

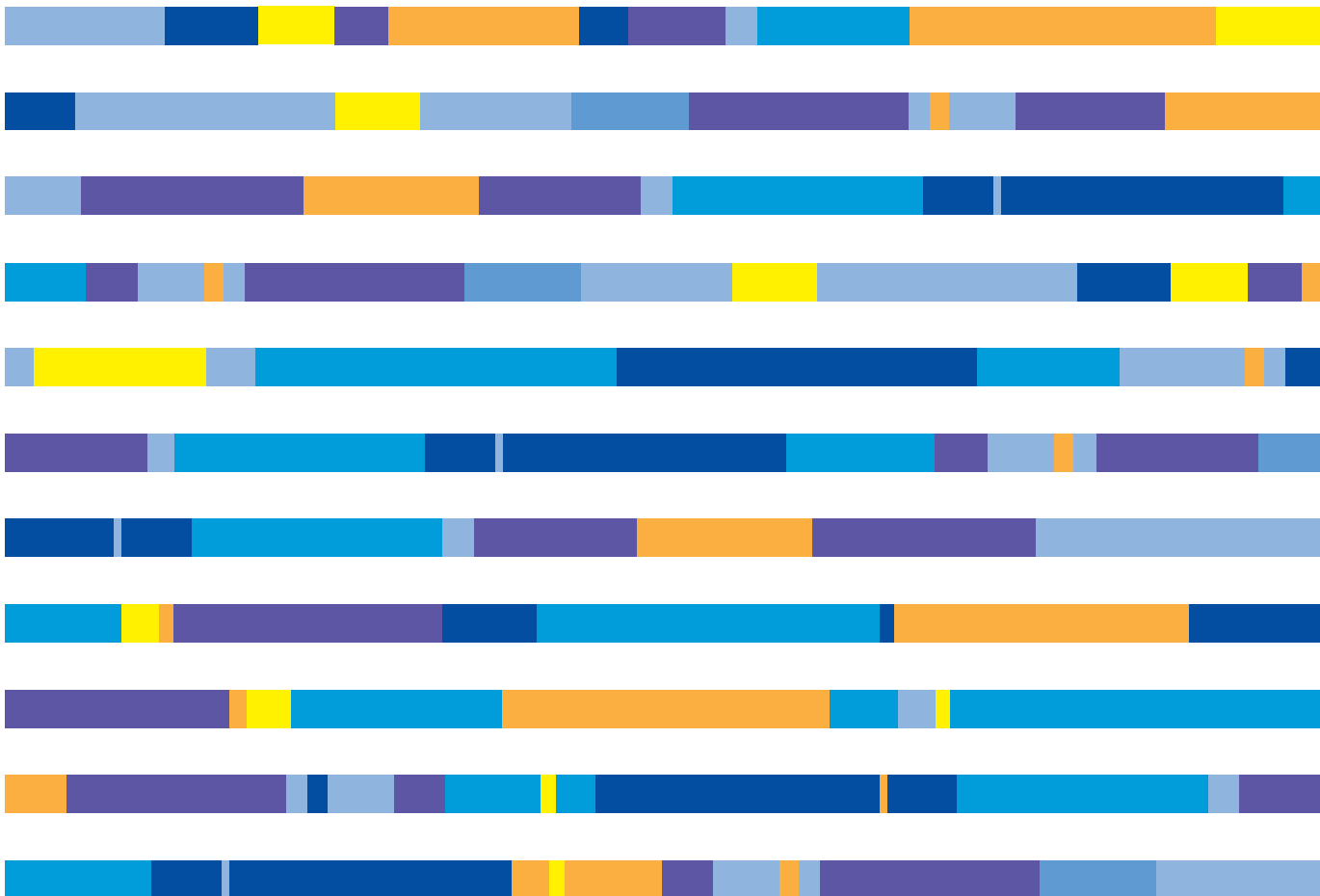


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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **SWITZERLAND**

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1 Abstract

In Switzerland, one can observe the progressive development of validation procedures and initiatives in all Swiss education and training sectors over the years. This observation, already made in the 2018 update of the Inventory, has been continued since.

The importance of promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning is embedded in national training policies and regulated by law in the VET sector. In contrast to the other sectors of education and training system, validation in initial vocational education and training (IVET) is regulated at national level. In this sector, validation procedures have been firmly integrated into the IVET qualification offer for adults.

Information on possibilities for validation is generally available on the respective providers' website and for IVET on the cantonal gateway information portals. Several awareness-raising activities have been placed in recent years in order to reach out to potential target groups.

Yet, validation practices are spread across the Swiss education and training system quite unevenly, and for some areas, data is incomplete or simply unavailable. This makes it difficult to identify clear trends in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning, and it is not possible to assess, on a national level, how the uptake of validation has developed in recent years. Quantitative data on take-up is only available for the IVET validation procedure and suggests that the numbers of users have remained more or less stable during previous years.

In the third sector or in labour policies, there is little evidence of validation procedures being implemented.

2 Introduction

In Switzerland, the topic of validation has been increasingly incorporated in educational policies over the past years. Various documents and policy initiatives refer to the importance of recognising prior learning, regardless of how and where the learning outcomes have been achieved.

The Vision 2030 of Vocational Training is a strategy for the long-term development of VET, which was adopted in 2018. A number of projects carried out within this initiative either directly or indirectly deal with aspects related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which has also led to the publication of a number of different study reports and publications that are of interest in the context of validation.

The implementation of the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training from 2017 onwards has been an important policy development, in particular as it creates the basis for a coherent continuing education policy and better coordination between the federal level and the cantons – although its impact on validation so far has been negligible.

At the same time, the Swiss education system is characterised by a heterogeneous structure and regulation. With the exception of vocational education and training, there is little coordination of the education system as a whole on the part of the Swiss Confederation because the main responsibility lies with the cantons, i.e. at regional level. Cantons have significant freedom in implementing national policy guidelines.

The number of validation options in Switzerland has been developing in every education and training sector. This observation, already made in the 2018 update of the Inventory, has been continued since. Especially for qualifications offered at universities of teacher education, an increased offer of possibilities for the validation

of non-formal and informal learning can be observed in recent years, although there is no quantitative data on take-up available in this field.

Validation procedures are most prominent in the IVET sector. National validation guidelines for the VET sector were first established in 2010 and revised in 2018. To date, 15 different IVET qualifications can be obtained through a nationally defined validation procedure in a number of Swiss cantons.

In the Swiss context, validation procedures refer to a specific qualification procedure that leads to the award of a vocational qualification (*‘Qualifikationsverfahren mit Validierung von Bildungsleistungen’*). Besides this procedure, the general possibility for recognition of educational achievements (i.e. from formal, non-formal or informal contexts) has been anchored in the Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act and Ordinance since 2002 for all approximately 240 VET programmes. This means that prior learning can be credited in any VET programme on an individual basis (*‘Anrechnung von Bildungsleistungen’*).

Validation procedures in IVET are addressed to adults who wish to catch up on upper-secondary level vocational qualifications, i.e., to obtain a Federal VET certificate or a Federal VET diploma. Many adult candidates for an IVET qualification, however, rather opt for another pathway such as the direct admission to the final exam or the shortened IVET pathway (which usually includes elements of validation of learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts as well).

Information on possibilities for validation is generally available on the respective providers’ website and for IVET on the cantonal gateway information portals. Also, in the field of IVET, the use of ICT tools in validation has increased noticeably over the past few years. Several activities to improve awareness-raising of validation initiatives have been set in recent years, especially to promote validation in the VET sector.

Despite these developments, it remains difficult to identify clear trends in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Switzerland. Validation practices are spread across the Swiss education and training system quite unevenly, and for some areas, data is incomplete or simply unavailable. Systematic data on take-up is only available for the IVET validation procedure, suggesting that the take-up of validation has remained relatively stable (or slightly decreased) throughout the past few years. For the other sectors, however, no comparable data is publicly available that would allow to assess whether the expansion of the validation offer in recent years has led to an increased take-up.

Although specific activities have been set in previous years to raise awareness of validation initiatives, in particular in the field of IVET, reported challenges remain with regard to the position of validation in society. The possibility of having learning from non-formal and informal contexts validated is still relatively unknown to the general public. Furthermore, some mistrust or suspicion vis-à-vis validation remains, both among educational institutions and employers. A qualification acquired through validation is sometimes still considered as a qualification obtained ‘at a discount’. At national policy level, validation is still not considered as a systematic measure to fight unemployment, nor to support disadvantaged groups.

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

The Swiss education and training system is very complex from an organisational and decision-making point of view. This also applies to validation practices. Furthermore, a number of key national factors should be taken into account when considering the

Swiss perspective on validation: the federalism, the quadrilingualism and the composite articulation of the Swiss Education Area.

The Swiss Confederation and cantons have different roles for different education levels. However, they are constitutionally required to collaborate closely at every level. In particular, the cantons are primarily responsible for compulsory education (pre-school, primary and lower-secondary school). The post-compulsory education or upper-secondary level is divided into general education schools (baccalaureate schools and specialised schools) and vocational/professional education and training (VET). Swiss tertiary-level education is divided into two sectors:

- The tertiary A sector is comprised of cantonal universities, Switzerland's two federal institutes of technology (ETHZ and EPFL), universities of applied sciences (UAS), universities of teacher education (UTE) and various specialised institutions.
- The tertiary B sector (higher vocational sector) is comprised of PE (professional education) where various kinds of diplomas are included – in particular, the Federal Diploma of Higher Education and the Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education.

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is the Swiss federal government's specialised agency for national and international matters concerning education, research and innovation policy. Based on this framework, the Confederation and the cantons share the responsibility for the education system, the research system and the innovation system.

The cantons are also responsible for general education, and coordinate their work at the national level through a political body: the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK/CDIP). The Confederation acts in a full regulatory capacity within the VET/PE system, in collaboration with the cantons and the professional organisations. The cantons are responsible for implementation and professional organisations establish training content and create apprenticeship positions for VET programmes.

The universities are coordinated by the rectors' conference of Swiss universities, in which there is one chamber for universities, one for universities of applied sciences and one for universities of teacher education. Those chambers constitute themselves and carry out university-specific duties.

The Confederation and the cantons work together to enact legislation, fund, manage and supervise tertiary-level education. They are jointly responsible for the coordination and guarantee of quality in higher education. In fulfilling this responsibility, both the Confederation and the cantons take into account the autonomy of the higher education institutions.

Essentially, validation procedures are integrated within each education and training sector, whereas very little can be reported on for the third sector and labour policies.¹

National legal framework for validation in the Swiss education system

Initial vocational education and training (IVET) is the only sector of the Swiss education and training system for which validation is regulated at national level. For the other sectors of the education and training system, validation procedures are available as well, however, they are not regulated at national level; the responsibility for regulation for these sectors lies with the cantons rather than with the federal government (Salzmann et al., 2023).

¹ The section above is largely based on the 2018 update of the Inventory, slightly abridged and with minor edits and adaptations.

The national legal framework for validation is made up of a set of different laws, ordinances and policies.

Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA)

The most important articles refer to the following:

- (a) Art 9 (2) stipulates that learning achievements from outside traditional education pathways should be appropriately recognised.
- (b) Art. 17.5 defines that competencies acquired through non-formal or informal education and training may be validated through specific qualification procedures leading to the issuance of a Federal VET diploma.
- (c) Art. 33 states that professional competences may be demonstrated on the basis of a general examination, a series of partial examinations or other qualification procedures recognised by SERI.
- (d) Art. 34 (2) stipulates that access to qualification procedures shall not be dependent on attending specific courses of study.
- (e) Art. 35 states that the Confederation may provide funding to associations that develop or offer other qualification procedures.

These arrangements seek to give people with practical experience the chance to validate their prior learning and obtain a federally recognised qualification.

Federal Vocational and Professional Education and Training Ordinance (VPETO)

The Federal Ordinance of 19 November 2003 on Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPETO, SR 412.101) came into force on 1 January 2004. This legislative text provides more information about what is meant by 'other qualification procedures' mentioned in VPETA (for more detailed information, refer to the 2018 update of the Inventory). It also includes further specifications on the recognition of learning achievements (Article 4 and Article 18(2)).

Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training (WeBiG/LFCo)

The Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training was approved in 2014 and implemented in 2017. At its core is a set of five principles, one of which refers to the validation of learning achievements in formal education and training (art. 7). In addition, the Act regulates measures to encourage the acquisition and maintenance of basic skills for adults (art. 13). The law integrates continuing education into the Swiss education system and thus creates the basis for a coherent continuing education policy and better coordination between the federal level and the cantons (Sgier et al., 2022).

While the Act is overall considered to have led to positive achievements in the first five years since its introduction, little has been achieved with regard to validation so far (Sgier et al., 2022). In essence, the law can be considered as a framework law that regulates the status quo; it has not introduced any changes to how validation of non-formal and informal learning is implemented.

The Ordinance on Continuing Education (Verordnung über die Weiterbildung) of 24 February 2016 regulates the provisions for financial aid in continuing education and for the acquisition of basic skills for adults.

'Vocational qualification for adults' (Berufsabschluss für Erwachsene) initiative

The aim of this project was to improve the conditions for adults to obtain a vocational qualification and to increase the completion rate of adults without a vocational qualification. The validation procedure in IVET is one of the pathways promoted as part of the initiative. The project ran between 2013 and 2017, with the final works on the project finalised. (SBFI, n.d.f) The initiative has meanwhile been placed in the

hands of the cantons. Follow-up projects are currently being implemented as part of the 'Vision 2030 of Vocational Training' strategic process (see below).

Messages of the Federal Council for the Promotion of education, research and innovation for 2021-2024 and for 2025-2028

Every four years, the Federal Council issues policy guidelines and objectives for the promotion of education, research and innovation. The message for the period 2021 to 2024 refers to the validation of non-formal and informal learning as one action line towards achieving the goal of 'Education is aimed at promoting the ability to learn, work and study' in the sense of a policy for lifelong learning. (SBFI, 2021a).

The message for the period 2025 to 2028 is currently being elaborated; information on future priorities is not yet available at this stage. (SBFI, 2023a).

Measures to promote domestic workforce potential

In May 2019, the Federal Council decided on a series of measures to promote the domestic workforce. This includes funding for the implementation of *viamia* (<https://viamia.ch/>), initiative that allows all adults from the age of 40 to participate in an assessment of potential and career counselling free of charge, for the period 2019 to 2024 (see also section 3.1). Another measure refers to additional funding for the 'vocational qualification for adults' initiative (which includes the IVET validation procedure).² (Federal Council, 2019)

Vision 2030 of Vocational Training

The Federal Council (i.e. Swiss government), cantons and professional organisations³ jointly developed the Vision 2030 of Vocational Training (SBFI, n.d.a) a strategy for the long-term development of VET, which was adopted in 2018. It builds a reference framework for the development of the Swiss vocational training system in the years to come and is complemented by a programme containing ten strategic guidelines: four of them are related to lifelong learning, permeability and flexibility of the training system, the possibility to recognise learning from formal, non-formal or informal contexts and to valorise non-linear training pathways.

Since the start of the initiative in 2018, approximately 30 related projects were launched by the Federal Council, cantons and professional organisations, of which several have already been finalised (SBFI, n.d.b). Projects with specific relevance for validation of non-formal and informal learning include a project on validation in IVET (SBFI, n.d.c) (coordinated by the Swiss Conference of VET Agencies SBBK) and another project on validation in higher VET (SBFI, n.d.d) (coordinated by SERI). as well as the publication guidelines on the recognition of prior learning in VET

New guidelines for validation in IVET since 2018

The previous guidelines for validation in IVET were replaced with new guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in IVET. This new document puts the focus more broadly on recognition of prior learning in all pathways that lead to an IVET qualification (rather than solely on the validation procedure) (SBFI, n.d.e).⁴

No national skills strategy

² The initiative aimed at responding to the shortage of qualified staff (see 2018 update of the Inventory), which had been implemented by the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research between 2011 and 2018, was concluded and transferred into ordinary policy from 2019 onwards (SECO, 2018).

³ The expression 'professional organisations' ('Organisationen der Arbeitswelt (OdA)' in German or Organisations du monde du travail in French) is an umbrella term used to refer to social partners, trade associations as well as other competent organisations and providers of vocational and professional education and training. Their members are either companies (legal entities) or individuals (natural persons). See Glossary of VPET, <https://www.berufsbildung.ch/dyn/20850.aspx?lang=EN&action=detail&value=510&lex=0>

⁴ See also Salzmann et al., 2023.

Switzerland does not have a National Skills Strategy in place, and there are no plans to develop one in the foreseeable future. While the underlying topic itself, i.e. having strategies in place for quality and inclusive lifelong learning, is indeed considered politically relevant, the elaboration of a separate National Skills Strategy document is currently not being considered.

Individual learning accounts

Switzerland does not make use of individual learning accounts.

Skills audits

In line with what was reported in the 2018 Inventory, skills audits are commonly used in Switzerland to help jobseekers re-entering the labour market. Skills audits or assessment portfolios (*bilans de compétences*) are an essential part of active labour market policies. Cantonal services for labour market policies use them in order to clarify the perspective of jobseekers, shorten the period of unemployment and reduce the risk of misemployment. The *bilans de compétences* are carried out by the 'centres de bilan' or by the 'competences assessment centres', recognised by the Government⁵. The processes of 'bilan' proposed are often inspired by the French model of 'bilan de compétences', comprising self-evaluation. In addition to these processes, a more general inventory is possible in order to focus the support measures.

The results of *bilans* are often included in a report, which is given to the counsellors working in regional employment centres. The latter thus receive a general overview of skills and perspectives of the person they are following. The counsellors can also identify obstacles to employment or risks of long-term unemployment. Generally, a *bilan* is followed or accompanied by a course on job search techniques. *Bilans* can include also evaluations, evaluation interviews with a counsellor, self-evaluations and evaluations by third parties, as well as psychological tests and performance tests.

Skill audits are particularly relevant for low-skilled individuals, to foster self-confidence and stimulate them in having their skills recognised through validation and for experienced, older jobseekers that need to make the skills they have acquired over time visible, and identify new possible professional sectors. Skill audits can be related to specific professions and organised by professional organisations.

The methods used for the skills audits aim at taking stock of skills and know-how acquired in a formal or informal context, and they are often accompanied by the drawing up of a competences portfolio. In Switzerland, the following model concepts are particularly used: 'competences bilan-portfolio' of the Association for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (ARRA, <https://www.arra.ch/>) and the CH-Q model (<https://ch-q.ch/>)⁷.

In May 2019, the Federal Council agreed on the implementation of *viamia* (<https://viamia.ch/>), an initiative that allows all adults from the age of 40 to participate in an assessment of potential and career counselling free of charge, for the period 2019 to 2024. It is intended as an important initiative to promote the domestic workforce potential. *viamia* was implemented as a pilot project in selected cantons in 2021, and has been rolled out across Switzerland since January 2022. (ECOPLAN, 2022; SERI, 2020)

⁵ Such as, for example, the Geneva Bilan Centre (CEBIG) in the canton of Geneva, <https://cebig.ch/>; effe (Fachstelle für Erwachsenenbildung) in Biel/Bienne, <https://effe.ch/>.

⁶ CH-Q has been repositioned since the 2018 update of the Inventory and is no longer incorporated within VALIDA Suisse, which has meanwhile been dissolved. Since 2023, CH-Q has been incorporated within the SAG Foundation. <https://ch-q.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Text-History-CH-Q.pdf>

⁷ CH-Q has been repositioned since the 2018 update of the Inventory and is no longer incorporated within VALIDA Suisse, which has meanwhile been dissolved. Since 2023, CH-Q has been incorporated within the SAG Foundation. <https://ch-q.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Text-History-CH-Q.pdf>

The high number of skills audits offers proposed in Switzerland confirms the positive consideration for this kind of personal and professional assessment across the country. They are already a part of the classic procedure for career guidance. The targets for these are:

- (a) Women, where recognition of the skills gained from voluntary work and housework can facilitate their reintegration into the labour market;
- (b) Migrants, where recognition of qualifications, skills and experience gained abroad can facilitate their (re)integration into the labour market (see also information provided in section 9.2.3);
- (c) Qualified or unqualified job seekers for the same reasons;
- (d) Persons undertaking retraining;
- (e) Persons who lack qualifications but would like, nevertheless, to enrol in an education and training programme;
- (f) Groups of people with the same professional background (sometimes supported by enterprises);
- (g) Anyone wishing to assess their (formal or informal) learning or career development.

Data collection

Systematic data collection at national level only takes place on the number of individuals who undergo the validation procedure towards an IVET qualification (see 8.2.2 on validation users). There is no data collection on other forms of validation of non-formal and informal learning in IVET that lead e.g. to a shortened VET programme, exemption or provide access to education and training. (SBFI, n.d.f)

3.2 Validation in education and training

The validation of prior learning is anchored, in general terms, in Art. 9(2) of the VET Act which states that learning experiences acquired outside formal training, either in professional or non-professional contexts, shall be recognised accordingly. This being said, initial vocational education and training (IVET) is the only sector of the Swiss education and training system for which validation is regulated at national level. For the other sectors of the education and training system, validation procedures are available as well, however, they are not regulated at national level; the responsibility for regulation for these sectors lies with the cantons rather than with the federal government (Salzmann et al., 2023).

Validation in IVET

The regulatory framework for VET states that prior learning from various contexts shall be recognised towards the acquisition of a VET qualification. The possibility for recognition of educational achievements has been anchored in the Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act and Ordinance since 2002 for all approximately 240 VET programmes. This means that educational achievements can be credited in any VET programme ('Anrechnung von Bildungsleistungen'). Although RPL is provided for by law, its implementation is still somewhat patchy across cantons.

As a result of these provisions, there are several ways in which prior learning can be recognised. This includes, for example, the option of exemptions from parts of education and training, or even a shortened VET pathway, for which the overall duration of the training programme is shortened. Another option consists in the direct access to the final examination: adults with at least five years of professional experience may directly apply for admission to the final apprenticeship examination, without attending an organised VET programme. Candidates either prepare

themselves independently for the final exam or may attend preparatory courses. This pathway is available for all apprenticeship qualifications.

Validation procedures, in turn, refer to a specific qualification procedure that leads to the award of a vocational qualification ('Qualifikationsverfahren mit Validierung von Bildungsleistungen'). Validation procedures in IVET are addressed to adults who wish to catch up on upper-secondary level vocational qualifications, i.e. to obtain a Federal VET certificate ('Eidgenössisches Berufsattest, EBA') or a Federal VET diploma ('Eidgenössisches Fähigkeitszeugnis, FZ'). Besides the regular full-time dual pathway (i.e. without any validation), there are different pathways available to adults. Only the first one is specifically referred to as a validation procedure (covering all four stages of the validation process, as presented in the 2012 Council Recommendation of validation), whereas the others (e.g. shortened basic VET and qualification procedure without VET) may include elements of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

IVET validation procedures (in the narrower sense) are only available for a list of specific IVET occupations, for which such a procedure has been formulated. As of 2023, there were validation procedures for a total of 15 IVET qualifications offered, across German, French and Italian-speaking cantons (Salzmann et al. 2023). For examples, validation procedures are offered for approximately 6 percent of all 245 currently available IVET qualifications.⁸

There are two key documents that describe the national guidelines for validation in the IVET sector:

- (a) Handbook Initial VET for adults (SERI, 2017);
- (b) Validation of educational achievements in initial VET (SERI, 2018a).

The guidelines specify that besides qualification procedures that are based on certification through a final exam, it is also possible to develop 'other' qualification procedures (according to Art. 33 of the VET Act) recognised by SERI. The IVET qualification procedure (see below) is one of these 'other' qualification procedures.

IVET validation procedure

The qualification procedure through validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the 'other' qualification procedures foreseen by Art. 33 of the VET Act. The candidate demonstrates that he/she possesses the required operational skills and meets the general knowledge requirements by means of a dossier in which he/she has documented the acquired experience. To access the validation procedure, usually five years' professional experience is required. Duration: most candidates will acquire their aspired IVET qualification within 1.5 and 3 years.

The validation procedure takes place in several phases:

- (a) Application and dossier:
After having been admitted to the qualification procedure with VNIL, the candidate submits to the competent department the application for validation together with a dossier in which they have documented the prior experience required. These achievements may have been obtained through practical professional or extra-professional experience or through specialised or general training.

⁸ The most recent data are available at <https://www.berufsberatung.ch/dyn/show/26870>. Researcher's note: The number of IVET qualifications for which validation procedures were reported (15) is significantly lower than that reported in the 2018 Inventory (22). This difference can be explained by a different approach to counting the procedures rather than due to a decreasing offer. The validation procedure is only possible for qualifications for which the responsible body has formulated a corresponding procedure and implementing provisions recognised by SERI. To date, these implementing provisions have been prepared for 22 occupations. However, due to insufficient demand, the validation procedure is currently only offered for 15 occupations.

(b) Assessment:

The experience acquired in the application is evaluated and then discussed with the candidate during an evaluation interview. In case of uncertainty as to the relevance of the dossier or the outcome of the interview, additional verification methods may be used on a case-by-case basis. The results of the evaluation are recorded in the evaluation report.

(c) Validation:

On the basis of the evaluation report, the cantonal examination committee takes the decision on the validation of learning outcomes. A learning outcomes certificate will be issued, which specifies which learning outcomes have been validated (and which not). If the validation procedure has been successful (i.e. all required competences have been evidenced and validated), the candidate is awarded with a Federal VET certificate or Federal VET diploma.

An unsuccessful candidate receives, in addition to the learning outcomes certificate, a recommendation on how to fill the gaps.

As pointed out above, this validation procedure is only available for qualifications (professions), for which the responsible body has formulated a regulation and implementing provisions recognised by SERI.

Validation in Professional Education (PE)

Tertiary level professional education comprises colleges of higher education and Federal Diploma of Higher Education examinations and Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education examinations. They primarily address professionals holding a Federal VET Diploma or equivalent qualification and wish to specialise or deepen their expertise at tertiary level.

For the field of professional education, in addition to the VET Act (Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act) and the Ordinance on VET, the EAER Ordinance on the minimum requirements for the recognition of study programmes and continuing education and training at professional education institutions (MiR-PEI) is of relevance⁹.

For the Federal Diploma and Advanced Federal Diploma examinations, validation of non-formal and informal learning (which leads to exemption of certain parts of the qualification procedure) is generally possible regulated in the corresponding examination regulations (SBFI, n.d.f).

At the level of colleges of higher education ('höhere Fachschulen', HF), validation of non-formal and informal learning is regulated in the framework curricula. In contrast to the IVET sector, there is no defined procedure that would provide a set process for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A concept for the admission 'sur dossier' is a requirement for the accreditation of a study programme. However, the individual training providers have significant leeway in deciding on the recognition of prior learning, whereby practices vary significantly across study programmes. The possibilities for the validation and non-formal learning have not been systematically recorded so far and thus remain not very transparent.

Findings from a recent study by Salzmann et al. (2022) reveal great heterogeneity in the extent to which colleges validate non-formal and informal learning. While some of the examined colleges validate non-formal and informal learning, 50% of those

⁹ Article 44 of the Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act of 2002, as for VET colleges, specifies: learners who obtain passing scores on the final examinations organised by a college of higher education or whose competences have been validated through an equivalent qualification procedure shall be awarded a PE college degree.

Article 13 of the Ordinance of EAER concerning the minimum requirements for recognition of the education cycles and of the studies post-diploma of the Upper specialised schools (OCM-ES, 2005), subparagraph 3, specifies that admission to the education cycles is possible (these training cycles usually require a diploma of secondary degree) on the basis of qualifications considered equivalent.

responsible for educational programmes stated that admission based on recognition of prior learning is not possible, while for 40% it is not possible for learners to have outcomes from non-formal and informal learning credited in the study programme. These findings apply to all language regions and occupational fields. At the same time, the majority of respondents believe that validation is a topic with great potential that will keep them occupied in the future.¹⁰

Some colleges have made specific arrangements to validate non-formal and informal learning, e.g. through shortened or modular training programmes. The following PE qualifications can be obtained through (partial or full) validation:

- (a) Qualifications for trainers in adult education: Federal Diploma and Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education for trainers in adult education, promoted by SVEB/FSEA, the Swiss national Umbrella Organisation for Adult Education¹¹. SVEB has a detailed procedure in place that allows for a partial or full validation of these qualifications. (SVEB, 2023a)
- (b) Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education for Community interpreters promoted by INTERPRET (the 2 first modules can also be completed through validation), the Swiss Association for Community Interpreting and Intercultural Mediation (<https://www.inter-pret.ch/>). The INTERPRET certification is currently being revised; new procedures are expected to be launched in 2024 (INTERPRET, 2023; INTERPRET, n.d.)
- (c) Federal Diploma of Higher Education in Management of SMEs promoted by the Swiss Association for the Training of Executives (BFG), which is in turn supported by the Swiss Trade Association sgv and the Swiss Association of Women in SMEs ('KMU Frauen'), amongst others. The qualification can also be obtained through a validation pathway, which in particular addresses women with significant professional experience from working in family-owned businesses. (BFG, n.d.; KMU Frauen Schweiz, 2022)

Validation in continuous education and training (CET)

In line with what was reported in the 2018 Inventory, in the area of continuing education at both secondary and tertiary level, validation practices are relatively absent. Nevertheless, interesting initiatives can be identified. While there is no specific reference framework in place, the procedures tend to be in line with the strategies put into action in other education and training areas. The validation possibilities in this sector are as follows:

- (a) Validation for the qualification of health auxiliary certificate by the Swiss Red Cross (SRC), constituting certification at the level below FCVET and. Originally proposed in the canton of Vaud, this procedure is intended for candidates (whether employed or not) who have worked for several years in the field of healthcare and have regularly attended continuing education courses. Once the candidate's dossier is accepted, the health auxiliary certificate is obtained on the basis of a practical and theoretical (oral) examination taken at the candidate's workplace or during a three-week work placement (Croix-rouge vaudoise, 2020).
- (b) Validation possibilities which are offered by Swiss Leaders (formerly Swiss Association of Managers) and do not focus on formal qualifications but on awarding diplomas or certificates, validating experience and achievements in the areas of leadership and management:

¹⁰ See also Engelage et al. (2022) for a short summary of the outcomes of the above mentioned study.

¹¹ This diploma also includes the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning certificate, which corresponds to both a CET title and Module 1 of the Federal Diploma. For simplicity, all are mentioned in the PE category. <https://alice.ch/de/professionalisierung/gleichwertigkeitsbeurteilung-gwb/>

- (i) Validation for Swiss army officers: three levels of recognition are offered depending on the experience of leadership within the Swiss army (Swiss Leaders, 2021);
- (c) Validation of management competences for members of municipal councils with a minimum of four years' experience. The certificate obtained covers a maximum of ten key competences (Swiss Leaders, n.d. b);
- (d) Swiss Register for engineers, technicians and architects (REG). This is the only private institution in Switzerland mandated to officially recognize professional experience in Engineering, Architecture, Industry and Environment as equivalent to Swiss degrees. This form of recognition, endorsed by SERI, allows people who do not have a recognised qualification, but are able to demonstrate a year-long experience in a specific field, to be evaluated on the basis of a dossier which confirms their professional practice. This is a special form of validation, because it does not issue a professional title, but it permits practice of one of the REG professions, according to the corresponding level in the register. (REG, 2022)
- (e) Validation of language competence for naturalisation/citizenship or residence permit: The Swiss federal law defines the levels of language competency required in one of the national languages. One possibility of attesting language skills is the language passport issued by the fide Secretariat on behalf of the State Secretariat of Migration (SEM) which can be acquired through validation. (fide Secretariat, 2021a)
- (f) Validation for the acquisition of the fide certificate for integration language instructors. All modules can also be obtained on the basis of submitting a dossier electronically. (fide Secretariat, 2021b)

Validation in higher education

No major changes have been reported since the 2018 update of the Inventory. In Switzerland, the higher education sector is divided into different types of higher education institutions: the cantonal universities, the federal institutes of technology (ETHZ and EPFL), the universities of applied sciences, the universities of teacher education, other various specialised institutions, and the Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training (SFUVET). The coordination of higher education is now assigned to the Swiss universities conference that has proposed, since 2015, within the Swiss Higher Education Bill, the promotion of universities and coordination in Switzerland's higher education sector.

The Higher Education Act regulates the cantonal universities, the federal institutes of technology, the universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education. Art. 12 stipulates that the Higher Education Council may be charged with issuing rules on the recognition of prior learning. However, these norms are not binding and the cantons and HEIs have been assigned the responsibility for their implementation. Thus, there are no standardised policies concerning validation.

The Qualifications Framework of the Swiss Higher Education Area (CRUS, KFH, & COHEP, 2011) describes and defines higher education levels and qualifications in Switzerland on the basis of the following elements: generic descriptors, admission criteria, ECTS credits, academic degrees. The nqf.ch-HS contributes to the implementation of the Bologna process goals; it serves as an orientation tool for the higher education institutions to develop and describe their study courses and programmes; it improves the information about the Swiss higher education system, particularly with regard to teaching; and, it facilitates the comparability of qualifications within Europe and enhances transparency.

For each type of university, there are legal bases or programmatic indications which legitimate or enable the activation of validation practices. This framework allows both

the possibility to be admitted for those who do not have a baccalaureate and the possibility to validate partially a university degree.

It is up to the individual higher education institutions whether and how they recognise non-formal and informal learning. There is, however, great heterogeneity whether and to what extent HEIs recognise and credit prior learning within HE programmes, e.g. to grant exemptions from courses or part of programmes.

With regard to admissions to their courses, the individual higher education institutions also decide autonomously. Many HEIs offer additional admission procedures for people who do not hold the required university entrance qualification but can prove their suitability for the course through alternative ways (e.g. **admissions 'sur dossier'** or through exams). Depending on previous education and/or experience, prior learning can be credited. (SDBB, n.d.).¹²

In Romandy (French-speaking part of Switzerland), three HEIs offer validation procedures (referred to as VAE – 'validation des acquis de l'expérience'): the University of Geneva, the University of Lausanne and the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland. They jointly operate the 'Réseau Romand de la VAE' network (<http://vae-formations.ch/>).

An overview of existing possibilities of validation within HE is provided below.

Cantonal universities and federal institutes of technologies

Validation procedures depend on the universities themselves and refer to cantonal legislations. To access cantonal universities and federal institutes of technologies (EPFL and ETHZ), the most common way is the (academic) baccalaureate. However, holders of a Federal vocational baccalaureate or, since Summer 2017, of a specialised baccalaureate can access through an additional examination ('Passerelle' exam) carried out in several disciplines (languages, mathematics, experimental sciences, human sciences).

Furthermore, at the federal institutes of technologies (EPFL and ETHZ) and the cantonal universities of Bern, Fribourg, Lucerne, Neuchâtel and USI of Lugano it is possible under certain circumstances to be admitted to a Bachelor's degree programme in several faculties without a baccalaureate. In these cases, special admission procedures are applied, which vary from one university to another as well as from one faculty to another. Geneva University (since 1978) and Lausanne University (since 2004) propose an admission based on a dossier, which takes into account non-formal and informal learning. (SDBB, 2022a; SDBB, 2022b)

The University of Geneva, for example, has offered a validation procedure since 2008; five entities (three faculties, one institute and one centre) take part. For a Bachelor programme, up to half of the programme can be obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. 90 out of 180 ECTS). For Master programmes and other study programmes, different thresholds apply. (Université de Genève, 2018a; 2018b)

Since 2016, the University of Lausanne has offered a validation procedure for selected Bachelor and Master programmes in different faculties¹³. Up to 60 ECTS for a Bachelor and up to one third of a Master programme (i.e. between 30 and 60 ECTS, without the ECTS of the master thesis) can be obtained through validation of non-

¹² SDBB (2022a) and SDBB (2022b) provide an overview of alternative access routes to higher education programmes.

¹³ The procedure is offered for the following programmes: Bachelor and Master in Arts (ès Lettres), Bachelor and Master in Social sciences, Bachelor and Master in Political sciences, Bachelor and Master in Sport sciences, Bachelor in Biology and Master in Law, Bachelor in Religious Sciences. The procedure is based on institutional legislation Regulation 3.17 (on Validation of non-formal and informal learning) and Regulation 3.18 (on Recognition of ECTS or equivalences).

formal and informal learning. (Université de Lausanne, n.d.; Université de Lausanne, 2016)

No information could be obtained on any existing validation procedures in the federal institutes of technologies.

Universities of applied sciences

Switzerland has currently nine universities of applied sciences (UAS), each of which are maintained by one or several cantons. A number of UAS offer the possibility of admission to study programmes on the basis of a dossier including non-formal and informal learning (admission 'sur dossier'). This is in particular offered in the fields of health and social work, but also in other fields.¹⁴

The organisation ASD Villari collaborates with a number of UAS to provide a joint procedure on the basis of a dossier including non-formal and informal learning to allow admission 'sur dossier' to social work and health programmes to candidates who do not have the required formal qualification. The dossiers are elaborated in guided group workshops.¹⁵

Partial validation of a study programme is, according to the current state of this research, possible only at the UAS Western Switzerland, and only a wide variety of Bachelor and Master programmes in the fields of: design and visual arts, economics and services, engineering and architecture, music and performing arts, health and social work. For a Bachelor programme, up to 120 ECTS can be credited through validation of non-formal and informal learning. For Master programmes, between up to 30 ECTS (for Master programmes comprising 90 ECTS) and up to 90 ECTS (for Master programmes comprising 120 ECTS) can be credited based on validation.¹⁶ The offer has been continuously expanded in recent years.

Universities of teacher education

The universities of teacher education (UTE) have an independent position in higher education, as they are under the exclusive responsibility of cantons and are subject to inter-cantonal laws. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK/CDIP) has entrusted the coordination of the different institutions working in the field of teaching to the specific chamber of swissuniversities. This chamber is made up of the rectors of all universities of teacher education and of other training institutions for teachers. (swissuniversities, n.d.)

In 2019, EDK/CDIP revised the national guidelines for the recognition of teaching qualifications. The aim of the revision was primarily to bring together and streamline several legal texts. The new regulations came into force in 2020. (EDK/CDIP, 2019a; EDK/CDIP, 2019b; EDK/CDIP, 2019c; EDK/CDIP, 2019d). The guidelines foresee that career changers¹⁷, who fulfil the formal admission requirements, may have up to one third of the ECTS of the teacher training study programme credited based on

¹⁴ For example, the UAS Eastern Switzerland offers admissions 'sur dossier' for the study programme in social work, <https://www.ost.ch/de/studium/soziale-arbeit/bachelor-soziale-arbeit/zulassung-bachelor-soziale-arbeit/sur-dossier-verfahren>.

¹⁵ <https://www.asdvillari.ch/de>. The procedure is offered for social work and health study programmes at a number of universities of applied sciences, both in the German-speaking and French-speaking part of Switzerland.

¹⁶ At the UAS Western Switzerland, the validation procedure is offered together with the University of Geneva and University of Lausanne. <https://www.hes-so.ch/la-hes-so/etudier-a-la-hes-so/lifelong-learning/validation-des-acquis-dexperience>; <https://www.hes-so.ch/la-hes-so/etudier-a-la-hes-so/lifelong-learning/validation-des-acquis-dexperience#c31683>

¹⁷ Career changers in the sense of the guidelines means individuals aged 30 or above with at least three years of relevant full-time professional experience (or an equivalent volume of experience spread over a maximum period over seven years).

validation of non-formal and informal learning; for a Bachelor programme, this corresponds to a maximum of 60 ECTS¹⁸.

The guidelines furthermore stipulate the possibility to be admitted to a study programme 'sur dossier', i.e. for individuals who do not fulfil the formal admission requirements. (EDK/CDIP, 2019d)

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland, an agreement concluded by four UTE (Vaud, Valais, Fribourg, BeJuNe) and two training centres attached to universities (IUFÉ Geneva and CERF Fribourg) on validation of non-formal and informal learning has been in place since 2013 and was revised in 2018 (CAHR; 2018). The agreement foresees the implementation of a common procedure to validate non-formal and informal learning in Bachelor and Master programmes for teacher education for career changers (see above). The agreement mandates the Romandy Commission for VNIL CORVAE ('Commission romande de la validation des acquis de l'expérience') to oversee the process and ensure consistency across institutions and cantons; CORVAE also evaluates the dossiers (CAHR, 2018; swissuniversities; 2014)

Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education (SFUVET/EHB/HEFP/SUFFP)

The Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training SFUVET (until 2021 known as Swiss Federal Institute for VET, SFIVET¹⁹) is owned by the Swiss Confederation and in charge of basic and continuing training to VET professionals. It has a specific status among universities of teacher education.

The validation procedure for the federal diploma of teachers working in vocational schools offered by SFUVET Lausanne and reported on in the 2018 Inventory, has since been expanded to the German-speaking regions, and to additional teacher training qualifications. It is offered for teaching qualifications for vocational schools, baccalaureate schools and colleges for higher education. The procedure is open to individuals with at least five years of professional experience in teaching and a tertiary A or B level of education in the teaching field. The procedure includes several different ways of support and evaluation. The evaluation is based on a dossier comprising the analysis of three situations related to teaching activities, an on-the-job visit (a period of teaching lesson followed by an interview), a collective assessment and a final interview. The procedure usually takes one year (instead of two years when choosing the regular training pathway).²⁰ (EHB, 2023a; EHB, 2023b)

Furthermore, many HEIs recognise (parts of) the **military leadership training** within their study programmes, both at Bachelor and Master level. The Swiss Army provides an overview of options and arrangements made with different HEIs (Federal Council, 2023).

3.3 Validation and the labour market

In Switzerland, labour market policies are coordinated by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). As pointed out in the 2018 update of the Inventory, little use is made of validation procedures in this field, because they are considered too long to be used for a quick reintegration into the labour market.

¹⁸ See, for example, description of the validation procedure and requirements at UTE Bern, <https://www.phbern.ch/validation-des-acquis-de-l'experience>

¹⁹ In 2021, the former Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET) became the Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training (SFUVET). <https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases.msg-id-84508.html>

²⁰ When full validation is possible, candidates will receive their diploma. If full validation is not possible, candidates need to acquire the missing competences and present them at a later date. To participate in the procedure, candidates need to pay an admission fee of CHF 200 (EUR 204) plus a semester fee of CHF 1 500 (EUR 1 532). If additional training is needed, there will be additional fees of CHF 450 per semester (EUR 460).

When this opportunity is given, the jobseeker might validate different modules, as it is the case in the validation of Module 1 of the Federal Diploma Certificate in Adult Education. Another option is the 'model F' initiative provided by INFORMA addressed to experienced specialists in the professional fields Engineering, Economy, Commerce, Construction and especially ICT, who do not have the necessary qualifications or who want to improve their skills, including migrants and those people who are unemployed. This project is recognised in the field of the labour market measures in several cantons, which may cover the cost upon request (Bern, Zurich, St. Gallen, Solothurn, Aargau, Fribourg). (INFORMA, n.d.) See also section 3.2 for validation possibilities within professional education qualifications.

In 2019, the Federal Council decided on a series of measures to promote the domestic workforce. This includes funding for the implementation of *viamia*, initiative that allows all adults from the age of 40 to participate in an assessment of potential and career counselling free of charge, for the period 2019 to 2024 (see also section 3.1). Another measure refers to additional funding for the 'vocational qualification for adults' initiative (which includes the IVET validation procedure) (Federal Council, 2019)

Furthermore, in some cantons, it is possible to activate individual validation projects, recognised as labour market measures by regional employment centres.

3.4 Validation and the third sector

As reported in the 2018 Inventory, in the third sector, there is no specific regulation concerning the validation of skills acquired through voluntary work. Nevertheless, in several educational sectors and particularly in the health and social sectors, these experiences are taken into account when drawing up the portfolio for the validation procedure. Moreover, since 2001, an initiative called Volunteer Dossier (Dossier 'freiwillig engagiert'/Dossier bénévolat) has been implemented concerning the identification and documentation of skills and competencies acquired through volunteering. The initiative is implemented nation-wide, and offers a tool to document and make visible voluntary work.

This Volunteer Dossier proposes an instrument for the identification and documentation of voluntary experiences. The aim of the dossier is to give value and greater visibility to the experience gained from volunteer work, similar to a work certificate. This dossier was drawn up in 2001, in the framework of the UNESCO year for voluntary work, and is now used all over the country and, in particular, supported by the Swiss National Youth Council (Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendverbände SAJV – CSAJ).

Between 2020 and 2022, *benevol* (the umbrella organisation for regional centres for voluntary engagement) and the Swiss National Youth Council (Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendverbände SAJV – CSAJ) worked on a revision of the Volunteer Dossier, which was relaunched as a digital tool in 2022. Users can also share their profile online, e.g. with potential employers (*benevol* Schweiz – Suisse, n.d.) (see also 3.6).

To encourage voluntary work in the youth sector, the 'Youth leave' (set in the Code of Obligations, Article 329e), entitles all employees and apprentices under the age of 30 who are volunteering for youth up to five days of unpaid leave each year (SAJV/CSAJ, n.d.). A cantonal law in the Canton of Vaud (art. 30 LSAJ) permits recognition of the experience of supervising youth activities as equivalent to internships in the curriculum of vocational training. This may be of special interest for individuals who wish to enter a university of applied sciences in social work where one-year experience is requested. (Canton de Vaud, 2016)

For the youth sector, policies do not systematically consider validation as a tool for social inclusion and unemployment prevention. The strategies focus primarily on practices' recognition, assessment and valuation of non-formal learning. Even so,

there are many national and cantonal initiatives intended to support young people in their training course, in order to avoid drop-out and to facilitate access to the labour market.

As regards the use of Youthpass, the official Youthpass cannot be issued under the Swiss Erasmus+ programme. However, Movetia, the Swiss agency for exchange and mobility, recommends using the Youthpass model as a guide when designing own certificates and adapting it to the respective needs. (Movetia Exchange and mobility, n.d.)

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The links between the qualifications frameworks and validation have not changed since the 2018 update of the Inventory. As described in the previous report, many Swiss VET/PE qualifications are relatively unknown in other countries, potentially hindering Swiss citizens seeking employment abroad. For this reason, Switzerland considers the link to European cooperation on qualifications frameworks (both the European qualification frameworks - EQF, and the Qualification Framework for the European Higher Education Area - QF-EHEA), as an opportunity to strengthen the transparency and comparability of its national qualifications in a European and wider international context.

The national qualifications framework NQF VPET is currently intended to integrate all qualifications in the field of vocational education and training (VET, upper-secondary level) and professional education (PE, tertiary, non-university level). Both general education and non-formal education qualifications (this includes continuing education and training CET) are currently not within the scope of the NQF VPET (SBFI, 2015). The referencing of this qualifications framework (NQF VPET) to the EQF was established in 2015. Since the summer of 2016, professional organisations are given two options: applying for simplified referencing of qualifications or applying for individualised referencing of qualifications.²¹ For the simplified referencing of qualification, SERI proposes a standard reference level for each type of qualification. If the professional organisation feels that the given qualification should be referenced to a higher level within the NQF VPQ, then it may apply for individual referencing of that qualification. This individual referencing process is based on the learning outcomes of each qualification and takes into account the specificities of each profession. It is however complex and requires a close cooperation and coordination with the relevant stakeholders of each profession in order to reach consensus regarding the appropriate NQF level.

The introduction of the NQF VPET did not lead to any changes in the Swiss vocational education and training system. As a result, the procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal have remained unchanged as well.

Universities have elaborated their own, separate qualifications framework, with reference to the Bologna reform (NQF.CH-HS), on the basis of the QF-EHEA. In the universities or UAS where validation of non-formal and informal learning is practiced, the recognised learning outcomes give a right to obtain corresponding ECTS credits. These credits are registered in the study plan of the student.

Tangible outcomes that can be achieved through the validation of non-formal and informal learning

²¹ The standard reference levels for selected types of qualifications are as follows: Federal Certificate of Vocational Education and Training: NQF/EQF level 3; Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training: NQF/EQF level 4; Federal Diploma of Higher Education: NQF/EQF level 5; Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education: NQF/EQF level 6. <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/en/home/bildung/mobilitaet/nqf-vpet/das-vorgehen-zur-einstufung.html>

As described in Chapter 3, tangible outcomes that can be achieved through the validation of non-formal and informal learning include the award of qualifications, exemptions as well as the access to learning opportunities. The concept of partial qualifications is not used. Many qualifications have a modularised structure, which is considered to support the use of validation arrangements. However, there is no general rule that would prescribe a modularised structure. Also, there is no general rule on any maximum number of modules for a qualification that can be obtained through validation.

Micro-credentials are offered in different contexts, in particular in the higher education sector or in the form of industry certificates – however, they are usually not referred to as micro-credentials (Hedinger, 2023). At policy level, as part of a discussion why the numbers of validation users in IVET have remained behind expectations since the VET Act introduced the possibility of ‘other’ qualification procedures, it has been suggested allowing for the possibility of validation of modules or smaller units of qualifications – which could be understood as micro-credentials. This being said, there are no signs at policy level that a coordinated approach towards using micro-credentials for validation could be introduced in the near future.

5 Standards

There have been no changes regarding the use of standards for validation since the 2018 update of the Inventory. In Switzerland, there are several definition levels for training standards, according to different training and educational contexts. This section only refers to those sectors where there is a validation procedure.

As far as upper-secondary and higher vocational training (VET/PE) is concerned, all diplomas have standards and national examinations (ordinance on initial vocational training and national education plan for all places of training) and are based on skills. These qualification standards are established by professional organisations, so that a strong relationship between occupational, educational and training standards and employment is ensured.

The validation procedure in **IVET** refers directly to these standards, as well as to:²²

- (a) *The qualification profile*, which lists all the skills required, which must be validated for each specific profession. Its contents correspond to the ordinance on initial vocational training and it is formed by compact and functional unities. It allows applicants to compare their own position to the skills required and it allows experts to evaluate if the student has reached the level required.
- (b) *The Language, Communication and Society (LCS) subjects in VET profile* (which includes personal, social and methodological skills). The applicant confirms that they have the skills required for the profession and for the management of day-to-day life.
- (c) *The assessment, validation and certification standards* are defined according to the qualification profile and to the LCS requirements.²³

As regards **universities**, the main basis for training standards is the Qualifications Framework for the Swiss Higher Education Area (swissuniversities, 2021). If validation practices are applied in this sector, they refer directly to these education and training standards, as well as to the rules of the Bologna Process.

²² <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/fr/home/bildung/berufsbildungssteuerung-und--politik/projekte-und-initiativen/diplome-professionnel-et-changement-de-profession-pour-les-adult/handbuch-berufliche-grundbildung-fuer-erwachsene/validierung-von-bildungsleistungen.html>

²³ E.g. assessment standards ('Bestehensregeln') for the qualification of cook <https://www.becc.admin.ch/becc/public/bvz/beruf/show/79007>

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

As reported in the 2018 update of the Inventory, the coordination of validation arrangements throughout Switzerland is ensured by SERI, although the educational institutions keep a high degree of autonomy in the higher education sector. There is no accreditation system in place for institutions involved in validation. The key roles of institutions involved have not changed since the previous update.

The responsibilities of relevant actors differ depending on the type of qualification and sector:

- (a) In initial VET, the key actors in charge are the cantonal or intercantonal consultation centres (portals) in charge of adult qualification procedures; the cantonal or delegate centres for guidance and skills audit, which support applicants in the preparation of their portfolios/dossiers; and the professional organisations, which define and supervise the qualifications standards²⁴. (Salini & Salzmann, 2020) Although the validation of prior learning is anchored in Art. 9(2) of the VET Act and the basic procedure for validation in IVET has been defined at national level²⁵, the existing guidelines leave the cantons a lot of room for manoeuvre. (SERI, 2018a)
- (b) In CVET²⁶, validation procedures generally arise from bottom-up approaches, where the professional organisations as well as third sector organisations (e.g. women's associations or trade unions) can initiate the development of validation procedures. All procedures require approval from SERI.
- (c) In higher education, validation procedures are developed by individual universities through bottom-up approaches. Within the universities, specific working groups (sometimes across universities) handle the processing of validation cases. Validation procedures require approval from the respective canton in charge.
Universities of Teacher Education are a special case in the higher education context, as there are national guidelines in place for the recognition of prior learning teaching qualifications. These guidelines were recently revised by the EDK/CDIP (in 2019) and allow admission 'sur dossier' to teacher training programmes and a shortening of study periods through validation up to one third of the ECTSs in a programme. (EDK/CDIP, 2019d)

While attempts have been made in previous years to make the IVET validation procedure more coherent across cantons (see chapter 3), this did not really lead to increased institutional integration. Both in IVET and in the other sectors, institutional arrangements for validation remain highly fragmented. This reflects the overall heterogeneous structure and regulation of the Swiss education system, where cantons retain the main authority over these issues.

Information on the institutions involved in information, awareness raising and guidance is presented in chapter 7.

As for the process of assessment and certification of the outcomes of validation procedures, the professionals and organisations involved are generally the same as those involved in the formal education and training sector. See also information provided in chapter 8.

²⁴ SBBK/CSFP (2022) provides a more detailed description of the process of developing a new IVET validation procedure. Salzmann et al. (2020) refer to the differences observed across cantons in the distribution of responsibilities for the recognition of prior learning achievements.

²⁵ As pointed out above, the key documents are (a) Handbook Initial VET for adults (SERI, 2017); (b) Validation of educational achievements in initial VET (SERI, 2018a).

²⁶ Considering both professional higher education and continuing education.

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

Overall, awareness-raising is the shared responsibility of organisations in charge of the respective procedure and of other stakeholders. Other key information sources include professional organisations and trade unions. For validation in VET, it is the cantonal services (services in charge of adult qualifications and of educational and career guidance) that play a key role, in collaboration with SERI, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation.

The website <https://www.berufsberatung.ch/> is the key information and guidance portal on education and training in Switzerland. It is maintained by SDBB (Swiss Service Centre for VET – vocational, study and career counselling) on behalf of the cantons and with support from SERI. It provides general information on possibilities for validation offered in VET, and links to specific cantonal websites, which then provide more detailed information on the requirements and steps in the validation process.

In the field of **IVET**, the Gateway Portal²⁷ mentioned above (with general information on validation in Switzerland) and the websites of the cantonal services (with more detailed information on requirements and steps involved in the validation procedure), as well as www.berufsbildungplus.ch, are the main source of information on validation. The websites do not present validation in isolation, but as one of several pathways for adults to obtain an upper-secondary VET qualification.

The gateway portal also provides information by which canton(s) a specific validation procedure is offered as well as general information on the steps involved in the process. Visitors are then guided towards websites of the specific cantons²⁸, which then provide detailed information on the requirements and detailed information on the steps involved in the process.

The IVET validation procedure as such is specifically targeted to low-qualified adults who wish to obtain an upper-secondary VET qualification. The information is thus presented as one of several options to catch up on one's vocational qualification, together with information on other alternative pathways to obtain a VET qualification, as part of information addressed to adults on how to catch up on their vocational qualification.

One of the key challenges is to make validation accessible to those groups that are considered low-qualified, i.e. who have a low level of formal qualification. Maurer & Schneebeli (2018) noted this challenge in particular with regard to the IVET validation procedure – although some activities to improve awareness-raising have since been set.

For example, in 2018, SERI launched an information campaign to raise awareness of the pathways available to adults who wish to acquire a vocational qualification (www.berufsbildungplus.ch). The campaign targeted not only adults but also employers and counselling services. It was implemented as a testimonial campaign,

²⁷ For the IVET validation procedure, the information on which qualifications can be achieved through this procedure is available through the gateway portal. The qualifications are listed by linguistic regions, e.g. the qualification procedures available in Switzerland in German language are listed here <https://www.berufsberatung.ch/dyn/show/26870>

²⁸ Example: information website provided by the canton of Zurich: <https://www.zh.ch/de/bildung/berufs-studien-laufbahnberatung/laufbahnberatung/bildungsabschluss-nachholen.html>

telling success stories (SBFI, 2018b). There are several different publications available to inform the target group about the different pathways to obtain an IVET qualification; the validation procedure is typically presented as one in four pathways for adults to obtain an IVET qualification (see e.g. the brochure provided by SDBB (2019)).

As regards **professional education**, Salzmann et al., 2022 identify significant room for improvement with regard to transparency and accessibility of information on possibilities for validation, which are rarely described in detail on the websites of the colleges of higher education.

For **higher education**, the respective HEIs offer information and contacts on their individual web pages. With variations at cantonal level, which means that some cantons are more proactive than others, validation providers and stakeholders generally organise information events, conferences and workshops about validation practices. Furthermore, every year, SFUVET (Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training) organises a study day on the theme of validation²⁹.

The website of the 'Réseau romand de la VAE' presents the validation procedures offered by three institutions in Romandy (French-speaking part of CH): University of Geneva, University of Lausanne and UAS Western Switzerland. <http://vae-formations.ch/> The website also includes information videos on the validation procedure as well as a short quiz to test one's suitability for the validation procedure.

The University of Lausanne, for instance, operates a separate webpage with detailed information on the validation procedures offered <https://www.unil.ch/vae/fr/home.html>. It includes detailed information on the procedure and steps included, a checklist for interested candidates, information about upcoming information events, contact information and links to the underlying regulations for the procedure.

The UAS Western Switzerland also provides a dedicated website on their validation procedures, including videos, detailed information about the process and information videos. <https://www.hes-so.ch/la-hes-so/etudier-a-la-hes-so/lifelong-learning/v...>

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

Every validation provider has a service in place that provides basic information to potential users for free. Available counselling on validation procedures varies depending on the context and users' needs. Art. 4 of the Ordinance on VET (Verordnung über die Berufsbildung BBV), cantons are required to provide guidance centres/bodies that help people to compile evidence of their non-formal or informal learning achievements.

In the field of **IVET**, each canton operates a gateway portal for their validation procedures, which describes the validation procedure applied in the canton and provides all relevant information.³⁰ The most relevant information with regard to the IVET validation procedure is generally summarised in two guidance notes: part I provides general information on the validation procedure and part II provides specific

²⁹ The most recent event was held on 6 May 2022, in Renens, and focused on validation in French-Speaking Switzerland. https://www.hefp.swiss/evenements/journee-dechanges-reconnaissance-et-validation-des-acquis-dexperience?_gl=1*429li8*_up*MQ..*_ga*MTkxNTI0MTc1NC4xNjQ3MjYxMjQ1*_ga_2L0TGBZVHC*MTY4NzI4NTI1MC4yLjEuMTY4NzI4NTI1Ni4wLjAuMA..

³⁰ The services provided by the gateway portals are described in more detail in the 2018 update of the Inventory. The gateway portals for all cantons can be accessed through <https://www.berufsberatung.ch/dyn/show/115332>. For example, the gateway portal for the canton of Zurich is available at <https://www.zh.ch/de/bildung/berufsstudien-laufbahnberatung/laufbahnberatung/bildungsabschluss-nachholen.html>

information on a given occupation/qualification.³¹ The responsibility for the guidance in the validation procedure was officially transferred to the vocational, study and career guidance services in 2018. So far, validation only accounts for 2-3% of the guidance cases. (KBSB, 2021; Kraus, 2023).

Most IVET validation procedures require the attendance of two mandatory information events, before candidates enter into the procedure. Guidance in the identification and documentation phases varies in terms of duration and across cantons. Generally, guidance is offered on an individual basis, sometimes also for small groups of candidates. While guidance provides candidates with methodological support on how to prepare their validation dossier, it does not enter into the specifics of the content that has to be validated.

In higher education, for example, the validation procedure for the federal diploma of teachers working in vocational schools offered by SFUVET includes individual and group guidance throughout the validation procedure. In total, for individual and group guidance, up to 10 hours of guidance are offered per candidate. (EHB/SFUVET, 2023a)

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

As reported in the 2018 update of the Inventory, three types of validation professionals can be identified in Switzerland. Those who provide information and counselling generally have a background in education, guidance and/or adult training.

Those who are in charge of assessment are experts in the specific professional field. Lastly, those who manage validation procedures have a background as managers in the specific professional field. The majority of people working in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning do not hold any specific qualification related to implementing validation procedures.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

As pointed out in the 2018 update of the Inventory, training offers for validation practitioners have been offered since the 1990s. Examples include the following:

Training as bilan-portfolio counsellor

effe, a training, counselling and skill assessment centre based in Biel/Bienne, offers a training programme for counsellors in assisting people/groups of people to identify and document their competences. The training programme is structured into two modules, and has been offered since 1998. (effe, 2023)

Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning

SFUVET, the Swiss Federal University for VET, offers a modular qualification pathway for professionals specialising in advising, assessing and/or managing validation procedures. It is currently offered in French and Italian. (SUFFP, 2022; HEFP, n.d.)

³¹ For the canton of Bern, for example, part I with general information is available at https://www.biz.bkd.be.ch/content/dam/biz_bkd/dokumente/de/themen/laufbahn/bae-handbuch-vda-teil-1.pdf
Part II includes specific information on the respective qualification, e.g. for the cooking diploma at https://www.biz.bkd.be.ch/content/dam/biz_bkd/dokumente/de/themen/laufbahn/bae-handbuch-vda-koch-koechin.pdf

Training for assessors in the validation procedure at IVET level

SFUVET offers two-day assessor trainings, which are compulsory for assessors in the field of IVET and which are offered in French, German and Italian language.³²

8.3 Qualifications and experience

Qualification requirements only refer to validation practitioners in the IVET sector, whereas one needs to differentiate between assessors and other validation practitioners. SERI recommendations foresee that validation guidance practitioners are professionals specialised in the guidance and support of adults in VET. (SBFI, 2018a) There is, however, no specified training structure available.

For IVET assessors, compulsory training is required, as described in the section below.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

In line with what was reported in the 2018 update of the Inventory, only the upper-secondary level of VET has a specific financing system for validation in place. In the other contexts and levels of education, funding for validation is almost always integrated within the overall budget. As pointed out before (see 3.1), Switzerland does not make use of individual learning accounts. No information could be obtained on any arrangements in place to collect information on the cost of validation.

For the field of initial VET, the Swiss Conference of VET/PE agencies recommends that the cantons cover the cost of the validation procedure (SBBK/CSFP, 2018; also see below for more information).

In the field of professional education, since 2018, as a result of the new law and ordinance on continuing education, individuals who take the Federal Diploma or Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education exam may benefit of a reimbursement of 50% of their training expenses.

IVET

The funding of the validation practices in IVET is connected to the general funding framework. According to Article 53 of the VET Act, the 'other qualification procedures' are included in the federal flat rate that the cantons receive. This means that the validation procedures are funded with the same budget as apprenticeships for young people.

Given that the validation procedure can be followed by an individual in a canton different from his/her canton of residence, the Swiss Conference of VET/PE agencies give indications on inter-cantonal financing methods. Specifically, a person can follow

³² The course description for the German-speaking region is available at <https://www.ehb.swiss/berufsspezifische-kurse-fuer-validierungsverfahren-vae> The course description for the French-speaking region is available at https://www.hefp.swiss/formation-continue/expert-e-s-aux-examens-exp/autres-offres/cours-specifique-metier-par-vae?_ql=1*en1yjt*_up*MQ..*_qa*NDgzNTI0Njk0LjE2ODgzNDIzNTc.*_qa_2L0TGBZVHC*MTY4ODM0MjM1Ny4wLjAuMA.. The course description for the Italian-speaking region is available at <https://www.suffp.swiss/corsi-specifici-sulla-validazione-degli-apprendimenti-esperienziali-vae>

validation procedures outside their canton of residence, whenever that canton does not offer a validation procedure for the selected profession.³³

Additionally, specific financing measures are in place so that professional organisations can develop the competence profiles and assessment criteria necessary to establish a validation procedure. These measures include a federal contribution of approximately EUR 3 067 (CHF 3 000) for the development of competence profiles and assessment criteria for IVET qualifications. (SBFI, 2023b)

The implementation of a validation procedure in IVET costs the public sector approximately EUR 8,183 (CHF 8,000). This is significantly below the cost of other pathways towards an IVET qualification: EUR 25 593 (CHF 25,000) for the direct access to the final examination and EUR 51 187 (CHF 50,000) for the regular VET programme³⁴. (Giger, 2016)

As regards the cost to beneficiaries, the Swiss Conference of VET Agencies recommends that the cantons shall bear the same costs for adults acquiring a VET qualification as they normally bear for ordinary initial VET. The decisive factor is the cost guarantee obtained in advance from the canton concerned. (SBBK/CSFP, 2018; see also SBKK/CSFP, 2007; SBKK/CSFP, 2017)

Currently, the majority of cantons follow these indications (23 out of 26 cantons, see Rudin et al., 2023). At the same time, significant differences in funding can still be observed across cantons. In particular, there are observed differences across cantons as to whether they cover the cost of additional training required in validation procedures (EDK, 2021). Rudin et al. (2023) provide an overview of the direct and indirect cost arising from initial VET for adults, highlighting the various variations across cantons and pointing out that challenges and funding gaps remain.

The table below provides an overview of the validation fees incurred by candidates in the canton of Bern. For candidates with a residence in the canton and who do not yet hold an upper-secondary VET qualification (or higher qualification), only a fee of EUR 92 (CHF 90) for the use of the validation tool will be charged. The cost of the remaining procedure will be covered by the canton. For candidates who do not have an established residence within the canton, fees will be charged.

³³ There is an upper ceiling for the cost of the validation procedure covered by the cantons. For the school year 2023/24, this ceiling has been set at EUR 8,105 (CHF 7,900). This maximum amount corresponds to the costs of full-time vocational training, which is regulated in the intercantonal vocational school agreement (Interkantonale Berufsfachschulvereinbarung) and is adjusted annually (EDK/CDIP, 2021).

³⁴ Data from 2016.

Table 1 Validation fees for candidates in the canton of Bern

Phase	Residence within canton Bern		Residence outside canton Bern	
	Without prior VET diploma	With prior VET diploma		
Phase 1: Information	free of charge	free of charge	free of charge	Candidate to make individual request for cost coverage with their canton of residence
Phase 2: Documentation	EUR 92 (CHF 90) fee for validation tool (due once admitted to the procedure)			
	free of charge	EUR 797 (CHF 789)	EUR 1 329 (CHF 1 300)	
Phase 3: Assessment	free of charge	EUR 613* (CHF 600)	EUR 1 022* (CHF 1 000)	
Total Phases 1-5	EUR 92 (CHF 90)	EUR 1 503 (CHF 1 470)	EUR 2 443 (CHF 2 390)	
Additional training	free of charge	up to EUR 3 373 (CHF 3 300)	up to EUR 5 622 (CHF 5 500)	
Maximum amount	EUR 92 (CHF 90)	EUR 4 877 (CHF 4 770)	EUR 8 066 (CHF 7 890)	
		* Excludes cost of textbooks and room rent (CHF 180) which will be invoiced separately.		

Source: <https://www.biz.bkd.be.ch/de/start/themen/laufbahn/berufsabschluss-fuer-erwachsene/validierung-von-bildungsleistungen.html>

Initiatives supported by EU Programmes

Since 2014, Switzerland has no longer been associated to the Erasmus+ Programme but instead now takes the status of a partner countries. Swiss institutions can however continue to take part in cooperation and mobility activities with Erasmus+ programme countries, thanks to a solution financed by the Swiss government. This Swiss Programme for Erasmus+ promotes cooperation between individuals and institutions from Switzerland and Erasmus+ programme countries. (Movetia, 2023)

One prominent example is the **ValiSkills 3 project** (Validation in Vocational Further Training: Exchange on Theory and Practice)³⁵, finalised in 2021. The project, running between 2018 and 2021, built on the outcomes of the ValiSkills and ValiSkills 2 projects, which were reported on in previous editions of the Inventory. As part of the first two projects, the ValiSkills competence assessment procedure was developed, which aims at the identification and assessment of professional competences of low-qualified adults through reliable methods and procedures. The subject of ValiSkills 3 was a transnational exchange of information and experience on the use of national validation systems in the partner countries involved.

The table below provides an overview of costs for selected validation procedures presented in this report. Note that not all procedures cover all four stages of validation (as they are referred to in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation); some for example, only refer to identification and documentation.

³⁵ The project website <https://www.valiskills.eu/> provides information on all three ValiSkills projects. SVEB/FSEA (Swiss Federation for Adult Learning) was involved as Swiss partner. <https://alice.ch/de/project/valiskills3/>

Table 2 Distribution of costs for different validation procedures³⁶

Type of qualification/ institution	Average cost per person for the whole VNIL procedure	Cost to the person	Other forms of funding
Federal Certificate or Federal diploma of Vocational Education and Training	CHF 8 000 (c. EUR 8 179) but detailed statistics about the distribution of costs are currently not available.	No uniform cantonal practice. There are recommendations to support the procedure financially, but they are not binding.	Cantons
Federal diploma and Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education for trainers in adult education	n/a	CHF 600 (c. EUR 615) for each module, CHF 2 350 (c. EUR 2 407) for six modules	Federal contributions (50% of the fees). Sometimes insurance assumes the costs of the procedure to the person
Federal Diploma of Higher Education for Community Interpreters	n/a	CHF 800 (EUR 819) for the two modules	Federal contributions (50% of the fees).
Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education in Management of Family- Owned SMEs ³⁷	CHF 8 000 (c. EUR 6 815) Half of which covers support for creating the portfolio, and the other half for registration for the final assessment	During the pilot, candidates covered half the cost, now they assume the total cost	Federal contributions (50% of the fees).
SFUVET validation procedure for VET professionals	n/a	CHF 1 700 (EUR 1 732 for full validation; in case of partial validation additional fee of CHF 450 (458 EUR) per semester)	
Universities of teacher education in French- speaking Switzerland	n/a	CHF 1 200 (c. EUR 1 222)	
Faculties of Geneva University	n/a	CHF 1 000 (c. EUR 1 019)	n/a
Faculties of Lausanne University	n/a	CHF 1 000 (c. EUR 1 019)	n/a
Universities of applied sciences of Western Switzerland	n/a	CHF 1 000 (c. EUR 1 019)	n/a
Health auxiliary certificate	n/a	CHF 900 (EUR 919),	Sometimes covered by unemployment insurance or the candidate's institution of origin.

³⁶ Whenever data could be obtained. Costs refer to 2023 unless stated otherwise.

³⁷ Fees for this particular procedure could not be verified for the 2023 update and are still based on the 2018 Inventory.

Type of qualification/ institution	Average cost per person for the whole VNIL procedure	Cost to the person	Other forms of funding
Certification for Swiss army officers (offered by Swiss Leaders)	n/a	Between CHF 200-500 (c. EUR 203 - 509); first-level certification free of charge for army personnel since 2019 ³⁸	n/a
Certificate of competencies for Municipal executive members (Swiss Association of Managers)	n/a	Between CHF 400-1000 (c. EUR 409-1022)-	n/a

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

As pointed out in the 2018 update of the Inventory, it is difficult to identify clear trends in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Switzerland. Validation practices are spread across the Swiss education and training system quite unevenly, and for some areas, data is incomplete or simply unavailable.

From the limited data that is available, it can be concluded that the number of validation options (possible paths) in Switzerland has been developing in every education and training sector. This observation, already made in the 2018 update of the Inventory, has been continued since. Especially for qualifications offered at universities of teacher education, an increased offer of possibilities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning can be observed. However, there is no quantitative data on take-up available in this field.

Data from the IVET sector suggests that the take-up of validation has remained relatively stable throughout the past few years. In the third sector or in labour policies, there is little evidence of validation procedures being implemented.

VET

Data on validation use generally refers to validation that leads to the award of a VET qualification, whereas there is a lack of data on other forms of validation, such as validation that leads to facilitated access to educational pathways or exemptions from education or training.

In 2020, 10659 adults obtained an IVET qualification (Federal VET Certificate or Federal VET Diploma), of these 6% (n=642) were obtained through the validation pathway, 25% through direct access to the final examination, 21% through the shortened VET programme and 48% through the regular IVET programmes (i.e. without any validation of non-formal or informal learning). The share of adults who obtain an IVET qualification through the validation pathway has remained stable over the years, ranging between five and eight percent. (Salzmann et al., 2023)

The IVET qualifications most frequently awarded through validation can be found in the health and care sector, with the Federal VET Diploma in Care and the Federal VET Diploma in Health on top of the list between 2014 and 2020. (Salzmann et al., 2023). This is followed by IVET qualifications in the field of hospitality and trade.

³⁸ Since 2019, the certification at the first level (out of three) has been free of charge for army personnel. See <https://www.vtg.admin.ch/de/karriere/bildungslandschaft-und-armee/kooperation-schweizer-kaderorganisation.html>

The procedure is very demanding, it requires a high level of language and writing skills from candidates. In addition, a high degree of independence, self-discipline and self-organisation skills are required to undergo the procedure.

In addition, further uptake is limited by the fact that the validation procedure is currently only offered for a small share of IVET qualifications, and not all procedures are offered in all Swiss cantons.

Calculations by Fritschi (2023) suggest that approximately 9 percent of people without completed upper secondary education have the potential to go through a validation process. This corresponds to 52 000 individuals. Yet, each year, only between 600 and 700 adults obtain an IVET qualification through validation³⁹. There are several reasons that would explain the limited participation in validation: the procedures are complex and may take several months to several years (i.e. if additional training is needed), while the outcome often remains uncertain. In addition, candidates must have excellent skills in one national language, ICT skills, the ability to reflect, writing skills and also sufficient time and financial resources. Fritschi (2023) concludes that as long as the existing validation procedures continue to have this level of complexity, it would be difficult to find more candidates who are willing to undergo a validation procedure.

9.2.2 Validation users

There is no comprehensive data collection available at national level on the number of validation users and their distribution in terms of age, gender, qualification level or other characters. In addition, some cantonal services systematically collect data on validation users and their distribution. However, this data is not publicly available. Detailed information on users of validation at national level is only available for IVET.

IVET

As pointed out above, systematic data collection at national level only takes place on the number of individuals who undergo the validation procedure towards an IVET qualification, while there is no data collection at national level on other forms of validation of non-formal and informal learning in IVET that lead e.g. to a shortened VET programme, exemption or provide access to education and training.⁴⁰

In absolute numbers, the number of IVET qualifications obtained through the validation procedure has slightly increased over the past years, from 554 in 2016 to 642 in 2020. In relative terms, the share of adults who opt for the validation procedure to obtain an IVET qualification remains at a constant low level, with approximately 6%. Compared to this, 48% of adults obtaining an IVET qualification had opted for the regular VET programme, 21% for the shortened VET programme and 25% for the direct access to the final examination. (SBFI, 2022; Fritschi, 2023)

Table 3 Number of vocational qualifications awarded to persons aged 25 and older in 2016 and 2020

IVET qualifications obtained by adults	2016	2020
Regular VET programme	3800 (45%)	5138 (48%)

³⁹ If one considers all existing pathways (including the regular VET programme and direct access to the final examination), then 8 999 adults obtained an IVET qualification in 2022. In other words, one out of seven IVET qualifications were awarded to individuals aged 25 or above.

⁴⁰ Data from 2018 reveals a large heterogeneity in how cantons recognise prior learning for adults who work towards a VET qualification. The share of adults who have prior learning (i.e. may also refer to formal learning) recognised when pursuing an IVET qualification (through the regular or shortened VET pathway, or through the direct access to the final examination), oscillates between 90% in some cantons and 10% in others. (Salzmann & Hämmerli, 2022)

IVET qualifications obtained by adults	2016	2020
Shortened VET programme*	2075 (24%)	2259 (21%)
Direct access to final examination*	2164 (25%)	2620 (25%)
Validation procedure	554 (6%)	642 (6%)
Total	8539	10659

Source: SBFI (2022), SBFI (2018). *The shortened VET programme and direct access to the final examination pathways may also include elements of validation of non-formal and informal learning but in the national context, but only the validation procedure pathway is referred to as 'validation' in the national context.

Data shows that younger adults tend to opt for the regular or shortened VET programme to obtain an IVET qualification, whereas adults in the 40+ age group tend to opt for the direct access to the final examination. More than 60% of those opting for the validation procedure are aged 40 or older. Females account for a

Geographically, the validation procedure is most often opted for in the French-speaking community, whereas candidates in the German-speaking region tend to opt for the shortened VET programme, and candidates in Italy prefer the direct access to the final examination. The cantons with the highest numbers of validation users are Geneva and Zurich (Schmid et al., 2017).

It should be noted that the validation pathway for IVET is only available for a selected number of occupations (14 as of 2022). In addition, the validation procedure for these occupations is not offered in all language regions of the country. This contributes to unequal access to the validation pathway. Additionally, there are significant differences across cantons in how validation procedures are implemented (see also Salzmann et al., 2023)

Findings from recent research (Fritschi, 2023) suggest that from an individual point of view, it is not monetary incentives that motivate people to have their learning outcomes validated, as no significant wage increases can be identified after completion of the validation process. Instead, validation rather seems to function as a signal in the labour market, which can be an important factor when changing jobs and can reduce the risk of unemployment.

Professional Education (PE)

In the field of professional education, data on validation users is available for the following qualifications:

- Qualifications for trainers in adult education

The Swiss Federation issued 98 certificates and diplomas that were acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2022, out of a total of 3 309 certificates and diplomas issued in that year. The gradual decrease in the number of certificates and diplomas acquired through validation reported in the 2018 Inventory continued in recent years, with the numbers cut in half between 2017 and 2022 (SVEB, 2018; SVEB, 2023).

- Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education for Community Interpreters

In 2022, 14 individuals obtained either INTERPRET module 1 and/or 2 based on the offered validation procedure (out of 17 applications for validation received by INTERPRET) - this number increased considerably compared to the previous year. There is, however, no information available how many of these candidates proceeded to take the Advanced Federal Diploma exam. Overall, in 2022, 13 candidates took the professional exam to obtain the Advanced Federal Diploma (this number has been in decrease for several years); 5 candidates passed the exam and obtained the Advanced Federal Diploma. (INTERPRET, 2023b)

Continuous VET (CVET)

No current data on the numbers of validation users could be obtained.

Higher education

No current data on the numbers of validation users in higher education could be obtained⁴¹.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The use of validation of non-formal and informal learning to support disadvantaged groups plays a very minor role in the Swiss context. Existing validation procedures, especially those in the field of IVET, are not considered suitable for low-qualified individuals and other disadvantaged groups, due to their complex procedures and detailed documentation requirements.

Data on proportions of disadvantaged groups participating in validation is not publicly available.

While the topic of migration is a national priority topic, existing initiatives, however, rather focus on integration (sometimes however also including skills audits as part of assessments of potential) rather than validation procedures as such.

One example of validation to support migrants is the validation of language competence for naturalisation/citizenship or residence permit through the 'fide dossier'⁴² (see section 3.2 for more information).

Furthermore, so-called assessments of potential among migrants and refugees ('Potentialabklärungen', 'évaluations du potentiel') form a core element of the Swiss integration policy. The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) has developed a set of tools for the assessment of potential⁴³ (available since 2020); these include a toolkit for the identification of competences. (SEM, 2020a; SEM, 2020b; SEM, 2020c)

Practices in terms of the assessment of potential vary across cantons and methods may vary from a questionnaire to a portfolio approach for the assessment of potential. However, in all cases, the first step is to assess the linguistic level and the educational, professional and even extra-professional career paths of individuals in order to establish their potential for integration into the labour market, which provide the basis for individual measures taken. Sometimes they are language courses, internships in companies, specific courses or even a VET training, like the INVOL/PAI pilot programme for pre-apprenticeship, integration and early language promotion⁴⁴. These measures are aimed primarily at young migrants with greater potential for integration into the labour market. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is rarely applied in this context.

In addition, some initiatives exist that include elements of validation. The PROGREDIR initiative, for example, addresses migrant women working in the

⁴¹ The 2018 update of the Inventory at least included detailed data on the number of admissions 'sur dossier' by type of higher education institution – whereas comprehensive data on other validation procedures was also unavailable then. For the 2023 update, it was not possible to include data on the number of admissions 'sur dossier' from the Federal Statistical Office.

⁴² 'fide' stands for 'Français, Italiano, Deutsch in Switzerland' and is the name of the Swiss system for promoting the linguistic integration of the migrant population: <https://www.fide-info.ch/en/entwicklung>

⁴³ These include a flexible set of tools and instruments to facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees by developing individual integration plans and setting individual integration goals. The assessment of potential refers to: identifying the individual's goals and expectations with regard to their integration; identification of the individual's competences; identification of the individual's motivation, flexibility and ability to learn; setting realistic goals for the integration and elaborating an integration plan.

⁴⁴ Since 2018, the 'integration pre-apprenticeship programme' (INVOL/PAI) has been offered to refugees and temporarily admitted persons in order to allow for a smoother labour integration of these groups. The programme seeks to prepare these groups for participation in an apprenticeship training programme. <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/themen/integration/ppnb/integrvorlehre-sprachfoerd.html>

cleaning, hotel and hospitality sector. The programme starts out with a skills audit and leads candidates through a tailored two-year training programme to prepare them for the final apprenticeship exam and acquisition of a Federal VET certificate or diploma. (PROGREDIR; n.d.)

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

The main method used in Switzerland to identify, document and assess learning outcomes is the validation dossier, as described in the 2018 update of the Inventory. Additionally, other methods are included as well, including declarative methods, interviews, observations, presentations and work simulations (see 2018 Inventory report).

IVET

The IVET validation procedure is based on the preparation of a validation portfolio/dossier. Candidates generally receive support for the preparation of their dossier through the interview method. Nevertheless, significant differences across cantons remain in how prior learning achievements can be recognised in IVET. Differences can be observed both with regard to the degree of standardisation and with regard to methods and processes used. While some cantons assess dossiers that need to be submitted online, other cantons invite candidates for an interview (Salzmann et al. 2020).

For example, for the validation procedure in the canton of Zurich, there are four different options offered for demonstrating professional competence: a written report of experience; an oral report of experience; an on-the-job-visit; and a project and order documentation. (Salzmann et al., 2018)

A study conducted in the canton of Waadt, between 2017 and 2021, on the experiences of adults in obtaining a VET qualification issued several recommendations on how the IVET validation procedure could be improved. These included the following: providing more individual interviews to those who need them; involving peers in information sessions to motivate participants; providing clearer documents to candidates on portfolio drafting, reducing the required size of the portfolio, and providing better training for experts in communication with candidates. (CePCO, 2020)

Continuous VET and higher education

As described in the 2018 update of the Inventory, the validation dossier is the core element of validation procedures in CVET and HE. However, the assessment varies from one context to another. In several cases, the interview method is not used and assessors make their evaluation solely based on the dossier (see 2018 Inventory report).

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

VET

Compared to the 2018 Inventory, when the use of a webtool to prepare the validation dossier to acquire a VET qualification was only reported for the canton of Zurich, the use of these webtools has been expanded in recent years. The three cantons of Bern, Wallis and Basel Land have since adopted the validation tool developed by the canton of Zurich, whereas the canton of Geneva has introduced another tool. The cantons of Vaud and Ticino are currently considering the use of ICT tools in validation.

The validation tool (i.e. the one originally developed by the canton of Zurich) supports the elaboration of the validation dossier and guides candidates through the validation process. For the canton of Zurich, it can be accessed at <https://www.zh.bae-dpa.ch/Verwaltung/111/40> The dossier can only be submitted through the validation tool and not in any other way.

Candidates need to pay CHF 90 in order to receive the login details to register on the validation tool. After registration, candidates are required to undertake a self-assessment, based on a questionnaire, in the validation tool. Afterwards, both the compilation of the dossier by the candidate and the assessment of the dossier

For each module, candidates need to self-assess themselves based on statements with a four-point Likert scale. In addition, the validation tool gives candidates the opportunity to invite a third party (e.g. employer) to undertake a third-party assessment on one or more modules. If this is the case, the validation tool will send a request to the third party and ask them to make their assessment within three weeks. Candidates can then add the third-party assessment as additional evidence to their dossier.

On the basis of the experts' evaluation, a certificate of prior learning will be issued, which will be available in the validation portal and will additionally be sent to the candidate as a paper copy by mail. If the evaluation is positive, this will automatically lead to the award of the respective VET qualification (Federal VET Certificate or Federal VET Diploma). In case of a negative evaluation outcome, the certificate of prior learning will list recommendations on how the unsuccessful candidate could acquire the missing learning outcomes. (Kanton Zurich, 2020; Kanton Zurich, 2019)

Third sector

In the third sector, for example, the Volunteer Dossier (see 3.4. has been recently digitalised. Since 2022, it has been possible to create the Volunteer Dossier – a tool to document and make visible voluntary work - fully online. Users can also share their profile online, e.g. with potential employers (benevol Schweiz – Suisse, n.d.).

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

As reported in the 2018 update of the Inventory, the quality assurance for validation is linked to the general quality assurance mechanisms in the Swiss education system. Art. 61a of the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Federation stipulates that the 'Confederation and the Cantons shall, within the scope of their powers, jointly ensure the high quality and accessibility of the Swiss Education Area.'

Both the Confederation and the cantons support jointly and on equal level the monitoring of education. The General Secretariat of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (CDIP/EDK) and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), being executive State Secretariat, monitor jointly with the Federal Office for Statistics (OFS). In addition, each sector of the education system has specific guidelines for quality assurance, such as the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance AAQ of universities.

IVET

IVET is the only sector for which specific regulations for quality assurance of validation procedures have been issued. The previous guidelines for validation issued by OPET in 2010⁴⁵ were replaced in 2017/2018 by the following two documents:

- (c) Handbook Initial VET for adults (SERI, 2017);
- (d) Validation of educational achievements in initial VET (SERI, 2018a).

Quality assurance is based on Art. 8 of the Vocational Education and Training Act. The responsibilities are divided as follows⁴⁶:

- (a) The Confederation is responsible for ensuring the quality at system level. It is also obliged to guarantee that regional and sectoral variations are being protected.
- (b) The cantons are responsible for implementing qualification procedures. In particular, they are in charge of creating the structures and designating the services responsible, of ensuring the quality of the procedures, setting up the complementary training, issuing federal qualifications, state legal procedures; and, participating in the ongoing development of procedures.

The Swiss Conference of VET Agencies (SBBK/CSFP) is responsible for the coordination and exchange of experiences between cantons.

- (c) The professional organisations ('Organisationen der Arbeitswelt, OdA') are responsible for the content of the IVET programmes. At regional level, they are in charge of identifying the assessors (who are the same as those who operate within the traditional qualification procedures). At national level, they are in charge of defining the competence profile and assessment criteria for the validation procedure.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

As described in the 2018 Inventory, there are no national studies focusing on measuring the take-up and success of validation practices.

For validation in IVET, two relevant study reports date back to 2017 and investigated the impact of the vocational qualification for adults initiative on adults and on employers (Schmid et al., 2017; Tsandev et al., 2017). Schmid et al. (2017) in their study on adults' perspective towards the vocational qualification for adults initiative, reported that interviewed adults referred to the complexity of the IVET validation procedure and required detail for the documentation of the achieved competences as a key hindrance in the process. Another challenge reported was the overall duration of the process, which in some cases may take up to five years (average duration 1 to 3 years). The same hindrances were cited by interviewees who dropped out from the validation procedure.

No information on any other mechanisms in place for monitoring and evaluation of validation practices could be obtained.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

There are no reported changes with regard to the position of validation in society, compared to the 2018 update of the Inventory. Although specific activities have been

⁴⁵ OPET was the former Office for Professional Education and Training, which has since been integrated into SERI.

⁴⁶ See also 2018 update of the Inventory for a more detailed description of these roles. SBBK/CSFP (2022) also provides a very good description of the different quality assurance roles in the IVET validation procedure.

set in previous years to raise awareness of validation initiatives in particular in the field of IVET, reported challenges remain.

The importance of promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning is embedded in national training policies and regulated by law in the initial VET sector. Information on possibilities for validation is generally available on the respective providers' website and for IVET on the cantonal gateway information portals (see chapter 7 for more information).

With regard to the acceptance of qualifications obtained through validation, some mistrust or suspicion remains, both among educational institutions and employers, as was also reported in the 2018 update of the Inventory. A qualification acquired through validation is sometimes still considered as a qualification obtained 'at a discount'⁴⁷.

Tsandev et al. (2017), in a study on employers' perspective towards the vocational qualification of adults initiative, found that many interviewed employers were not aware of the validation procedure for IVET qualifications. At the same time, the study also found that many employers seem to have reservations toward the validation of non-formal and informal learning, either questioning its benefits from company perspective or the concern that it could lead to a 'VET diploma light'.

In a more recent study, Salzmann et al. (2023) conclude that there is still little awareness and little acceptance of the IVET validation procedure both in the labour market and in society. Both targeted individuals but also companies, professional organisations and institutions such as regional employment services seem little informed about possibilities for validation. There are misconceptions about how a validation procedure works and what it entails. The prejudice that it is an easy way to obtain a vocational qualification remains. In this sense, no major changes have been reported in comparison to 2018 concerning the position of validation in society.

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⁴⁷ While IVET diplomas are the same no matter what pathway has been chosen to obtain them, one could technically identify a diploma obtained by validation through the absence of a training company.

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- Federal Department of Home Affairs - FDHA: <https://www.edi.admin.ch/>
- Federal Office for Swiss Statistics: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/>
- State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO : <https://www.seco.admin.ch/>
- State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI: <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/>
- State Secretariat for Migration – ODM: <https://www.sem.admin.ch>
- Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance – <https://aaq.ch/en/>
- Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education – EDK/CDIP: <https://www.cdip.ch/fr>
- Swiss Conference of VET/PE Agencies - CSFP/SBKK: <https://www.edk.ch/fr/csfp/>
- Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education - CSRE/SKBF: <http://www.skbf-csre.ch/en/news/>
- Swiss federal university of vocational education and training - SFUVET <https://www.sfuvet.swiss/>
- Swiss Vocational Education and Training documents in English: <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/en/home/education/v-p-c-e.html>
- Swissuniversities: portal of Swiss universities <http://www.swissuniversities.ch>
- Swiss Portal for VET, HE and career guidance: <https://www.berufsberatung.ch/>

Other organisations

- Centre for continuing education and lifelong learning - ECAP: www.ecap.ch
- Centre for training in adult education and skills audit centre - EFFE: <https://effe.ch/>
- Movetia exchange and mobility: <https://www.movetia.ch/en/>
- Réseau romand de la VAE: <http://vae-formations.ch/>
- Skills Assessment Centre of Geneva CEBIG: <https://cebig.ch/>
- Swiss Association for Community Interpreting and Intercultural Mediation – INTERPRET: <https://www.inter-pret.ch/>
- Swiss Leaders (formerly Swiss association for managers) <https://www.swissleaders.ch/>
- Swiss association for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning - ARRA: <https://www.arra.ch/>
- Swiss Federation of Adult Learning - FSEA/SVEB: <https://alice.ch/>
- Swiss register of professionals in the subjects of engineering, architecture and environment – REG: <https://req.ch/de/>
- University of Geneva : <https://www.unige.ch/>

- University of Lausanne: <https://www.unil.ch/>
- CH-q model: <https://ch-q.ch/>
- Volunteering dossier : <https://dossier-freiwillig-engagiert.ch/>

13.2 Sources

- State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)
- State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)

Annex 1 Glossary

Swiss acronym (DE/FR/IT)	English acronym	Definition in English	URL
AAQ	AAQ	Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance	http://aaq.ch/en/
EBA/AFP/CFP	FCVET	Federal Certificate of Vocational Education and Training	
ARRA		Association for the Recognition of Prior Learning	www.arra.ch
EDK/CDIP/CDPE	EDK	Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education	www.cdip.ch
EFZ/CFC/AFC	FDVET	Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training	
CH-Q		Swiss career qualification programme	https://ch-q.ch/ch
SBBK/CSFP		Swiss Conference of VET/PE Agencies	www.csfp.ch
WBF/DEFR/	EAER	Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research	www.wbf.admin.ch
EDI/DFI	FDHA	Federal Department of Home Affairs	www.edi.admin.ch
EHB HEFP SUFFP	SFUVET	Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training	www.sfuvet.swiss
ETH/EPF		Federal Institute of Technology	
SVEB/FSEA	SVEB	Swiss Federation for Adult Learning	www.alice.ch
PH/HEP	UTE	University of Teacher Education	
FH/HES	UAS-	University of Applied Sciences	
HFKG/LEHE/LPSU	HEdA	Higher Education Act (Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss HE Sector)	
WeBiG/LFCo		Federal Act on Continuing Education	
BBG/LFPr	VPETA	Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training	
BeBiV/OFCo		Federal Ordinance on Continuing Education	
BBV/OFPr	VPETO	Federal Ordinance on Vocational and Professional Education and Training	
BFS/OFS/UST	FSO	Federal Statistical Office (FSO).	https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home.html

OdA/OMT	PrO	Professional organisations	
SECO	SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs	www.seco.admin.ch
SBFI/SEFRI	SERI		www.sbf.admin.ch
SEM	SEM		https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home.html
SQUF			www.squf.ch
Swissuni	Swissuni	Swiss university continuing education	http://www.swissuni.ch/
Swissuniversities	Swiss-universities	Swiss conference of Universities	www.swissuniversities.ch
SGV/USAM		Swiss Union of Arts and Crafts	https://www.sgv-usam.ch/fr/
VSAA/AOST/AUSL		Association of Swiss labour market authorities	https://vsaa.ch/

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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