and thus ensure a validated framework for required competences. The

²⁴ In the EVC procedure for professional qualifications (see section 4.1), an individual can obtain a partial qualification certificate or a certificate of acquired competences. These qualifications could be considered as a micro-credential, depending on the definition of a micro-credential.

²⁵ <https://vlaamsekwalficatiestructuur.be/en/what-is-fqf/>

new validation system in Flanders focuses on the validation of professional qualifications, which are formally linked to the FQF. Validation standards are based on the professional qualification. In this way an individual can acquire a professional qualification through education, training or through a validation procedure (AHOVOKS, forthcoming).

A successful assessment of competences leads to a full professional qualification certificate (see Box 2). In some cases, a partial qualification certificate can be awarded. When an applicant cannot give proof of all acquired competences from the qualification, but shows the mastery of some relevant competencies, a certificate of acquired competencies is awarded. It is possible to combine these certificates of acquired competencies with partial qualification certificates obtained through training to acquire a full professional qualification certificate.

The exemption procedures in higher education and adult education are also linked to the FQF. A learner can request exemptions from (parts of) a study programme. In adult education the arrangement does not lead to a credit certificate but can be used to shorten the study programme and ultimately obtain a qualification. In higher education the exemption can lead to a proof of acquired competences for an entire programme. In most cases, however, the exemption shortens the study programme, and thus potentially leading to a qualification.

EVC for secondary education is linked to the FQF as well. The exam in the presence of the Exam Committee can lead to a diploma of secondary education. The Exam Committee gives the opportunity to exemptions based on (partial) qualifications of formal education, including certificates of adult education.

EVC in the sport sector is linked to the FQF by means of professional qualifications for trainers since 2013. The VTS has adapted the model of coach education in January 2023, which continues to link the model to four existing professional qualifications, but it adds a new training level for which there is no professional qualification yet. (Partial) qualifications obtained through other validation bodies cannot be combined to acquire a VTS qualification.

The certificates of work experience are not linked to the FQF.

The certificates acquired through validation are equivalent with the qualifications and credits delivered after (vocational) training programs and programs. It is, however, still possible to know that a certificate or diploma has been obtained (partially) by validation arrangements. First, because the name of the institution that has awarded the certificate or diploma is mentioned on the certificate. For instance, if the diploma has been awarded by the Exam Committee, it is clear that it was obtained through validation arrangements. Second, the name of the certificate will give away that it has been awarded after a validation arrangement in case it is issued by a centre of adult education. They have a different name for certificates obtained through education or validation, which is not the case in certificates issued by validation bodies of the work sector (where these certificates have the same value for both the candidates as future employers). Third, when an annex is added to a diploma listing the courses and grades obtained, it is also visible that for parts of the programme validation procedures were used.

Box 2 Possible outcomes of EVC in Flanders

EVC in higher education

- Proof of acquired competences which leads to exemptions from a study programme
- Proof of acquired competences which leads to exemptions from parts of a study programme

EVC in centres of adult education

- exemptions from parts of a study programme
- EVC for professional qualifications
 - full professional qualification certificate
 - partial qualification certificate
 - certificate of acquired competences

EVC for secondary education

- Diploma of secondary education
- Certificate

EVC in the labour market

- EVC for professional qualifications
 - full professional qualification certificate
 - partial qualification certificate
 - certificate of acquired competences
- Certificate of Work Experience ('Ervaringsbewijs')

EVC in the socio-cultural and youth sector

- certificate of participation accepted in the sector

EVC in the sport sector

- exemption for a course or training programme
- proof of competences equal to a VTS qualification

4.2 Credit system

The Flemish higher education sector uses the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and no significant changes have taken place in this area since 2018. Credits in higher education give an indication of the effort or amount of work (workload) that a student has to carry out to acquire learning results. The workload is the time that the student should take to execute all learning activities such as attending courses and seminars, completing practice and projects, self-study and exams that are necessary to acquire and demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. The workload of one academic year is set at 60 ECTS credits. 60 credits correspond to 1 500 - 1 800 hours of workload. EQF level 5 graduate programmes comprise of 90 or 120 credits, while professionally and academically oriented bachelor's programmes comprise of a minimum of 180 credits. Master programmes follow after a bachelor's degree and comprise at least 60 credits (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). Learning outcomes that have been acquired previously can lead to an acquisition of the corresponding credits after a successful assessment or validation of the learning outcomes. Students who successfully complete a course or modules are awarded a credit certificate.

No credit system has been developed for compulsory education in Flanders. Flanders is closely following the European developments with regard to ECVET²⁶, but has not undertaken formal initiatives to implement the system.

²⁶ This system is also based on learning outcomes and allows the validation of the results of non-formal and informal learning

5 Standards

In Flanders, both educational and professional qualifications are used in education to shape study programmes, and since the decrees of 2019 specific EVC standards have been developed and used for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in centres for adult education and accredited validation bodies of the labour market.

If validation arrangements are used to obtain exemptions and shorten the programmes for the learner, the educational and professional qualifications are only indirectly used since they shape the study programmes. In those cases, the educational institution will check whether the learner is eligible to be exempted from certain courses or assignments. The educational institution will follow its own rules and procedures.

In the wake of the decrees of 2019 fifteen EVC trajectories are operational, where a candidate can subscribe in a programme. For these trajectories EVC standards have been developed with the sole purpose of validating informal and non-formal learning, and thus not for education or training. Based on a professional qualification, a unique validation standard is developed. A standard includes the most appropriate methods for assessing the competences of the professional qualification, the situations addressed in the assessment, relevant infrastructure and materials, an indication of assessment duration, the certificate that is delivered and finally general quality indications for the assessment. In the development of validation standards, a catalogue of assessment methods is used for the choice of assessment methods. The EVC standards are publicly published on a website²⁷.

AHOVOKS coordinates the creation of validation standards. A development committee will be established for each validation standard or cluster of validation standards. This committee is made up of education and training providers, sectors or community organisations. Before approval, the validation standard is advised by members of the inspection authorities (Educational inspectorate and Flemish Social Inspection) and finally adopted by the ministers of Work and Education. At the moment the Flemish government plans to expand the list of EVC standards with at least twenty new EVC standards.

However, the validation standard is not what is ultimately used by the validation bodies. They have to use approved validation instruments, which is a concrete description of the tests. The validation instruments have to be based on the validation standards, and the development of the instrument is the responsibility of the prospective validation body or bodies, for which AHOVOKS offers a set of templates. Once the validation instrument has been developed, AHOVOKS will test it against a number of criteria. There will be a verification as to whether the validation instrument corresponds to the professional qualification and to the validation standard. Once they are checked, the instruments can be shared and used by all validation bodies assessing the same qualification. These instruments are not published on a website as it discloses details of the assessments.

The certificate of work experience is based on so-called “standards”, but these are not linked to the FQF. The social partners give their advice on the professions for which a certificate of work experience is relevant (and needs to be included). It is based on the competences related to a certain profession (as described by sectoral funds and employers), no matter where one has achieved those competences. Therefore, professional competence profiles are translated into standards. Up till 2018 the SERV (Flanders’ Social and Economic Committee) was responsible for the

²⁷ [Hoe zien de procedure en de inhoud van EVC-standaarden eruit? | Vlaanderen.be](#)

development of the standards. In 2018, by means of a new decree²⁸, this responsibility was handed over to VDAB, the public employment service of Flanders, advised by SERV and the social partners. Due to its close link to the labour market, the value of these certificates is mainly supported by employers. At the moment the certificate of work experience is only possible for one profession 'supervisor/trainer'. Since the decrees of 2019 this validation arrangement has been converted to EVC for professional qualifications based on the EVC standards. However, this validation arrangement remains an option for the labour market when there is no professional qualification in place, which is the case for the 'supervisor/trainer'.

The validation procedures in the sports sector are not based on standards as described above. They follow their model of coach education.

²⁸ [Moniteur Belge - Belgisch Staatsblad \(fgov.be\)](https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/decreet/2018/10/12/2018032071/staatsblad) - <https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/decreet/2018/10/12/2018032071/staatsblad>

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

Since the two decrees of 2019, a more integrated policy on validation across the different sectors has been made possible and has been established between the educational and work sectors. The two decrees result in an integrated regulation for the validation bodies, for which standards are used, and how the phases of assessment and certification are implemented. Validation can be offered by educational institutions, public or private organisations acting as a recognised validation body under four conditions (AHOVOKS, forthcoming):

- The competences they assess are part of a recognised professional qualification.
- The validation instruments are developed in line with the validation standards.
- The organisations have a quality label at the organisational level.
- The validation bodies accept a regular quality control.

The two decrees thus also promote quality assurance in validation, though quality control is performed by two different bodies (see Quality Assurance).

The integration is, however, only the case for EVC for professional qualifications, which means that the other procedures of EVC are still the sole responsibility of several institutions and stakeholders, resulting in different designs and implementations of validation.

AHOVOKS

AHOVOKS is the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants under the Ministry of Education. The Agency supervises the development of educational and professional qualifications for which AHOVOKS involves sectoral representatives of employers and employees, VDAB, Department of work and social economy, independent experts and education and training providers. With regard to EVC for professional qualifications AHOVOKS coordinates the development of the EVC standards and tests the quality of the EVC instruments. It manages the accreditation of validation bodies for the educational sector (see Chapter 5). AHOVOKS also oversees quality assurance by means of monitoring for the education and training sector (see Chapter 11). It is responsible for the general website of EVC in Flanders (see Chapter 7) and it developed a database²⁹ of validation and training programmes for professional qualifications, and of the accredited test centres. AHOVOKS is also responsible for the LED (database of proofs of qualifications)³⁰

The Department of Education and Training

In the policy sector of education and training the approach towards validation through exemptions is decentralised and the education and training institutions are given a great deal of responsibility. These validation practices tend to be developed from the bottom up, depending on the motivation of those concerned and the amount of demand. However, incentives are also provided centrally (for example support and the availability of assessor training at association level). This has been unchanged since the report of 2018. However, since 2019, EVC for professional qualifications stand for more integrated validation practices, which is implemented in the centres of adult education.

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for the broad design of and approach towards validation by drafting the legislation on the different sectors within

²⁹ [Register beroepskwalificerende trajecten \(vlaanderen.be\)](https://www.vlaanderen.be/registreer-beroepskwalificerende-trajecten)

³⁰ [Startpagina | Leer- en ervaringsbewijzendatabank \(leerenervaringsbewijzendatabank.be\)](https://www.leer-en-ervaringsbewijzendatabank.be/)

the field of education. The actual implementation on the ground is done jointly by the Department of Education and Training and the associations and education institutions for higher education and by the Department of Education and Training and institutions for adult education.

In terms of providing general information, this role is implemented by the Ministry of Education and Training, whereas in the case of both adult education and higher education it is the institutions themselves which provide specific information and raise awareness. Similarly, it is the associations, educational institutions and adult educational institutions which provide services such as providing counselling and guidance; undertaking assessments; certifying the outputs of the validation arrangements and quality assurance both for higher and adult education.

Evaluation and review are carried out annually by the associations and educational institutions themselves.

The Department of Work and Social Economy

Since 2019 the department for Work and Social Economy is responsible for the accreditation of validation bodies in the field of the labour market³¹. The decree of the common quality framework expands this authority to trainings as well in case they lead to professional qualifications. Only accredited validation bodies can issue certificates for a professional qualification. The accreditation is given per EVC or training programme, not on the level of the organisation. As of 2018 the department of work and social economy is not responsible for the validation arrangement of the certificates of Work Experience anymore. That has been transferred to VDAB. The department undertakes information and awareness-raising activities in partnership with other stakeholders, such as AHOVOKS, VDAB, etc. It also coordinates the development of sector agreements (see below).

Flemish School for Coach Education (VTS)

In the Sports sector, and more specifically in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning carried out by the VTS, the division of tasks is as follows. The design of the procedure and approach is developed within the administration of Sport Vlaanderen and formally accepted by the government. Information, promotion and awareness-raising takes place via the VTS and mostly via their website³². The role of guidance is shared between different stakeholders depending also on the specific sports; a person from the Sport Vlaanderen administration is involved, together with partners within the Flemish sports federation as well as the applicant since they have to put the dossier together. Undertaking the assessment as well as the certification of the outcomes of the validation arrangement is done by the VTS. Similar to the role of guidance, partners from a specific sport will be included in the assessment phase depending on which fields need to be validated.

VDAB (PES)

The VDAB is the public employment service of Flanders. It takes the leading role in validation arrangements in the labour market sector. Since 2018 it is responsible for the accreditation of validation bodies for the certificates of Work Experience. And since 2019 the VDAB is an important partner in integrating the policy and implementation of EVC for professional qualifications, especially for the unemployed. Moreover, the VDAB is also one of the validation bodies of EVC for professional qualifications. More recently VDAB takes the lead in the new validation arrangement 'leerjobs' (see Section 3.3.).

³¹ [Hoe vraag ik de erkenning van mijn traject aan? | Vlaanderen.be](https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/hoer-vraag-ik-de-erkenning-van-mijn-traject-aan)

³² I.e. www.sport.vlaanderen/vts

Actors in the sector of education and training

With regard to validation arrangements the exam committee is responsible in secondary education, and the centres of adult education for adult education. As described in the report of 2018, five associations are responsible for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the higher education sector. Each 'association' (cooperation platform between universities and university colleges) is legally authorised to carry out the validation. These associations are:

- KU Leuven Association (Associatie KU Leuven).
- Ghent University Association (Associatie Universiteit Gent);
- Antwerp University Association (Associatie Universiteit en Hogescholen Antwerpen);
- Brussels University Association (Universitaire Associatie Brussel); and
- Limburg University Association (Associatie Universiteit-Hogescholen Limburg).

Actors in the labour market sector

Similar to 2018, employer organisations and trade unions generally agree on the principle of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Most of them underline the positive dimensions of this process as well as the opportunity that is therefore given to recognise the formative dimension of work. To date, it can be considered that social and sectoral partners are involved in the process. All the sectoral social partners sign an agreement with the Flemish government on topics related to education, training and the labour market (a 'sector covenant'). They are also involved in the development of the NQF, professional qualifications and EVC standards.

Any private or public actor in the labour market sector can apply to become a validation body for EVC for professional qualifications. At the moment VDAB and three private actors function as validation body in this sector³³. The Flemish government expects sectors and SYNTRA to join as validation bodies in the future.

All public and private training providers can apply for accreditation to be an assessment centre with regard to the work experience certificate. These organisations are recognised centrally by the VDAB after they have fulfilled the procedure for accreditation.

³³ [Register beroepskwalificerende trajecten \(vlaanderen.be\)](https://www.vlaanderen.be/register-beroepskwalificerende-trajecten)

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

Since the new validation system of 2019, the Flemish government has undertaken information and promotional activities, albeit still limited due to the transformation of the system and the fact that the range of possible programmes is narrow at the moment. A much needed awareness-raising campaign on validation and its relevance for lifelong learning is planned in the near future, but at the moment the outreach initiatives focus on websites and databases.

AHOVOKS has taken the lead in developing a general website on validation in Flanders (www.vlaanderen.be/evc), which includes the different validation arrangements of the educational and work sector. The website currently has pages dedicated to potential candidates and to organisations who wish to become a validation body. The pages for the candidates include information on validation in general and it redirects candidates to the websites of the different validation arrangements. It focusses, however, on the new validation system, namely EVC for professional qualifications. It includes a video to explain the new validation system and it provides information on each programme. Currently, AHOVOKS is working on dedicated pages for stakeholders who may guide potential candidates towards validation, e.g. career counsellors, educational counsellors, organisations who work with specific target groups, companies.

Linked to this website, AHOVOKS also created a public database (*register van beroepskwalificerende trajecten*) for EVC for professional qualifications³⁴. It includes all the validation bodies and their contact details, their locations, the different programmes, and a link to the professional qualifications. It can be used by candidates and the different stakeholders.

The other agencies and departments also invested in promotional activities for validation. For instance, VDAB has dedicated pages on EVC (<https://www.vdab.be/laat-je-ervaring-erkennen>) and actively informs its stakeholders and jobseekers of the validation possibilities. The department of work and social economy informs candidates ([EVC-ervaringsbewijs | Vlaanderen.be](http://EVC-ervaringsbewijs.Vlaanderen.be)) and potential validation bodies through a website and webinars ([Beroepskwalificerende trajecten | Vlaanderen.be](http://Beroepskwalificerende-trajecten.Vlaanderen.be)). And the department of education and training refers to different validation arrangements on its website (<https://www.onderwijskiezer.be>).

Besides these general websites and databases, individual institutions often, but not always, have their own websites on validation, sometimes accompanied by promotional activities during events or information sessions.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

In Flanders, the provision of information, advice and guidance on validation is decentralised and offered by different institutions across and within the three sectors. As stated in the previous section, information on validation is provided by several stakeholders through websites, but once candidates have signed-up for a validation arrangement, the different institutions may use platforms, telephone, mail, face-to-face interviews, video's, information sessions, (digital) pamphlets, and even a chatbot to inform candidates about the different aspects of the validation process. These

³⁴ [Register beroepskwalificerende trajecten \(vlaanderen.be\)](http://Register-beroepskwalificerende-trajecten.vlaanderen.be)

aspects can cover all or a set of the aspects proposed in the European guidelines³⁵ for validation, namely:

- existing alternative validation forms *or training* available;
- timelines for validation;
- costs;
- procedure;
- forms of evidence of learning outcomes;
- presentation of evidence;
- requirements for evidence;
- standards to be applied;
- assessment and how best to approach the process;
- support available;
- appeal procedures;
- results and outcomes of the validation process.

With regard to advice and guidance, the VDAB (PES) actively informs, advises and guides possible candidates, mostly jobseekers, towards validation arrangements. Sectoral funds and *leerwinkels* (local educational counsellors) also direct candidates towards the different validation arrangements. For the domain of childcare pools of mentors guide applicants through either education or validation arrangements to acquire their qualification (see also Section 9.1.1). And migrants may be directed to validation arrangements by NARIC (an organisation which recognises foreign qualifications³⁶).

But other than the above examples, it is often the institutions themselves (e.g. in higher education, centres for adult education, VTS) who direct candidates towards their validation arrangements when it becomes clear that a person is eligible for the procedure. It is the institutions which are responsible for the provision of information, advice and guidance.

In the following sections, more information on the provision of information, advice and guidance is given per validation arrangement where possible.

Exam committee

The exam committee has a website (www.examencommissiesecundaironderwijs.be) with clear instructions about the regulations and process of this validation arrangement. It has created a platform for candidates where candidates can register, find information and support, and collect their obtained qualifications. Giving information and guidance is done by means of the website, the platform, short video's, an info session, course fiches and the possibility to call an assistant. Specific measures are taken to support candidates with issues such as dyslexia or concentration issues. There are, however, no dedicated guidance practitioners who help plan the programme or who run through the feedback and discuss the different options after the assessments. The exam committee does give the option to check the evaluated tests at the exam centre in case a candidate fails an exam.

Higher education

In the higher education sector, validation is part of the information and orientation process that is carried out by each education institution. Basic information is available on the associations' websites, including study guides and specific guides on validation edited by the institutions, and also on the website of the Flemish Department of Education and Training. Experienced staff guides applicants during the four or five phases of the process (see also Chapter 10), namely:

³⁵ [European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning | CEDEFOP \(europa.eu\)](http://europa.eu)

³⁶ [What does NARIC do? | NARIC-Vlaanderen \(naricvlaanderen.be\)](http://naricvlaanderen.be)

1. Information and guidance;
2. Identification of the elements of competences gained through experience;
3. Assessment;
4. Certification;
5. Follow-up.

In some cases, guidance practitioners give advice on whether or not assessment is feasible on the basis of screening instruments. Most guidance practitioners coach the candidates in preparing for the assessment, in drawing up a portfolio or giving advice on future steps during the follow-up phase. The follow-up phase may also include information and guidance on appeal procedures.

EVC for professional qualifications

The test centres follow the four phases of identification, documentation, assessment and certification. Across the four phases, several steps can be followed (see Figure 1), though some test centres skip certain steps or combine different steps into one:

1. Sign-up
2. Information
3. Screening
4. Advice
5. Registration for assessment
6. Run-up to assessment
7. Assessment
8. Aftercare

Depending on the test centra, the programme and the target groups, the guidance of the applicants through the different steps may differ, including which instruments and methods are used³⁷. Currently, AHOVOKS is working on tools to support the guidance at the test centres.

³⁷ Based on a study issued by AHOVOKS conducted by Kimps, Nackaerts, Bostyn and Sempels (2022) and published on the following website: [Hoe ziet de EVC-begeleiding eruit? | Vlaanderen.be](https://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/hoer-ziet-de-evc-begeleiding-eruit)

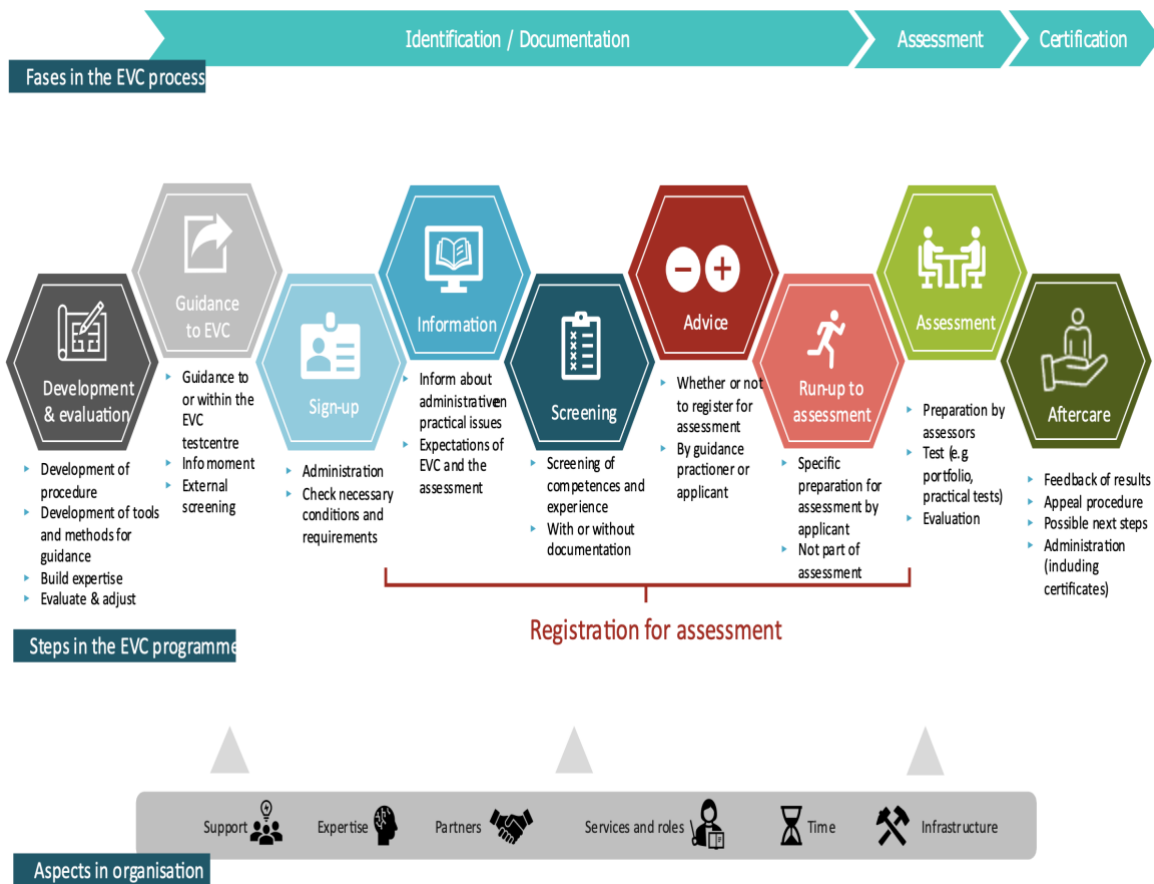


Figure 1 Guidance in the different phases and steps in EVC for professional qualifications

Sports sector

The information about the validation arrangement is easily available, both publicly via the website, chatbots, requests per email or phone, etc. Guidance through the seven steps (see Section 10.1) is offered through email, telephone, digital meetings, etc. The partner organisation, namely the sports federation, plays an important role, because it can guide the applicant to the right role in the sports club.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Overall, the main validation practitioners in Flanders are assessors, who are often the lecturers or internal experts of the different organisations.

In higher education, in most cases, the assessment is carried out by a jury of at least two assessors, unless the procedure is completely standardised (e.g. a test with no open-ended questions). The organisation and appointment of juries/assessors varies depending on the associations, the institutions involved and/or the study programme. The assessors are mainly internal experts, but sometimes external experts are part of the jury as well. Some associations make use of guidance and counselling practitioners.

In adult education, validation of learning is the responsibility of the staff working in the adult education centres, namely the lecturers of the centres for adult education. Similar to the validation bodies for EVC of professional qualifications of the work sector, the centres of adult education have dedicated assessors, who may also function as guidance practitioners. There is, however, the agreement that one candidate cannot have the same staff member as assessor and guidance practitioner. The latter agreement was adopted from the legislation developed for the work experience certificate, for which dedicated assessors are necessary as well. The composition of the jury depends on the programme. This is similar for validation bodies from the educational and work sector.

The Exam Commission for secondary education consists of professionals dedicated to all aspects of the validation arrangement (teachers, department coordinators for example).

For validation in the sports sector, there is a group of assessors of internal and external experts. As a rule of thumb, experienced assessors are involved as much as possible to ensure consistent implementation of the assessments.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

In general, each provider of validation arrangements is responsible for its own training and support for validation practitioners. Except for the work experience certificate, there is no legal framework for professionalising validation practitioners. Most higher education associations organise training for assessors, which is mostly in-house training and sometimes external. In the centres of adult education and the other validation bodies of work the assessors generally have taken a training, but this is often not the case for the guidance practitioners. In sports there is no specific training for assessors.

The legislation concerning 'the Certificate of Work Experience' ('Ervaringsbewijs') obliges assessment centres to organise training for their employees who offer guidance and for their assessors, even though the system is phasing out in favour of EVC for professional qualifications. Each assessor receives a training, including a profession-specific training on the use of the tools and procedures for validation.

For organisations from the work sector to become a validation body for EVC for professional qualifications, there is the general rule that staff members need to have the requested experience and should be supported by guidance and training³⁸. This aspect is, however, not one of the criteria checked during the quality control³⁹, nor

³⁸ [Wat zijn de kwaliteitsvoorwaarden? | Vlaanderen.be](#)

³⁹ [Ontwikkelingsschalen-beroepskwalificerend-EVC-traject_igaak5.pdf \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

during the check for accreditation for a specific EVC programme⁴⁰ (see Chapter 6 and 11).

8.3 Qualifications and experience

Similar to 2018, no specific qualifications are required by the government for the professionals working as assessors or guidance counsellors. It is up to the organisations providing validation to define the required profile, experience etc. An exception is the work experience certificate, where the law decree 30/4/2004 and decision of the Flemish government 23/09/2005 determine that validation assessors must be evaluation experts (i.e. they must have a minimum of one year's experience in assessment and must be an expert in the occupation they are assessing).

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

9.1.1 Funding

Similar to the situation in 2018 is that funding arrangements are not for validation specifically and that they are diverse. The decree on validation has not changed this situation. The Secondary Exam Committee is funded by the government as it is a service provided by the government. The adult and higher education training institutions have to bear the various costs of validation with regard to exemptions, together with individuals who also bear some of the associated costs. There is no earmarked funding from the government.

The centres for adult education are financed for EVC of professional qualifications in case there is an assessment, but not when an applicant stops the EVC programme after the information or documentation phase. Validation bodies can (from different sectors) also make use of project funds for the development of EVC instruments. Thus, stakeholders in the educational sector feel that on the one hand validation is promoted but that on the other hand it is not, or not adequately, financially supported, which affects its promotion at institutional level. Moreover, there is the concern that the reimbursement for validation bodies does not cover the actual costs (VLOR, 2019), which might demotivate actors from the work sector to become a validation body (SERV, 2019).

In the work sector, the certificates for work experience are now funded by VDAB instead of Europa WSE (ESF), which has changed with regard to the report of 2018. The accredited assessment centres receive on average a reimbursement of EUR 1000 to assess the competences of the applicant. Practical, sectoral tests are still financed by the sectoral training funds. The new experiment of 'leerjobs' is funded by Europa WSE.

In the third sector no specific funding schemes for validation arrangements are available.

There is a specific funding issued by the Flemish agency of care to promote and support the qualification of unqualified employers of childcare places. It funds pools

⁴⁰ [BKT-aanvraag-EVC-20200605.docx \(live.com\)](https://www.live.com/BKT-aanvraag-EVC-20200605.docx)

of mentors who guide the applicants through either education or validation arrangements to acquire their qualification, which will be mandatory by law by 2024⁴¹.

9.1.2 Costs

Most providers of validation procedures do not charge for giving general information or discussing with the applicant if a validation procedure is what the applicant needs. Only when the applicant decides to go through with the procedure, a fee is asked.

In the educational sector

Applicants who wish to register for a validation arrangement of the exam committee pay a fee of EUR 38 per grade per programme. This cost is indexed.

For higher education the associations are responsible for recognition and assessment. The maximum fees that can be charged to individuals are stated by law⁴². The cost for the assessment varies. The associations calculate and charge different prices for a validation procedure, taking into account the size of the assessment. Most associations charge EUR 335 for recognition of all competences for a graduate's programme, EUR 590 for a bachelor's programme and EUR 770 for a master's programme with underlying bachelor's degree. For a master's programme with a relevant bachelor's degree the fees vary between EUR 230 and EUR 350. It is also possible to follow an arrangement for the recognition of separate competences or clusters of competences. In that case there is a minimum fee ranging between EUR 50 and EUR 155, with either a fixed price per study point, ranges of study points, or per assessment method.

In the adult education sector, no fee is required for validation through exemptions. The adult education centres use their own resources.

EVC for professional qualifications

The decree on validation stipulates that the applicants have to pay a cost which is indexed yearly. At the moment the cost is EUR 141 per EVC programme. The cost is reduced for partial qualifications. The cost is the same whether the applicant follows the EVC programme at a centre of adult education or another validation body. In case the applicant is a job seeker, the VDAB (previously ESF) will pay the cost to the validation body for dedicated EVC programmes. In reality it happens that employers or temporary employment agencies pay the cost for the applicant. There are also reductions for specific target groups such as the unemployed, migrants or refugees.

In the work sector

Assessment centres for Work experience certificates provide the validation services to individuals for free. Only for the practical test might a small charge be made by the centre, never more than EUR 100, but only when the applicant is not a jobseeker.

In the sports sector

Just as in the report of 2018, the VTS does not have a specific budget set aside for costs related to providing validation since these costs can be quite variable and based on demand. The administration costs relating to a validation procedure at the VTS are EUR 180. If it is decided that the applicant can start an assessment, then the following costs apply:

- Initiator: EUR 250
- Instructor: EUR 400

⁴¹ [Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de toekenning van een subsidie aan pools gezinsopvang \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

⁴²Art. II.219 Codex Hoger Onderwijs

- Trainer C: to be defined
- Trainer B: EUR 650
- Trainer A: EUR 1 000⁴³

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

In general, the uptake of validation arrangements in Flanders is still low and only slightly rising. This might be due to the fact that awareness-raising activities are still limited and that validation arrangements are not necessarily easier than following education or training for a qualification. It also needs to be noted that for the different arrangements many candidates start the arrangements, but do not go through the assessment.

Between 2006 and the end of 2022 14 948 assessments were undertaken and 7 738 work experience certificates were granted. Since 2019 the work experience certificates were gradually transformed into EVC for professional qualifications. The take-up of the new validation arrangements is still low (in the order of 200-300 applicants), because of several reasons. For instance, the first EVC standards were only developed in 2020, the number of EVC standards and their EVC programmes, is still rather limited, and the outreach measures and awareness-raising activities are also under development. At the moment the arrangements most undertaken by applicants are for forklift driver and childcare assistant. Whether or not a profession has a (legal) obligation to a qualification has an influence on the uptake of the arrangement (Kimps et al., 2022).

In the sports sector around 10 people a year undergo the validation arrangement, but this number has been slightly decreasing since 2018, because the admission of the trainings has been flexibilised.

At the associations of higher education, the numbers are, like most other validation arrangements, rather low. For the academic year 2021-2022 the uptake is around 200 for the 5 associations together, which is comparable to the numbers reported in 2018.

For the exam committee, the trend of the last 5 years is a rather stable participation rate of on average 7000 participants per year (who participate in at least one exam per year). Candidates decide on the timing of the trajectory. There is no deadline, which means that there is a great deal of variation in the duration of the trajectory. However, the average is two years. Candidates may take the same exam three times a year. In case they fail, they may retry the next year. According to the Education Inspectorate (2022), the success rate varies between 49% and 79% depending on the grade and the type of education (i.e. general, technical, art and vocational secondary education).

9.2.2 Validation users

In general, validation bodies do not collect data about the age, gender, citizenship status or target group of candidates. It is not demanded by the coordinating departments or agencies, thus the policy with regard to collecting and monitoring this data is left to individual organisations and institutions. In case the validation bodies depend on the funding for specific groups, e.g. jobseekers, they will collect this data and communicate it to the relevant departments or agencies.

⁴³ The EVC-EVK procedure guide: https://www.sport.vlaanderen/media/17776/210622_evc-evkgids.pdf

The number of applicants per arrangement or organisation is often too small to either collect or analyse the distribution according to different users. The exam committee is one of the examples which does collect data on its users, and which has a larger dataset. Their dataset shows an equal distribution of gender across the participation rates between 2017 and 2021. Most candidates are between 17 and 24 years old, and the share of 55+ is rather small. According to a survey of 2021, participants of the exam committee have different reasons to follow this validation arrangement. A large share is because they did not obtain their diploma of secondary education, but there is an increasing number of participants who has chosen home schooling for ideological, physical or psychological reasons. Another new trend to choose this arrangement is because of flexible trajectories at school (for different reasons)⁴⁴.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

There are no generalised procedures for the validation of disadvantage groups, other than the reductions on the fee for certain groups of applicants, such as migrants, refugees, or jobseekers. Consequently, there is no or little data available on disadvantaged groups for validation.

There are, however, initiatives in some of the higher education associations to either adapt the validation procedures or provide extra support for, for instance, foreign students or migrants. The guidance practitioners for EVC for professional qualifications also try to provide extra support when needed, but the Decree on common quality framework states that the validation should be done in Dutch, which makes the arrangements difficult for these groups.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

The methods used and the validation process in the different sectors providing validation is broadly the same as described in the 2018 report. Overall, a validation procedure may consist of four phases:

1. identifying an individual's competences;
2. documenting these competences;
3. assessing an individual's competences on the basis of evidence;
4. awarding a certification on the basis of the assessment.

On the whole, most validation arrangements in Flanders focus on assessing an individual's competences, which is often by comparing it to a type of standard. Awarding a certification is often the case, but not for all arrangements. The phases of identifying and documenting competences are not always as clear cut, as documentation may also lead to identification. Moreover, the assessment phase may incorporate the identification and documentation phase in the form of a portfolio, for instance.

The table below provides an overview of the most common methods used by assessment centres at the different stages of the validation process. Darker shades of blue are used to highlight which methods seem to be the most used for the different stages of validation.

⁴⁴ Onderwijsinspectie (2022), see [Verslag van de evaluatie van de examencommissie secundair onderwijs, November-december 2022 | Vlaanderen.be](#)

Table 10.1 Most commonly used methods by the validation bodies per phase

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Declarative methods			
Interview			
Observation			
Portfolio method			
Simulation and evidence extracted from work			
Tests and examinations			

Exam committee

The exam committee focuses on the assessment and certification phases. It uses different types of exams to assess the competences of the candidates, namely written, digital exams, oral exams (for languages for instance), or practical exams.

Higher education

As reported in the EU inventory report, in the higher education sector, several methods can be used (alone or combined) (Codex Higher Education Art. II. 234; OECD, 2008):

- A structured interview in which the knowledge of the applicant is assessed;
- Direct observation of behaviour or products/realisations;
- Evaluation based on documentation (collected information and achievements);
- Evaluation based on the interpretation of facts or statements referring to theoretical schemes;
- Portfolios.

The five associations have set up a recognition service and defined their procedures (these are developed at the level of the institution for their own programmes). They are not restricted to establish their own arrangements (centralised or decentralised organisation, application receivable all year round or at fixed periods, etc.). They have to respect two restrictions introduced into the Codex Higher Education: to define a regulation, offering methodological and procedural guarantees to the candidate and to respect minimum rules concerning standards, methodology, procedures and quality assurance. All associations propose a four or five phase procedure (see Section 7.2).

The methods of identification of learning outcomes are common and are used according to various configurations: structured interview, observation in situations, collection of information and evidence, interpretation of data, portfolio. The decision essentially is based on the following assessment criteria:

- authenticity (is the evidence a proof of the applicant's performance?);
- topicality (does the evidence reflect the applicant's current competence level?);
- relevance (is the evidence sufficiently matched with training courses?);
- quantity (does the evidence refer to a sufficiently long period of experience?);
- and variety of contexts (does the evidence refer to more than one context?).

Exemptions in adult education

The assessment of competences for the granting of exemptions are the exclusive competence of the centres for adult education. Different validation procedures and techniques can be used in different centres. Though, some centres offering the same programmes have cooperated towards more standardisation in validation procedures and techniques.

EVC for professional qualifications

Since the decree on validation in 2019 validation bodies from the educational and work sector implement the same procedures for identical programmes. These were partly inspired by the methods used for the work experience certificate. The methods are prescribed in the EVC standards and these are concretised in the EVC instruments. Test centres may deviate from the standards in the EVC instruments if motivated properly. The test centres follow the four phases (see also Section 7.2) but with a focus on assessment and certification.

Assessments generally target observations in an authentic work context, but they can be simulated if needed. The observations are complemented with practice-oriented declarative methods and tests. The tests can be written multiple choice tests, tests based on actual cases, or interviews.

Sports sector

As reported in the report of 2018, the validation procedure provided by the VTS (started in 2009) still consists of seven phases which are the following:

Preparation: during this phase the applicant is expected to check whether s/he fulfils admission requirements and whether his or her competences correspond to those in the 'catalogue programme grids VTS'.

1. Application.
2. Registration and start of the validation procedure.
3. Composition of the portfolio.
4. Receptivity tests: after receipt of the portfolio the pedagogical division of the VTS checks on the basis of a guide whether the applicant is eligible to continue the rest of the procedure. If the application is deemed eligible, s/he is invited to undertake a competence interview and a control test.
5. Competence assessment on the basis of the above results.
6. Feedback on the decision with the applicant.

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

In Flanders the LED database is used to register and keep track of the qualifications of individuals. It includes validation outcomes whenever the outcome is a qualification, independent of which sector it is from. However, the qualifications of the third sector are not included. Individuals may consult the LED for their own qualifications. Employers may use LED to know whether a qualification is trustworthy, and the government can use the aggregated data to support its policy.

Across the different validation bodies ICT-based initiatives are used to support validation during the four phases. Guidance practitioners and assessors can use digitalised instruments, such as surveys, portfolio's, e-learning paths, online tests etc. And several test centres use platforms or databases to streamline administration and to inform the candidates about the processes. For instance, the exam committee uses a digital platform where candidates can register and obtain their qualifications. It is also a means to inform and support the candidates. One of the associations of higher education is also working on a similar digital platform. For EVC for professional qualifications there is a database with all the EVC instruments for the test centres.

However, the use of these digital instruments depends on the digital literacy of the candidates, and in some cases the practitioners. In general, validation practitioners handle these digital instruments flexibly, and will turn to non-digital instruments (e.g. face-to-face interviews and paper) where possible (Kimps et al., 2022). In some cases, the validation body may decide not to implement ICT instruments in case the costs of it are too high in relation to the number of applicants.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

The main body in Flanders overseeing quality assurance for validation pathways leading to professional qualifications (as included in the NQF) is AHOVOKS. It coordinates the development of EVC standards and tests the quality of EVC instruments, two important means to assure quality in EVC for professional qualifications. Moreover, the agency has made available a self-assessment instrument to help organisations of all kinds to assess the quality of their validation procedures⁴⁵ and a set of templates to support organisations in the implementation of validation.

Since the Decree of the common quality framework in 2019 the quality assurance agency has taken great steps towards integration between the sectors of education and work. The quality control of the validation programmes depends on the validation body linked to the Common Quality Framework. If a validation body is a centre for adult education, the external quality control will be carried out by the Education Inspectorate. Public or private organisations, with recognised trajectories by the Department of Work and Social economy, will be audited by the Flemish Social Inspection (AHOVOKS, forthcoming). Each inspection body uses its own quality framework. To improve the integration and stimulate equality the Flemish Social Inspection works together with Education Inspectorate for trajectories in the labour market sector⁴⁶. This was mandatory according to the decree for the first three years, but they have decided to continue the collaboration. The scope of the decree is all the vocational training programmes and validation programmes in the different sectors which are based on a professional qualification. However, this is not the case for all types of validation arrangements, nor is it adopted in the third sector.

Since Work experience certificates are for programmes which do not have professional qualification, the quality assurance is not handled by the Flemish Social Inspection, but by VDAB. Since 2018 it is responsible for the accreditation and quality control of these assessment centres. To guarantee fair treatment of individuals and transparent assessment, the assessment centres recognised for the work experience certificate must comply with nationally determined assessment standards and assessment directives.

As in 2018, the quality assurance framework for higher education does not fall under AHOVOKS or the above decree. As a consequence, the associations in the higher education sector have different procedures and methodologies in place. Institutional practice in recognition of prior learning is not explicitly included in the quality assurance processes used to evaluate institutions and/or programmes in higher education⁴⁷. Each association for higher education is responsible for quality assurance of validation procedures with respect to the following criteria: transparency, reliability and legality of the procedures and methodology adopted.

The quality control of centres of adult education in the case of validation through exemptions and EVC for professional qualifications is executed by the Education Inspectorate according to the decree of quality in education of 2009⁴⁸ and confirmed in the decree of common quality framework.

⁴⁵ [Hoe zien de procedure en de inhoud van EVC-instrumenten eruit? | Vlaanderen.be](#)

⁴⁶ [Toezicht ter plaatse | Vlaanderen.be](#)

⁴⁷ Flemish Report on Implementation of the Bologna process 2012.

⁴⁸ [wet: Decreet betreffende de kwaliteit van onderwijs \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

The Exam Committee is also subject to a quality control by the Education Inspectorate as stipulated in a decree for secondary education of 2010⁴⁹.

There is no external quality assurance of the validation arrangement undertaken by the VTS. Quality assurance is ensured by the broad range of partners included within the partnership and the composition of the validation commission within the VTS. Responsibility for the quality assurance of certificates in the sports sector lies with Sport Vlaanderen. This is considered as a given for the sports staff training courses organised by the VTS. In order to guarantee the quality of a certificate, some competences need to be acquired through a designated training provider. For instance, obligatory refresher courses or specific training programmes (such as lifeguard training) have to be followed at training centres related to the VTS, at the Netwerk Lokaal Sportbeleid or at the Vlaamse Reddingsfederatie.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

There is no centralised policy with regard to collecting or monitoring data on validation. This is left to the individual organisations and institutions. This is, for instance, also the case for the new validation arrangement of EVC for professional qualifications. The data from centres of adult education is kept in the Davinci database of AHOVOKS and the data for the validation bodies of the work sector are recovered through other separate databases. If data is collected, it is mostly the number of participants who sign up for a validation arrangement, how many received a qualification or exemption, for which programme, and by which validation body. Data on different users or their characteristics is seldomly collected, except for instance by the VDAB or the exam committee. There is also no centralised policy on the evaluation of validation either. There is, however, a database where the awarded qualifications, except the ones from the third sector, are collected, namely the LED database⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ [wet: Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de codificatie betreffende het secundair onderwijs \(vlaanderen.be\)](#)

⁵⁰ [Welke kwalificatiebewijzen zitten in LED? | Wat is LED? | Leer- en ervaringsbewijzendatabank \(leerenervaringsbewijzendatabank.be\)](#)

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

To this date, there are still no recent studies supporting the benefits to individuals, providers or employers with data, nor how the outcomes of validation are trusted by stakeholders. However, in case the validation arrangements lead to qualifications which are already trusted by stakeholders, there seem to be no indications of distrust. The procedures to obtain an exemption in higher education or the sport sector are also trusted by the stakeholders within those sectors. The visibility of validation and its benefits in society is on the whole rather low.

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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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