

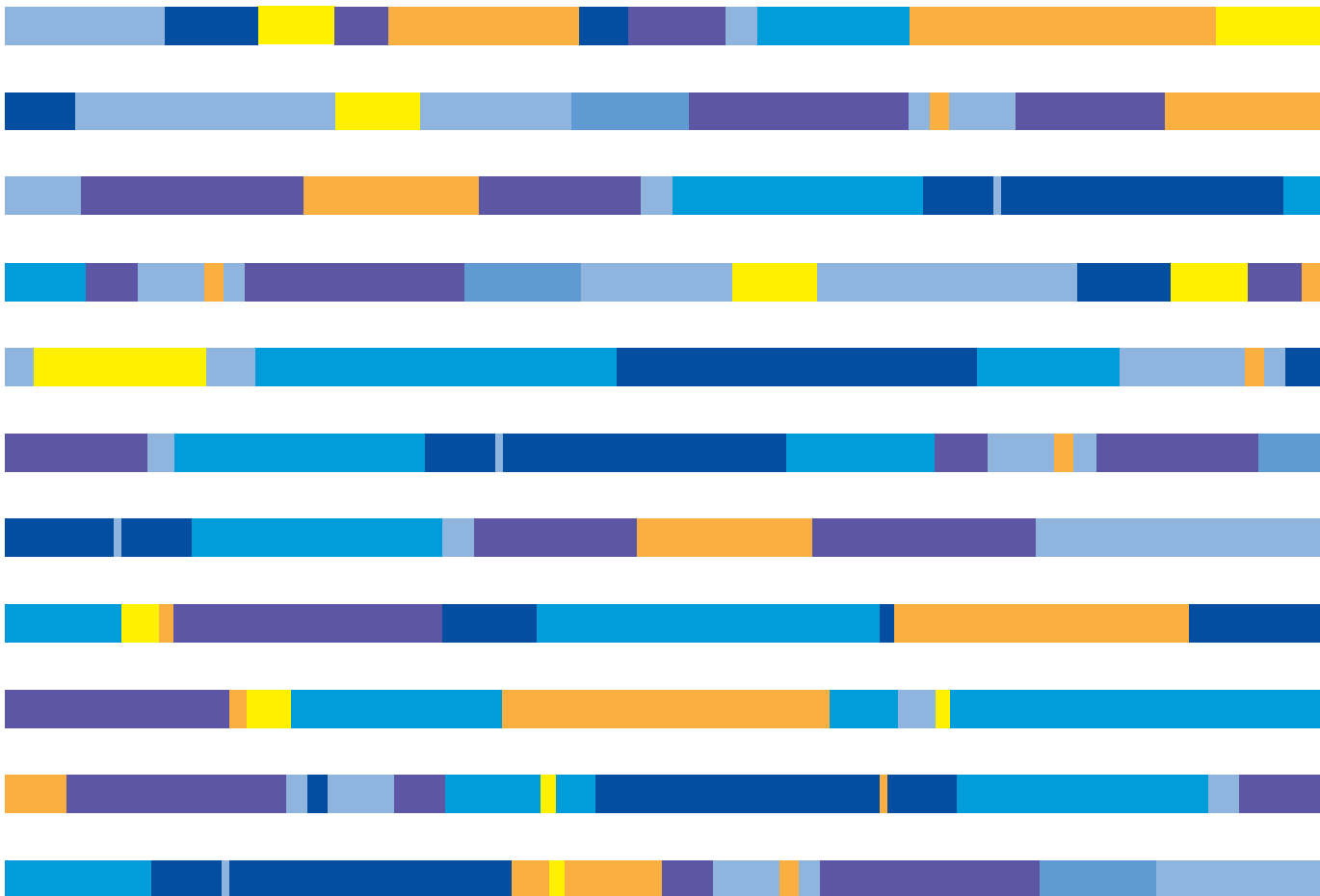


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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

## COUNTRY REPORT: **CYPRUS**

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## 1 Abstract

Validation of prior informal and non-formal learning in Cyprus mainly takes place through the System of Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS,  $\Sigma\epsilon\tau\tau$  in Greek) run by the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA). The VQS foresees procedures for the recognition of prior qualifications and work experience in a number of professions, articulated in 167 standards in 9 sectors. VQS developments since 2018 have focused on defining new vocational qualifications and on improving quality, assuring quality through revised criteria for candidates, assessors and assessment centres taking part in the validation processes, and improving the monitoring of validation procedures.

In the meantime, a validation framework has been in development since 2017, which culminated in the development of an Action Plan for the creation of mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus. The initiative was included for funding through the Structural Funds 2014-2020 with EUR 1.4 million. The initiative was concluded in November 2022.

## 2 Introduction

Since 2007, validation of prior informal and non-formal learning in Cyprus mainly takes place through the System of Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS,  $\Sigma\epsilon\tau\tau$  in Greek) run by the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA). VQS developments since 2018 have focused on defining new vocational qualifications and on improving quality, assuring quality through revised criteria for candidates, assessors and assessment centres taking part in the validation processes, and improving the monitoring of validation procedures.

In the meantime, a validation framework has been in development in Cyprus since 2017. An overall National Action Plan (EEO Group, 2018) for the creation of mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus was developed in early 2018. Experts designed a National Action Plan with a framework for a pilot implementation in the fields of adult education, youth and volunteering. The validation process will entail five stages: (i) information - individualised counselling, (ii) identification (iii) documentation of learning outcomes, (iv) assessment of learning outcomes, (v) certification. It was proposed that the duration of the process does not exceed five months. The initiative was included for funding through the Structural Funds 2014-2020 with EUR 1.4 million. The programme was concluded in November 2022. It was decided that further actions in the field of validation, based on the documents produced by the initiative, will be undertaken by the National Qualifications Authority which functions under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth and coordinated by the Directorate of Technical, Vocational Education and Training.

On the one hand, progress has been relatively slow in terms of implementing the Action Plan, on the other hand, the HRDA VQS system has been steadily expanding to cover more occupations.

## 3 National perspective

### 3.1 Overarching approach to validation

The Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) is the leading organisation in the non-formal learning sector, as it funds and promotes vocational training either at the premises of training institutions or in companies. HRDA is governed by a tripartite 13-member Board of Directors, including government, employer and trade union representatives. Since 2007, HRDA operates the System of Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS System, ΣΕΠ in Greek) which allows individuals to validate their prior informal and non-formal learning to obtain a vocational qualification at levels 1-7 of the CyQF (not foreseen for level 8) (HRDA - Tzamas, 2019). The purpose of this System is the upgrading of human resources through the Definition of Standards of Vocational Qualifications Standards (VQS) and the examination and certification of the competency of the interested persons to efficiently perform in a specific level of Vocational Qualification (Eurydice, 2022).

Hence, VQS developments since 2018 (since the last update of the Inventory) have focused on defining new standards of vocational qualifications and on improving quality, assuring quality through revised criteria for candidates, assessors and assessment centres taking part in the validation processes, and improving the monitoring of validation procedures.

In terms of basic skills, HRDA is well placed to support low skilled adults in terms of all three steps of the Upskilling Pathways, since the VQS already entails assessment of existing skills and competences, identification of gaps in relation to a standard, referring an individual to participate in poly-company training to complete gaps, followed by certification. Likewise, the project 'Establishing a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning' which was implemented by the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, was foreseen to respond to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. Through the implementation of the mechanism that was developed for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus and the piloting of the mechanism in the fields of adult education, the volunteering and youth sector, it was expected that low skilled adults (such as early school leavers) would be provided with some flexible opportunities to improve their skills and progress towards higher EQF levels.

#### **National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2021-2027**

A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the preparation of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (NSSL) for the years 2021-2027, in cooperation between several ministries and competent bodies, following a relevant decision of the Council of Ministers (Decision No.: 89.482, date: 27/5/2020). Collaboration first took place with Directorates, Services and Departments within the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, as well as with various governmental and non-governmental bodies and academic institutions. Input from the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the HRDA and support from the General Directorate for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) of the European Commission was also received. The goals and priorities of the Strategy will be pursued by the members of the National and the Technical Lifelong Learning Committee and a social partner committee that has been set up, through an Action Plan that will facilitate the work of the two Committees in achieving the goals of the Strategy, based on the Key Indicators Performance.

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (NSSL) for the years 2021-2027 aims to help national and other bodies in Cyprus to achieve national and European goals in relevant fields. A key objective of the Strategy is **to address challenges such as the low participation of adults in lifelong learning**, which remains below the EU

average. The NSSL is expected to improve efforts to upskill and retrain low-skilled adults and low qualification and will help to tackle the high rate of unemployment, especially among young people.

The Strategy is the starting point for realizing the vision of the Republic of Cyprus for unhindered access and participation of all citizens in education and training opportunities, supporting their personal development, active participation in social development, economic development and integration or reintegration into the labour market. It is also expected to benefit other groups such as early school leavers, young NEETs, migrants/refugees and older people. The Strategy has set the following horizontal strategic pillars: digital transformation, green transition and sustainability, participation and equality, **validation of non-formal and informal learning**, health and well-being and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.

In addition, in order to achieve the 2021-2027 vision of the NSSL, the following four strategic priorities have been set as key objectives to be achieved by 2027:

1. Establishing the governance, monitoring and evaluation framework that includes policy settings and action plans with clear roles of stakeholders and sound fiscal management,
2. Reducing youth unemployment and upskilling/reskilling youth and the workforce by providing learning opportunities that reflect labour market needs and take into account the digital and green transition,
3. Increasing the participation of adults in lifelong learning by improving the quality of the adult education sector, providing incentives to individuals and businesses, removing obstacles, as well as increasing the visibility and strengthening of information and communication and
4. Improving professional practice of adult educators and supporting educators of all levels of education to develop lifelong learning skills.

These priorities are necessary to provide the long-term strategic framework of lifelong learning towards the development of a knowledge-based and inclusive society and to guide future actions. They have been determined, taking into account current national needs as well as European priorities and objectives resulting from relevant programs, initiatives and mechanisms (e.g. Erasmus+, European Pillar of Social Rights, Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, European Education Area , European Skills Agenda, European Green Deal, Recovery and Resilience Facility).

The above goals and priorities will be pursued by the members of the Technical Lifelong Learning Committee and the social partners, with the help of an Action Plan that will facilitate the work of the two Committees in achieving the goals of the Strategy, based on the Key Indicators Performance.

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2021-2027 was approved by the Council of Ministers on 30 September 2022 (Decision No.: 93.682) (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth 2022).

### **Action Plan for Digital Skills**

The Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy of Cyprus has initiated the National Alliance for Digital Skills and Employment and a National Action Plan for Digital Skills 2021-2025. This is under the supervision of Cyprus' Digital Champion, a title attributed to its respective General Manager of the Ministry (decision of the Council of Ministers No. 89557 dated 10/06/2020). The National Alliance for Digital Skills and Employment<sup>1</sup> is a coalition of organizations from the public and private

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<sup>1</sup> <https://digitalcoalition.gov.cy/home/>

sectors, university institutions, research KIE Centres, the research ecosystem and innovation and civil society, with the aim of developing actions that will promote digital literacy throughout society.

The Action Plan does not give prominence to validation issues. Nevertheless, the electronic platform that will be created for the implementation of the Action Plan will include a self-assessment tool which will give citizens the opportunity to assess their digital skills on the basis of four levels: 1. Elementary skills, 2. Basic level, 3. Intermediate level, and 4. Advanced level. The questionnaire is based on the European Digital Competence Framework DigComp v2.1, which describes 21 digital skills organized into 5 skill categories. The results of the self-assessment will lead to a personalized suggestion for training to improve digital skills, according to individual preferences and future professional plans. The platform will also include an index of available training programs for digital skills offered by all the involved bodies that will constitute the members of the National Alliance as well as online asynchronous training materials in an eLearning Library (Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, 2021).

Cyprus' LLL Strategy 2021-2027 sees recognizing, validating and certifying non-formal and informal learning as a key characteristic of a successful and effective lifelong learning policy, as it reinforces the visibility and transferability of skills acquired through training programmes or from work experience. A comprehensive validation mechanism could act as a valuable motivating factor for individuals, educational institutions and businesses. A series of European policies and guidelines help Cyprus travel in this direction. However, the LLL Strategy document admits that despite various piecemeal efforts, Cyprus still hasn't created a comprehensive national system. The CYLLLS 2021-2027, recognizing the need for further developments in this area, supports every effort to establish procedures for validation and skills assessment, the introduction of quality standards for non-formal learning programmes and creating an interface between validation and certification settings.

**Individual Learning Accounts** (in Greek: Atomikoi Logariasmoi Mathisis - ALM) are listed as one of the HRDA Programmes included in the Cohesion Policy Programme 2021-2027. The development of Individual Learning Accounts and the use of Micro-credentials are both part of the strategic plan prepared by HRDA for the three-year period 2022-24 (HRDA, 2021a).

## 3.2 Validation in education and training

### Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The MESY has coordinated the implementation of the project 'Establishing a mechanism for the validation of non-formal and informal learning'. The project was co-funded by the European social fund (2014-2020) and the Republic of Cyprus and it was concluded in November 2022. The project supported a mapping study of the situation in Cyprus regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Based on the results of the study, an overall National Action Plan for the establishment of mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Cyprus was developed in 2018. This was put into public consultation in May 2018. In October 2018, the Council of Ministers, with Decision No 85.959, dated 16 October 2018, approved the National Action Plan, which included:

- (a) The setting up an overall validation mechanism and
- (b) A pilot implementation in the fields of adult education, youth and volunteerism.

Regarding the setting up of an overall validation mechanism it was decided in 2020 to assign this task to the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) which was already approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 May 2017 (Decision No 82.592). The NQA is coordinated by the Department of Technical Vocational Education and Training.

Regarding the pilot implementation:

(i) Adult Education: A steering document was produced including guidelines on how the validation of prior learning could be implemented in evening schools to enhance the potential of interested citizens to re-enter education.

(ii) Youth: A vocational qualification for Youth Workers was produced in cooperation with the Youth Board of Cyprus and other relevant stakeholders. The qualification was delivered to the Youth Board of Cyprus, which is in the process to put it into work in cooperation with the Human Resource Development Authority.

(iii) A document with guiding principles was produced which can help Universities support the validation of prior learning of citizens, which were engaged in volunteer activities. According to the current regulatory framework in Cyprus, the easiest, fastest and most effective way to link ECTS credits to extracurricular activities such as volunteering is to add the credits on top of the minimum number required amount in each program of study.

The Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS), which recognises Higher Education (HE) qualifications, can accept, as part of an individual's qualification, credits that come from work experience and credit transfers from recognised examinations of foreign education systems, provided that all necessary certificates will be submitted (e.g. A levels) (KYSATS). However, such credits from non-formal or informal learning can only comprise up to 10% of the qualification in question. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), although autonomous, try to adhere to the 10% limit of KYSATS.

Moreover, the Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) mentions that some Universities have activated the 'Occasional Study' provision. Occasional students are people who attend individual lessons and/or thematic modules at undergraduate or postgraduate level in order to enrich their knowledge and skills. Occasional students have the same academic obligations as regular students. The number of occasional students taking into account correspondence and exchange students may not exceed a percentage (usually 10%) of all regular students. Occasional students who do not take an examination receive a certificate of attendance, and if they pass the course exam, they receive grades and a certificate corresponding to specific European Credit Units (ECTS).

Other significant forms of non-formal training that take place include teacher training by the Pedagogical Institute (PI), adult learning provided by state training institutes (KIEs) and liberal adult education offered by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. These forms of non-formal learning are not yet being validated.

**The Pedagogical Institute (PI) offers training to teachers.** The training seminars are attended by teachers who see them as important for their work (based on the evaluations of these programmes by the PI). It is estimated that the number of teachers who participate in in-service learning programmes per year is 20 000. Teachers attending training sessions are given a simple certificate of attendance, which is not taken into account in the evaluation nor has recognition outside the education system. Currently, there is no process of recording the learning outcomes resulting from the training programmes, mainly because the teachers' representatives do not wish for this training to be linked to their evaluation.

There are also processes to record the input: the Register of Trainers, the programmes that take place, their content, etc. An attempt is made to record the programmes in the format of KPIs and at the end provide a monitoring certificate. PI training programmes should also include evaluation of the learning outcomes of trainees, if they are to result in certificates validating learning. The PI has the background to develop programmes in the form of learning outcomes but the institutional framework and procedures that would lead to the validation of learning are missing. The following are proposed by the PI in terms of a validation framework, as reported in the Mapping Study (EEO Group 2017):

- (a) to develop training programmes validating knowledge and skills and including a form of assessment, either through exams or work;
- (b) the certificates to be awarded should be accompanied by an analytical transcript of learning outcomes;
- (c) the informal skills acquired by teachers through self-education should be recorded, recognized and interrelated with the programmes;
- (d) all systems of education, training and teacher evaluation should follow common terminology and procedures.

**Adult education provided by the State Training Institutes (KIE)** - KIEs provide courses for adults in 40 locations across Cyprus with some 12 000 attending classes<sup>2</sup>. They offer language courses for different age groups, accountancy (certified by LCCI20), IT (certified exclusively by ECDL) and Greek. Some of these programmes lead to certification (e.g. ECDL, LCCI, in collaboration with bodies such as the British Council for English, etc.) while in most cases, they provide a certificate of attendance.

**Lifelong Learning Programmes of Vocational Education and Training** (Afternoon and Evening Classes) offer three-year and one year programs. The three-year programs are based on the curriculum of the respective daily programs of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Schools. Courses take place twice a week for 10 periods per week. Students who attend the one-year program programs are taught once a week, for 80 sessions throughout the school year. Other such programmes include the provision of preparatory courses for the Pancyprian exams and for any other external examinations for which special preparation is needed, such as the exams to secure the certification of “Operators of Fluorinated Greenhouse Gases”.

**Liberal adult education offered by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth** - Liberal adult education for personal development is provided by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth through Adult Education Centres with approximately 25 000 participants each year. A certificate of attendance is provided to participants. Interviewees were of the view that eventually there could be some validation for IT or language skills gained via such non-formal learning.

### 3.3 Validation and the labour market

The main national validation arrangements in place to help people access the labour market and support their career development relate to HRDA’s System of Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS System).

#### **System of Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS system)**

The main validation mechanism of non-formal and informal learning currently in place in Cyprus is the System of Vocational Qualification Standards (VQS, *ΣΕΠ in Greek*).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.moec.gov.cy/kie/>

The VQS System mostly concerns assessment and certification of prior work experience. There is a focus on vocational /occupational qualifications, which correspond to pre-set occupational profiles. The VQS System is based on Vocational Qualification Standards. Through the validation of the assessment results of previous learning and the certification of the professional qualifications of the candidates, HRDA's aim is for unemployed and inactive people to secure work and to facilitate the progression of the employed (HRDA, 2022), and aims to help people obtain a vocational qualification. In the VQS System, an individual may seek the validation of his/her knowledge and professional competences or a company can seek the validation of its employees. The VQS System has been developed with ESF co-funding.

During the ESF programming period 2007-2013, the HRDA had developed 72 Vocational Qualification Standards in the sectors of tourism, construction, wholesale and retail trade, motor vehicles repair, manufacturing, ICT systems and networks, trainers of VET, and hairdressers (HRDA 2016a). Since 2018, and as part of the 2014-2020 ESF programming period which is valid until the end of 2023, the HRDA developed a further 95 standards, bringing them to a total of 167 standards in 9 sectors. HRDA also revised the pre-existing 72 Vocational Qualification Standards. These are being uploaded on the HRDA site during 2023 and will be available from September 2023, whereby the assessment and certification of persons will be taking place on the basis of these new or revised Standards. The examinations take place in Examination Centres (Training Institutions and Companies/Organisations), according to the approval of the Authority. Moreover, the Standards of Vocational Qualifications are expected to be utilised for the adaptation of the detailed programmes of technical/vocational education, as well as of other subsystems, such as the Apprenticeship System, Intensive Programmes of Training and other activities (Eurydice, 2022). The System of Vocational Qualifications is expected to be included in the National Qualifications Framework, which will be connected to the European Qualifications Framework and will have an impact on lifelong learning and human resource mobility (Eurydice, 2022).

The development of the Standards of Vocational Qualifications is assigned to experts through the procedure of public tenders and the content of the Vocational Qualification Standards. The experts draft the standards which are then discussed and finalised by technical committees in which representatives of all relevant social partners and stakeholders participate. Priority is given to occupations in high demand or to occupations where the employees are without any certification.

The tasks are formulated in the form of learning outcomes for specific levels of knowledge, skills and competences as defined by the Cyprus and European Qualifications Framework (CyQF / EQF) Descriptive Indicators.

During 2022, the HRDA developed new VQs, through a project co-financed by the European Social Fund and national participation. The VQs were developed with the contribution of Technical Committees of Professional Qualifications which were made up of representatives of the social partners and other stakeholder agencies. The new VQs were approved by the HRDA Board of Directors during June 2022 and November 2022. The new VQs will be published gradually on the HRDA website and starting in the autumn of 2023, professionals will be able to be assessed and certified in the following nine sectors (HRDA, 2022):

- a) Agriculture and Food
- b) Processing
- c) Energy Supply and Waste Management
- d) Construction Professions I and Construction Professions II
- e) Trade and other services
- f) Repair of Vehicles and Appliances

- g) Tourism, Hotels and Restaurants
- h) Education, Training and Support Activities
- i) Information and Communication Technologies

Previously, VQSs had been developed in the following sectors:

- a) Manufacturing
- b) Construction
- c) Tourism Industry
- d) Wholesale and Retail Trade
- e) Vehicles Repair
- f) Professional Training
- g) Systems and Communication Networks / Computers
- h) Hairdressing

The latest available HRDA Annual Report 2020 states that by utilising the results of studies carried out during the previous Programming Period 2007-2013, the necessary amendments to the provisions and procedures of the SVQ were promoted in order to recognise prior formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The HRDA are considering whether the VQS System also adopts certain international qualification standards (such as the standard on welding from the Institute of Welding, IT skills from organizations such as ECDL, Microsoft etc.) to the extent that these are widely accepted and relevant to the labour market of Cyprus.

#### **Assessment of Vocational Training Centres (Αξιολογιστων in Greek)**

- i) In addition to the assessment and certification of persons, since 2017, the HRDA also operates a System of Assessment and Accreditation of Training Providers. The HRDA Annual Report 2020, states that the aim of the system is to assess natural and legal persons involved in the organisation and implementation of training activities or /and in the provision of infrastructural facilities for their implementation. The certification is compulsory for those who want to cooperate with the HRDA for the implementation of training activities. The following training providers are included in the System:
  - a) Vocational Training Centres (KEK in Greek)
  - b) Vocational Training Facilities (ΔΕΚ in Greek)
  - c) Trainers of Vocational Training (EEK in Greek).

The design of the System for the Assessment and Accreditation of Training Providers takes into account the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training. The project contributes to the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the training services provided.

Table 1 Number of training facilities and trainers accredited by HRDA's VQS

Year	No. of facilities accredited by the Assessment and Accreditation of Training Providers	No. of trainers assessed and accredited/certified in the VQS System	Source
2022			
2021			
2020	28 Vocational Training Centres 39 Vocational Training Facilities	296 Trainers of Vocational Training	HRDA Annual Report 2020*

2019	58 Vocational Training Facilities	291 Trainers of Vocational Training	HRDA Annual Report 2019
2018	28 Vocational Training Centres, 45 Vocational Training Facilities	218 Trainers of Vocational Training	HRDA Annual Report 2018

Note: \* latest published Annual Report

In addition, the reassessment of Vocational Training Centres and Vocational Training Facilities, the accreditation of which had expired, continues every year, as noted in the HRDA Annual Reports.

### **Assessment of assessors**

A call for assessors took place in 2017 in order to approve the assessors involved in the VQS System, according to upgraded criteria. The assessors, besides their academic qualifications and their working /teaching experience, should also be certified trainers of vocational training. Additionally, the assessors must possess a qualification at one level higher than the level they are assessing.

### **The validation process**

The Vocational Qualification Standards include both occupational-related skills, but also soft skills that are acquired through work experience (e.g. teamwork, collaboration etc.). All individuals can apply regardless of how they acquired the required knowledge and competences.

Individuals who are interested in being awarded a Certificate of Vocational Qualification can seek information and advice by the assessment centres (ΚΑΕΠ) and the HRDA. The application forms are filled in and signed by the candidates and submitted to the HRDA for approval through the ΚΑΕΠ. The applications should be accompanied by the identification and documentation report of the learning outcomes of the candidate recorded by the ΚΑΕΠ and accompanied by sufficient documentation of education and previous relevant work experience according to the vocational qualification requirements.

Since September 2016, entry requirements include four alternative induction routes for each level, depending on the qualification type/level and/or work experience the candidates possess. Induction route 1 is addressed to candidates who possess a relevant qualification but do not have any work experience. Routes 2 and 3 are for individuals with both qualification and work experience, while Route 4 is for candidates who do have sufficient relevant work experience without possessing a qualification (HRDA - Tzamas, 2019).

New entry requirements for each level of vocational qualification are published in the HRDA's Guide of Policy and Procedures for the System of Vocational Qualifications (HRDA, 2018b).

Each vocational qualification standard in the VQS System is designed in task areas - compulsory and optional. So, an individual has to choose a number of optional task areas over and above the compulsory task areas of the qualification. Through the results of identification and documentation, the individual can also decide whether further training is necessary.

Since 2016, the VQS process is expressed in terms of the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, and certification), instead of the three stages used up to 2016. In detail, the four stages are as follows:

- **Identification** of the learning outcomes of the candidate gained through formal, non-formal or informal learning. The identification takes place in a centre for

assessment of vocational qualifications (ΚΑΕΠ), approved by HRDA, where the individual is interviewed by the training director/manager of ΚΑΕΠ in which he/she obtains information from the candidate related to their acquired learning outcomes against the required ones.

- **Documentation** entails sufficient proof of the knowledge, skills and competences which have been identified during the previous stage. The training director/manager of ΚΑΕΠ asks the candidate to submit any relevant document proving the acquisition of the learning outcomes through formal, non-formal or informal learning. i.e. educational and vocational qualifications, employment experience affirmation, social insurance statements etc. If the candidate decides to proceed to assessment in order to acquire the certificate of vocational qualification he/she has to fill in and sign the application form. The application form should be accompanied by the identification and documentation report and all the relevant education and work experience documentation.
- **Assessment** of the learning outcomes gained through formal, non-formal or informal learning follows. The assessment is undertaken by two approved assessors. The assessment is based on the vocational qualification standard and entails mainly observation of the candidates under real working conditions or simulation. Assessment takes place in groups of up to three candidates in two to five meetings, each meeting having a three-hour duration, in an HRDA-approved training centre (ΚΑΕΠ). These can be private or public training centres, which are certified by HRDA as vocational training centres (ΚΕΚ) and have certified training facilities (ΔΕΚ). As far as the quality assurance is concerned every ΚΑΕΠ is obliged to operate at least one check, in order to provide internal quality assurance for each assessment. Additionally, each assessment is externally verified by an independent verifier authorised by HRDA through spot checks.
- The last stage is **Certification** of the learning outcomes with the award of a Certificate of Vocational Qualification. Assessment reports are sent to HRDA, which validates the successful candidates. The latter are awarded a certificate of vocational qualification. If the candidate has only succeeded in some task areas of the qualification, an affirmation is provided only for those task areas.

The certificates of vocational qualifications attained are gradually beginning to be accepted by the labour market, both by the public and the private sector. For example, the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Works, according to the law, considers the certificates of vocational qualifications of HRDA as sufficient requirement for entering the procedure of the attainment of a professional licence for car mechanics.

In terms of linking the outcomes of validation to formal education, this is currently under discussion in IVET. The New Apprenticeship Scheme is part of IVET and is offered in collaboration between the Ministry of Education Sport and Youth and Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. The Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) reports that the Ministry of Education is planning to organise the various non-formal learning programmes that it offers in ways that will allow participants to return to formal education (for example, to make it possible for apprenticeship graduates to enter the Evening Technical School and thus return to formal education).

### **Skills audits**

The Cyprus PES does not have a specific system in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of unemployed people. Based on the results of the consultation with the counsellor, individuals receive a referral document where their knowledge, skills, and competences, as well as career aspirations are indicated. The referral document is mandatory for unemployed individuals in order to apply for participation in training programmes subsidised by HRDA provided by local training

institutions. HRDA approves the individuals that can join each training programme. The selection criteria are relevant to each individual's qualifications and experience, while priority is given to certain types of beneficiaries, such as the long-term unemployed, members of large families etc.

### 3.4 Validation and the third sector

As noted above, a national approach for the Validation of Non-formal and informal learning is currently being set up in Cyprus. It was decided that the framework should focus on the sectors of adult education, youth and volunteering as a priority. The discussion currently taking place in Cyprus on the development of a framework for validation, includes a discussion on whether/how work in volunteering can be validated.

Third sector organisations are closely involved in the discussion on the development of such a system, including representatives of Cyprus' Youth Organization. All stakeholders involved emphasize their willingness to contribute to the formulation of the National Action Framework, which should be adequately promoted and communicated to all stakeholders and the importance of developing synergies between these actors, the necessity of a system that is user friendly and flexible, the existence of quality assurance mechanisms and the interface with the National Qualifications Framework (Source: Ioannou, 2017).

Interviews have not identified any specific third sector initiatives for validation. The Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) reports that the Pancyprrian Coordination Council for Volunteering which was set up in 2006 in order to upgrade the volunteering sector, offers a multitude short-term informal learning seminars related to volunteering for staff and members of associations and volunteering organisations. It is estimated that approximately 2 000 individuals receive this training each year. The Council has also set up a Training, Research and Development Centre, which is a certified Vocational Training Centre (KEK) and Vocational Training Facilities (ΔΕΚ) by HRDA's quality assurance system for training providers (ΑξιολογιστοΣυυ). The Centre promotes the development of its salaried staff, board members and of the volunteers of its member organizations with the aim of continuously upgrading the operation of voluntary organizations. Volunteering activities do not lead to the provision of attestations or certificates. The volunteering activities should be analysed into task areas in order to be assessed and certified. Volunteering activities may not lead to a full qualification but to a partial qualification (i.e. some skills).

Interviewees from both the HRDA and the Ministry of education note that since the validation by VQS is well advanced, the HRDA in cooperation with volunteering bodies could develop new Standards of Vocational Qualifications for third sector professions within the VQS System, including youth work and volunteering. Interviewees noted that Cyprus had a project to develop validation for Youth Workers, and it was decided as a result that the most practical way is to follow the HRDA way, by creating a standard for youth workers within the VQS system.

## 4 Links to credentials and qualifications

Cyprus adopted the NQF (CyQF) in 2016. This was referenced to the eight levels of the EQF in 2017. A Committee overseeing the national qualifications framework involves the Ministry of Education Sport and Youth, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and HRDA.

The VQS System is an integral part of CyQF and the qualifications of VQS System are incorporated in the CyQF. The existing Vocational Qualification Standards were developed during the period 2009-2011 and were based on specific competence levels ranging from basic level 1 to advanced level 5. Since May 2016, the HRDA has adopted the set of eight EQF/CyQF level descriptors in order to improve the comparability between VQS qualifications and other qualifications. The resulting relationship is as follows:

EQF/CyQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
VQS			3	4	5	6		

The vocational qualification standards by HRDA's VQS system that have been developed so far correspond to levels 3, 4, and 5, while one standard corresponds to level 6 of the CyQF.

## 5 Standards

The Cyprus Qualification Framework (CyQF) was adopted in 2016 and was referenced to the EQF in 2017.

As already mentioned, the HRDA oversees the development of vocational qualification standards and the assessment of candidates which lead to the award of vocational qualifications through the VQS. Since validation of non-formal and informal learning almost exclusively takes place in the vocational field, the standards used are relevant to the vocational qualifications. The standards are approved by technical committees in which all relevant stakeholders participate. In the context of the VQS, the Vocational Qualification Standards have adopted the EQF level descriptors and each standard is referenced vis-à-vis the CyQF and EQF levels. There are four alternative induction routes/pathways described for each level of vocational qualification. Typically, the four pathways involve a mix of formal or non-formal qualifications and work experience, with the four pathways often defining the number of years of work experience required to be considered for a vocational qualification, even if the individual does not have a formal qualification.

According to the Human Resource Development Law of 1999 to 2007, the HRDA has the right to:

- a) define Vocational Qualification Standards for any category or categories of employed persons;
- b) provide for the assessment of candidates;
- c) award and issue the relevant certificates of vocational qualifications.

In 2017, HRDA began the process of development of new Vocational Qualification Standards and the revision of the existing ones. First a study of the labour market needs in relation to occupational groups was undertaken. It was taken into account that the Vocational Qualification Standards should be compatible with the needs of the labour market and the international classification of occupations. The study defined the main task areas which are included in each occupation as well as the relationship with the other occupations in terms of content and level of competence. The resulting list of Vocational Qualification Standards was sent for public consultation. The final list of new and existing Vocational Qualification Standards was approved by the HRDA's Board of Directors.

Since the last Inventory update, the HRDA proceeded with the development of 95 new Vocational Qualification Standards and the revision of the 72 pre-existing Vocational Qualifications' Standards, bringing them to a total of 167 standards in 9 sectors. The Vocational Qualification Standards will be written/expressed in terms of learning outcomes and will follow the EQF's descriptive indicators for each level of knowledge, skills and competence. The Vocational Qualification Standards comprise Task Areas and each Task Area is analysed into Tasks. A Task consists of: Title, Performance criteria (standards of performance), Range (breadth of achievement required), Knowledge (essential knowledge to underpin competent performance).

During the development and/ or revision of the Vocational Qualification Standards the developers will prepare draft versions of each Vocational Qualification Standard, according to the terms of reference. These drafts will be studied, discussed and finalised by the members of the Technical Committees of Vocational Qualifications. The outcome of this process will be submitted to HRDA's Board of Directors for approval.

## **6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and coordination**

### **HRDA**

The HRDA is the organisation responsible for all validation steps towards vocational qualifications via the VQS system. Currently, only HRDA validates non-formal and informal learning, through the system that has been described earlier in this report. Representatives of social partners participate in the Board of the HRDA. With regard to the VQS, social partners closely collaborate in the Board of the HRDA: All Vocational Qualification Standards, criteria and processes for accreditation of assessment centres and assessors etc. have to be approved by the Board. Sectoral representatives were involved in the technical committees that defined each occupational profile for each vocational qualification, to make sure that these qualifications satisfy the labour market.

### **National Action Plan for the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning**

The interviewees noted that the design of a national validation framework is under development. This is being coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth with the involvement of the Ministry of Labour, the HRDA and the social partners. The Action Plan foresees the creation of a national body responsible for validation. In 2020, it was decided to avoid the creation of a new Body and to assign this competence to the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), whose operation had already been approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 May 2017 (decision no. 82.592). The National Qualifications Authority now operates under the auspices of the Directorate of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training of the Ministry of Education. Interviewees however noted that the National Qualifications Authority does not have much visibility in society to date.

At the same time, the Directorate of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth has linked some of the programs it offers to the basis of ECVET teaching units and credit units, providing the possibility of moving people from one program to another. Specifically, actions have been taken to connect the Apprenticeship System and the Lifelong Vocational Education and Training Programs with the programs offered by the Technical and Vocational Education Evening Schools, which operate as second chance schools. This means that the teaching units offered through attendance at the non-formal education and training programs of the Apprenticeship System and the Lifelong Vocational Education and Training Programs are certified and recognized for

continuing education in the Evening Schools of Technical and Vocational Education and for obtaining a Secondary Education Diploma in two instead of three years (Ministerial announcement, 2021).

There are provisions for the learning that school leavers gain outside school can be validated on a case by case basis. The MESY informs all relevant stakeholders and interested individuals about this process. Interviewees noted that in practice, validating learning gained out of school by school leavers that return to formal education is not yet a widespread practice in Cyprus.

Finally, the Ministry coordinates the development of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning, of which the validation of non-formal and informal learning is an important aspect (Ministerial announcement, 2021).

### **Higher Education**

Validation does not take place in formal education, including higher education.

At the level of proposals for the future, interviewees noted that Cyprus is examining whether Universities can validate learning for University students who obtain learning from certain projects might be validated.

### **Private Sector actors**

In the non-formal education sector, certification of ICT knowledge is offered by private organisations that represent foreign providers, for example, ECDL and the ICT certification provided by the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry. For these two certifications, the validation of non-formal learning takes place through examinations set by the 'mother' organisations (ECDL Foundation and ICT Europe, respectively).

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

### **7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising**

The HRDA informs the public of its activities on a regular basis, the VQS System included, through the press, internet, radio and television. The HRDA also invites the companies to participate in the VQS and channel their employees to certification through the system. Awareness-raising events for companies have taken place at local level, to which CEOs and sectoral representatives are invited.

At the time of writing this report, an information campaign was being planned by the HRDA in order to increase awareness of and participation in validation via the VQS since the numbers of individuals who have taken part in the assessment process to date, is not considered to be very high compared to the size of the perceived target group in society.

### **7.2 Information, advice and guidance**

Information, advice and guidance to validation users is provided by the following actors:

- a) PES specialised employment counsellors provide individualised guidance to unemployed individuals. The PES does not have a specific system in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of unemployed people but

employment counsellors in the local PES offices are aware of the VQS and they encourage unemployed people to participate.

- b) During the VQS initial stage of identification the training director/manager of the centre (ΚΑΕΠ) calls the candidates to discuss their learning outcomes and gives advice to each candidate for choosing a specific qualification and proceeding with the application for assessment and certification. For the purpose of this interview the Vocational Qualification Standards are used in order to find out whether the candidate has the knowledge, skills and competences for all the task areas of the specific qualification standard and is able to proceed to assessment.
- c) Youth Information Centres operate in Cyprus, in the context of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA). Among other services, the centres offer vocational guidance and counselling, specifically targeting young people.

Also targeting young people, the Career Counselling and Educational Services (Υπηρεσία Συμβουλευτικής και Επαγγελματικής Αγωγής - YSEA) operates under the Directorate of Secondary Education of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. The main objective is the personal, social, educational and professional development of students and other individuals. The YSEA operates Advisory and Vocational Education Offices in all general and vocational secondary schools. The Service provides individual and group counselling and vocational guidance, and a course or vocational guidance is taught in all secondary schools.

The Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) argues that the process of updating and raising awareness on validation issues is not widespread and the only information available is related to the National Qualifications Framework. The vocational guidance and counselling systems can help identify and record skills through the vocational guidance tools already being used.

## **8 Validation practitioners**

### **8.1 Profile of validation practitioners**

Since April 2017, HRDA has upgraded the quality criteria regarding the Assessment and Certification function. In VQS's assessments, there are two assessors for each group of individuals (up to three individuals). Both assessors are independent experts; they are also certified trainers and comply with certain academic and work experience criteria. The assessors have been trained by HRDA and have signed a contract regarding the terms of reference as assessors of VQS. As far as quality assurance is concerned, every ΚΑΕΠ is obliged to implement at least one check, in order to provide internal quality assurance for each assessment. Additionally, each assessment is externally verified by an independent verifier authorised by HRDA through spot checks.

### **8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners**

All assessors in the VQS have to attend a programme on assessment and certification run by HRDA, to ensure that common understanding and approaches are implemented during the assessment stage.

## 8.3 Qualifications and experience

The assessors of Vocational Qualifications that participate in VQS assessments, have to meet specific criteria for each vocational qualification and each level of qualification that they are called to assess (HRDA, 2018b). These criteria include minimum qualifications and/or years of work experience that they have to possess. The requirements differ among the vocational qualifications so that they match the demands of each vocational profile, while the assessors always have to possess a qualification at one level higher than the level they are assessing. Additionally, all approved assessors need to be certified HRDA trainers.

# 9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

## 9.1 Funding and costs

The main source of income for HRDA is the Human Resources Development levy paid by all companies in the private sector and semi-government organisations. The levy corresponds to 0.5% of the payroll of each contributing company. The levy is used to finance the activities of HRDA, and mostly the provision of training.

The major financial contribution for initiatives related to validation in Cyprus is provided by the European Structural Funds (ESF). The ESF has co-funded the establishment and development of the VQS as far as the development of vocational qualification standards and the assessment and certification of persons are concerned both during the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 Programming Periods.

The project for the development of a national validation framework in Cyprus is also co-funded by the ESF and coordinated by the Ministry of Education Sport and Youth, in the context of the Project 'Establishing a Mechanism for the validation of informal and non-formal learning'. The project was included for co-financing through the Structural Funds 2014-2020 programming period with EUR 1.4 million, and it was concluded in November 2022.

### **Distribution of costs**

Individuals participating in VQS assessments are not required to pay any fee. The 2016 report also provides information on the cost of private sector validation initiatives which remain in the range of EUR 50 per module. For example, the cost of ECDL in Cyprus is in the region of EUR 64 (source: <http://ecdl.com.cy/>), covering the cost of a logbook and the cost of each ECDL Core test.

The Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) identified that stakeholders feel that the funding of validation processes should be made from state resources and be gradually co-funded through private participation, with individuals participating in the validation process paying a fee. The mapping study also proposes that European Union resources or resources from industry, and from industrial training funds could be used to share the cost of validation.

Thus, the National Action Plan for the creation of mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning (EEO Group, 2018), foresees that a revenue for the sustainability of the mechanism, in the future, could be the fee paid by individuals that will take part in the validation process. During the pilot phase no fees will be applied for interested individuals.

Interviewees were of the view that there are many individuals in Cyprus that would be interested in participating in validation arrangements since they would stand to gain from being awarded a vocational qualification.

### **Evidence of benefits to individuals**

HRDA records the following benefits of the VQS system to individuals (HRDA - Tzamas, 2019): More effective professional education/training on the basis of standards that correspond to the real needs of their profession; increased chances of entering the labour market; facilitated prospects of finding work and increased development prospects; increased possibilities and opportunities for continuous training; and the recognition of the professional qualifications of individuals.

Individuals stand to gain more from the upcoming development of a validation framework in Cyprus. The Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) mentions that during individual counselling sessions, a gap has been identified in the recognition of previous work experience to allow individuals to access various formal education levels. For example, people who have been working in the tourism sectors for many years, seek to be trained, but access to training to obtain a bachelor or postgraduate degree is not available. There are, however, opportunities for training through the State Training Institutes, Professional Associations, MIEEK etc.

As part of the Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) mentioned above, many stakeholders in Cyprus (approximately 40) were interviewed. On this basis, the study assesses that there would be opportunities for further developing validation. Strong interest has been observed in the field of volunteering and youth programmes while it is noted that strong synergies and expertise arise from the existing System of Professional Qualifications’.

## **9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes**

### **9.2.1 Validation trends**

HRDA’s increased its targets for the programming period 2014-2020 (valid until the end of 2023), which was to certify 4 000 individuals. The table below summarises the number of beneficiaries of validation from 2018 onwards.

Table 2 Number of persons who completed HRDA’s VQS certification

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of persons who completed the certification of vocational qualifications</b>	<b>Source</b>
2022		
2021		
2020	309 candidates in Tourist Industry, Construction, Repair of Motor Vehicles and Provision of Vocational Training	HRDA Annual Report 2020
2019	366 candidates in the Tourist Industry, Wholesale and Retail Trade, Construction, Repair of Motor Vehicles and Provision of Vocational Training	HRDA Annual Report 2019
2018	315 candidates in the Tourist Industry, Wholesale and Retail Trade, Construction, Repair of Motor Vehicles and Provision of Vocational Training	HRDA Annual Report 2018

The numbers of beneficiaries of validation during the past five years have been comparable to the numbers of beneficiaries during the 2014-2018 programming period, when a total of 2 193 individuals had succeeded in obtaining validation. Of these:

- a) the majority (927 individuals) were trainers of vocational training;
- b) closely followed by 888 individuals who obtained validation in the tourism sector;
- c) 272 individuals who obtained validation in commerce-related professions and;
- d) 106 individuals who obtained validation in the sectors of industry and mechanics.

Interviewees were of the view that validation is relevant to a high number of people in Cyprus. So far, the numbers of individuals who have entered, gone through and succeeded in the different stages of validation may not be very high, but HRDA is planning an information campaign to increase awareness of and participation in validation. HRDA also plan to implement the results of an older study, so that graduates of post-secondary education and vocational secondary education can participate in VQS in order to acquire vocational qualifications.

No public database exists with data on validation users, but the HRDA regularly publishes data on validation in its Annual Reports.

### **9.2.2 Validation users**

During the programming period 2007-2013, according to the evaluation study, 51% of the 1 244 certified persons were female and 49% male, 86% were 35-65 years of age, and 29% had secondary and 53% tertiary educational level. The vast majority (90%) were employed. An impressive 93% of certified individuals were satisfied with their participation in the VQS.

### **9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups**

The interviews and desk research have not identified any validation initiatives specifically targeting migrants or other disadvantaged groups. Language learning for immigrants is offered by universities in the form of adult learning seminars.

PES local counsellors provide advice and guidance to disadvantaged unemployed people and can receive a referral document from the employment counsellor, where their knowledge, skills, and competences, as well as career aspirations are indicated. They can then complete gaps in their skills in local training institutions. All such institutions are certified by HRDA and HRDA selects those individuals that will join the programmes. The selection criteria are relevant to the individual's qualifications and experience, while priority is given to long-term unemployed people and members of large families etc. However, these programmes do not include a well-defined validation system nor stages of a system.

## **10 Validation methods**

### **10.1 Methodologies and methods**

As already noted, validation of prior informal and non-formal learning currently mainly takes place through the VQS in Cyprus. VQS methods developed in 2017 are still valid and remain focused on improving quality, in terms of the entry requirements for candidates, assessors and assessment centres (HRDA Revised Guide of Policies and Procedures, April 2017, in Greek).

More specifically:

- 1) Entry requirements for candidates exist, also relevant for candidates who have no vocational or formal qualification but have only work experience to validate.
- 2) Changes have been made to the criteria for assessors regarding the validation corresponding to higher levels of the CyQF. According to the new criteria the assessors should possess a qualification one level higher than the qualification they will be assessing as well as working/teaching experience. So far, validation has covered vocational qualification standards on levels 3, 4, 5 (and one on level 6) of the CyQF. In the future validation may cover even higher levels i.e. up to level 8.
- 3) Changes have also been introduced in the assessment centres. Since May 2017, all Centres for the Assessment of Vocational Qualifications (ΚΑΕΠ) should be certified Training Centres (ΚΕΚ) and should be entitled to use certified training facilities (ΔΕΚ).
- 4) Lastly, as far as the quality assurance is concerned, every ΚΑΕΠ is obliged to operate at least one check, in order to provide internal quality assurance for each assessment. Additionally, each assessment is externally verified by an independent verifier authorised by HRDA through spot checks.

Four validation stages are involved:

- a) Identification involves the determination of the learning outcomes gained through formal, non-formal and/or informal learning;
- b) Documentation entails sufficient proof of the knowledge, skills and competences which have been identified during the previous stage. During this stage, the candidate may decide to be assessed. In this case s/he submits the application form accompanied by all the relevant education and work experience documentation. The assessment of learning outcomes is carried out by two approved assessors, is based on the vocational qualification standard and mainly entails observation of candidates (in real working conditions and simulation);
- c) HRDA, being the awarding body, approves the assessment through the relevant documentation and proceeds to the certification of the candidate given the successful assessment in all task areas.
- d) The assessment methods used depend on the type and level of the vocational qualification. The main assessment method used is the observation of the candidates in real working conditions or in acceptable simulation conditions. For example, a cook can either be assessed in a vocational school kitchen or in a hotel where s/he works. The methods are pre-defined in the vocational qualification standards. Qualifications on higher level include additional and more diverse assessment methods i.e. written tests (with multiple choice or open questions), case studies, completion of a small project and / or an interview, presentation of a case study or a product, while for trainers, a 40-minute micro-lesson, i.e. a simulation of a training session to an audience is required.

The following table presents the main methods used in VQS through the main stages of validation.

Methods of validation	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			X
Declarative methods			
Interview	X		
Observation			X
Portfolio method			
Presentation			X
Micro lessons			X
Simulation and evidence			X

Methods of validation	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
extracted from work			
Tests and examinations			X (written and oral questions)
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify			X (online tests; product test; project; micro lessons)

Note: Micro-lessons are only used as an assessment tool for the certification of VET trainers.

## 10.2 Use of ICT in validation

The HRDA (HRDA - Tzamas, 2019) outline the responsibilities of individuals vis-à-vis the VQS validation process as follows: They are informed about the Training Centres certified by HRDA via the catalogue available on the HRDA website and they address themselves to KAEP to identify and document their learning outcomes and to submit their paper application for Assessment and Certification of Professional Qualifications. They are informed about the requirements of the Assessment and prepare for it. They then visit the centre for the assessment (with the appropriate clothing and equipment) and follow the assessment procedure.

As described in Eurydice (2022) and confirmed during the HRDA interviews, the forms used for validation have been prepared in a new form in view of the expected operation of the software system "Hermes", which is part of the Integrated Information System (IIS) of HRDA. To date, the validation process is still largely paper-based. However, with the launch of the Hermes system, the process of submitting applications, processing and managing applications, payment of sponsorships and generally the communication between the HRDA, the organizers and participants in the various Plans / Activities of the Organization, will be done exclusively electronically.

## 11 Quality assurance

### 11.1 Quality assurance processes

While the national framework for validation is under development, no national quality assurance system exists. Having said this, the HRDA has a robust process of quality assurance regarding the VQS System. All elements and participating actors in the system are quality assured by HRDA, which holds relevant registers of centres and assessors per vocational field and per region. The quality assurance procedures have been further enhanced over the past couple of years in terms of quality assuring the individuals that apply, the assessors, and the assessment centres. Given that stakeholders are highly involved in the VQS and in HRDA's governance overall, the quality assurance process has been designed in consultation with sectoral representatives, as well as Ministries and social partners.

More specifically:

- a) HRDA approves all assessment centres (ΚΑΕΠ) which are certified training centres (ΚΕΚ) and use certified facilities (ΔΕΚ). Criteria for the certification of ΚΕΚ include the available infrastructure, the managing structure, and quality of human resources, e.g. the qualifications and relevant experience of the director, training manager and officer of ΚΕΚ. Criteria for certified facilities (ΔΕΚ) include structures

and facilities according to the Vocational Qualification Standards needed for the assessment centres (ΚΑΕΠ) to operate assessments for candidates' certification.

- b) The employees of an assessment centre (ΚΑΕΠ) cannot operate as assessors in that specific assessment centre. This is to ensure that the applicant's assessment is objective and independent of the training he/she has received. Assessors are obliged to attend a specialised training programme that HRDA organises. The assessors collaborate with each other to ensure that the candidate is formally assessed through transparent and fair processes. The assessors collaborate with all participants and inform the responsible HRDA officer if any issue occurs. When the assessment of the candidates is completed, the assessors draft and submit a relevant report to HRDA.
- c) As far as the quality assurance of the assessment is concerned, HRDA has implemented some changes since 2017. Every assessment centre (ΚΑΕΠ) is obliged to operate at least one check, in order to provide internal quality assurance for each assessment. Additionally, each assessment is externally verified by an independent verifier authorised by HRDA through spot checks. The results of the verifications are reflected in separate reports.

## 11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

The HRDA monitors and evaluates all its schemes and systems through periodical studies conducted by its Research and Development Directorate. These studies are published on the HRDA website.

The monitoring and evaluation of the System of Vocational Qualifications includes the impact it has on all parties involved in the system: (assessment centres, assessors, candidates, and businesses).

## 12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

In summarising the feedback received from all relevant stakeholders during the Mapping project, the Mapping Study (EEO Group, 2017) identified that stakeholders generally see validation as an important process but also highlight that it will be important for the validation process to be perceived as valuable by the labour market and by educational institutions. The validation framework to be developed should also become known to society through adequate information sources and awareness raising.

The Mapping Study also points out that currently, most existing non-formal learning programmes are not certified and are not structured on the basis of learning outcomes, and most do not include an evaluation process for participants. However, there are training programmes that are approved by the HRDA, but the Authority does not oblige them to conduct an exam or any other way of certifying knowledge. The use of more traditional methods of certification such as tests and examinations could be appropriate. There is however the danger that if exams are involved in validation, people may not be interested in participating.

The findings of the 2017 Mapping Study are still relevant today: although validation of NFIL is being more frequently discussed in Cyprus over the past six years especially thanks to the increase in the number of occupations for which validation processes are available through HRDA's VQS system. Nevertheless, overall, validation is still not very prominent in the public consciousness and in public debate.

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

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

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

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

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