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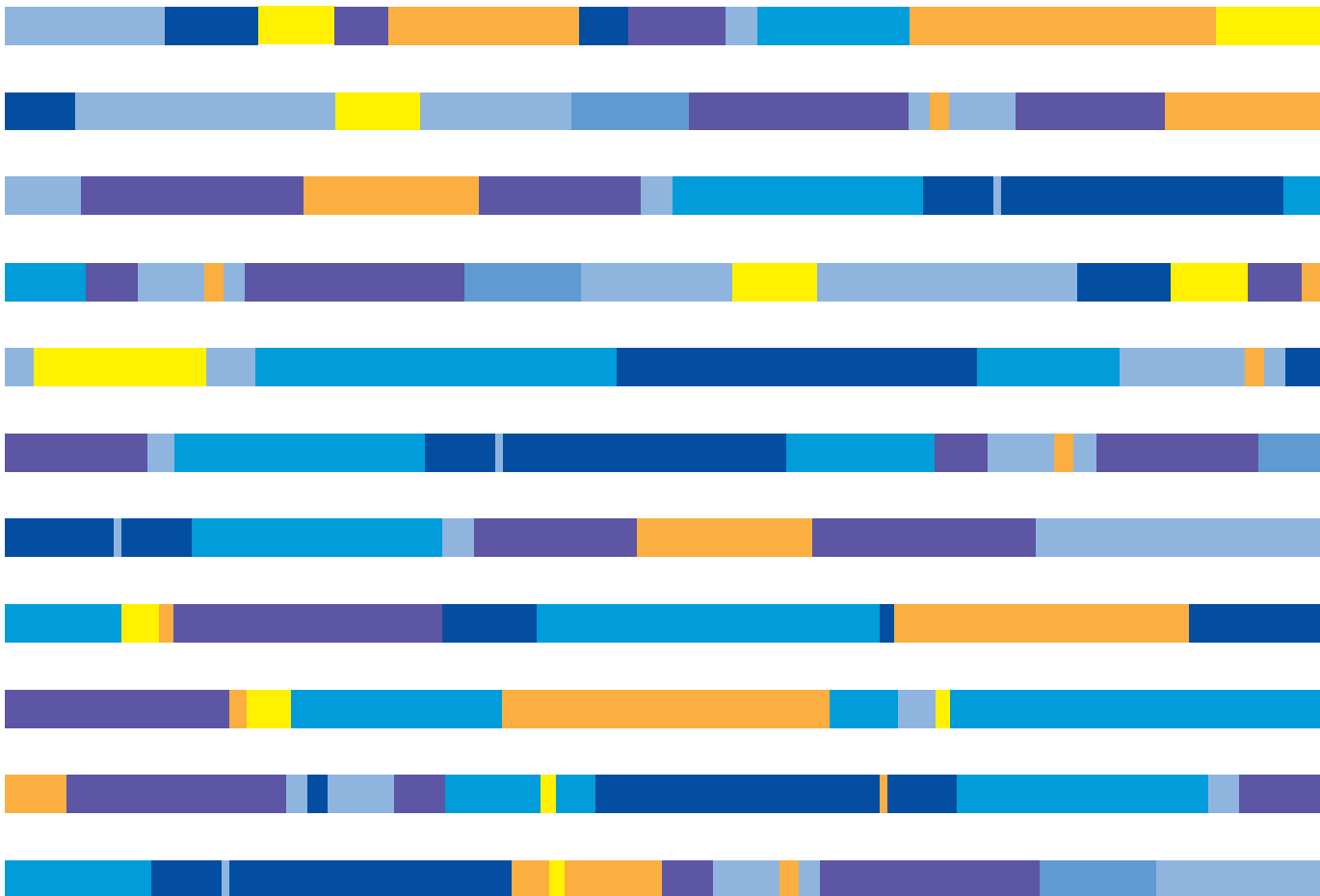
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

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CZECHIA

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1 Abstract

The validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) system in the Czech Republic is regulated by the Act 179/2006 Coll. The main tool for validation is the National Register of Qualifications (NSK), which offers an overview of all the vocational qualifications, and information regarding validation for interested parties. Up to February 2023, there have been 1 455 different vocational qualifications with more than 300 000 certifications of vocational qualifications awarded. Up to 2020, the NSK was in a development phase, supported by a project NSK2, and the mandatory sustainability period ended in 2020. After this period, the development of the NSK and creation of new vocational qualifications finished and is now well established. Consequently, the focus has now shifted more towards other activities, such as fine-tuning the NSK qualifications, their update, or quality assurance. Moreover, after discontinuing the Sectoral Councils, the exact mode of cooperation between the different stakeholders is not yet clear, especially regarding employers and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, which might complicate changes and development of vocational qualifications. Another challenge is the relatively low funding of VNFIL after 2020, which has implications especially in regards to outreach and awareness raising. In regard to future development, an important Amendment to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll. is planned, which is now being developed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and should most likely be effective from 2025.

2 Introduction

The validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) system is based on and regulated by the Act 179/2006 Coll. on the Recognition of Further Education Results. The system focuses on validation of vocational competences usable on the labour market, and therefore the main tool for validation is the National Register of Qualifications (NSK), publicly accessible at www.narodnikvalifikace.cz. The NSK comprises eight qualification levels and is currently populated with 1 455 vocational qualifications ranging between NSK/EQF levels 2 and 7. More than 306 000 adult learners (data from February 2023) have passed the exams and awarded with a certificate of vocational qualification in the last 10 years. Each vocational qualification is defined by its list of competences (qualification standard) that are further elaborated in the respective assessment standard. Assessment standards contain information on assessment methods and procedures for examination. Vocational qualifications were developed by Sector Councils (29 in total), where representatives of employers, employees, qualification authorities and academic sectors were involved to identify current skills needs and shortages to be tackled. There is a common set (a database) of competences (currently around 23 000) for the development of occupational standards in the National System of Occupations (the NSP) and the development of vocational qualifications in the NSK. Any individual applicant can stand for examination on any chosen vocational qualification upon request to an authorised entity. The assessment is competence-based and normally consists of an oral examination, written part and, most importantly, practical demonstration of skills and competences defined in the qualification and assessment standards. The authorised entity issues certificates to successful applicants. Certain vocational qualifications can be combined and lead to a comprehensive vocational qualification.

The VNFIL system as described above and further in the report is more or less parallel to the formal education system, with some connections. However, it does not cover general and higher education. In these two sectors there are validation possibilities which fall under the European definition of VNFIL, but these are not new, have not been reformed since 2010, there is no national methodology or approach to doing so, and there is little data about them. In the absence of a national qualifications framework, coordination, communication and transfer among sectors remains limited.

Among the strengths of the current VNFIL system has been its legal definition, information accessibility, quality assurance arrangements, close connection with labour market needs and until 2020 collaboration with employers on the development of vocational qualifications. Lately, the collaboration of employers is going through a challenging process as explained further in the report. The NSK is publicly available via the internet. Each vocational qualification certificate contains a reference to the corresponding level of the EQF. On the other hand, improvement in the accessibility of guidance and counselling would help individuals to better understand their abilities and further possibilities and there is a room for improvement in the coordination among sectors of education and the third sector and also between relevant policies. Raising awareness especially among the general public and users would help with the perception of validation of informal learning in society. Furthermore, some of the vocational qualifications are not used at all, in fact, about one third of vocational qualifications do not have any authorising person/institution. Validation is subject to fees being paid, although disadvantaged groups have access to validation through public employment services.

The system for VNFIL is well established in Czechia and the number of qualifications created within this system is now completed. The biggest change since the 2018 report is the fact that the NSK2 project¹ and its mandatory sustainability ended in 2020, which has had several implications. The development of the NSK and creation of new vocational qualifications is complete, and therefore the focus has now shifted more towards other activities, such as fine-tuning the vocational qualifications, their update, or quality assurance. However, the funding for NSK is currently rather limited. This unfortunately means that there is no sufficient funding for awareness raising which is an important challenge in Czechia. A project Upskilling running from 2019 – 2023 is partly helpful with this challenge, especially among schools in the regions, but more works needs to be done particularly among general public and employers. The end of NSK2 project and finalisation of the vocational qualifications also meant that the role of the Sectoral Council is now less important and new ways of cooperating with employers is currently being discussed. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is in cooperation with Employers to develop a memorandum. Even though expectations between these two parties differ, especially regarding the respective roles, the recent development showed a path to agreement, after more than two years of discussions.

The other important development is the planned Amendment to the Act No. 179/2006 Coll., which is now being developed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and should most likely be effective from 2025. The biggest planned change is that a mandatory ICT information system will be introduced for authorised persons, which will significantly decrease the paperwork for all the parties. Up until now, all the information related to validation of non-formal learning was done on paper; this meant huge quantities of paper for all parties, especially for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports that was obliged to keep all the documents for decades. The new ICT system will enable to move this information from paper form to online form, significantly decreasing complications related to the mandatory paper form. Moreover, there will be a possibility to set basic requirements for vocational qualifications, such as education, experience, or a specific certificate, which is now not allowed. The system will also be more flexible, for example, if one wants to work as a revision

¹ The NSK1 project took place in the years 2005–2008, which was aimed, among other things, at the creation of professional qualifications of lower qualification levels EQF 2–3. Completion of the system and development of its practical use was ensured by the project NSK2 – Development and implementation of the National Qualifications System (2009–2015). This project focused on qualifications of higher qualification levels, especially level 4, corresponding to education in fields of education completed by the matriculation examination. Qualification and assessment standards for professional qualifications of higher levels (5–7), which are required by the labour market, were also prepared simultaneously. Currently, thanks to the above-mentioned coverage, the system, especially for professional qualifications at EQF level 2-4, can be considered fully functional and there is no need to expand it in volume at the moment, as it was until now.

technician, he/she must have a training certificate (so this would be the entry requirement), another example would be for example a tourist guide expecting to have a language test. Finally, the plan is also to allow for competences to be replaced by a prior different certification. For example, a diver who has a certificate that he can dive will not need a diving test as part of an exam for vocational qualification.

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

The approach to VNFIL in Czechia is mainly based on passing a competence-based assessment of the knowledge, skills and competences gained by individual applicants in their prior learning, including (mainly) work experience. The competences required can also be gained through specific courses (training programmes) and acquired learning outcomes can be assessed through the same competence-based process. In 2020, the Strategy for the Education Policy of Czechia up to 2030+ (MSMT 2020) was published, which covers education policy as a whole, including the system of VNFIL. The first strategic line of the Strategy 2030+ is “Transforming the content, methods, and assessment of education” with an objective (1.8) focusing on non-formal education and life-long learning. In this section of the strategy, the emphasis is among others put on cooperation and coordination between different stakeholders to improve quality of non-formal education. The Strategy also 2030+ also promises the NSK to be revised and updated, and the qualifications in the Register to be linked to the vocational component of education in framework education programmes. Moreover, there is an objective focusing on Innovation of the system subjects with a measure on Acquisition of professional qualifications. This measure includes the key activity: “Acquisition of professional qualifications during studies“, which aims to enable the results of previous education to be recognised for the purposes of obtaining a qualification.

In the years 2005–2008, the implementation of NSK was carried out within the framework of the NSK1 project - Development of the national system of qualifications, financed from European Structural Funds². It was followed by the NSK2 project – Development and implementation of the National Qualifications System (2009–2015). During the implementation of the NSK and NSK2 projects, it was possible to create a system of descriptions of professional qualifications, which enables citizens of Czechia to obtain a certificate, thereby increasing their applicability on the labour market.

At the same time, the NSK has a number of other roles that are based on the fact that it is a unique, extensive and comprehensive database of professional competences required for the performance of various work activities that reflect the current needs of the labour market. Thanks to this, the NSK has become one of the main sources for adjusting and revising the content of the framework educational programs of vocational education in Czechia (the Modernization of Vocational Education project - MOV) and is a source for job descriptions in personnel practice, it is a starting point for setting the possibility of modularizing retraining programs, which has been undertaken the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in its project called Improving the quality and efficiency of the continuing education system in cooperation with employers - Kvasar.

² This section is basen on the evaluation of NSK by the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic (NPI 2021a).

In the years 2016–2020, during the mandatory five-year sustainability of the NSK2 project, further construction of the NSK took place. The parameters of sustainability were set by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' material "Proposal to ensure the implementation of Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the verification and recognition of the results of further education and on the amendment of certain laws, in 2016 and beyond" (MSMT–6677/2015–1). About 2 000 experts were involved in the creation in this way every year. They were united in informal voluntary groups, so-called Sector Councils, whose activities were coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce and Union of Industry and Transport.

The vast majority of implemented activities were focused on the creation of new, and revisions of, valid professional qualifications, with the supplier/representatives of employers being paid per processed unit – professional qualification. Based on the parameters of sustainability, the creation was implemented in the maximum range of 340 new or revised professional qualifications annually. The standards were to be revised regularly after a period of approximately three to four years for reasons of keeping their content up to date. This regime was maintained in the years 2016–2018, and in 2019 and 2020 the creation and revision of professional qualifications took place on a smaller scale (in 2019 there were 250 professional qualifications, and in 2020 approximately 100 professional qualifications). This decrease in the number of revisions took place because regular revisions no longer incorporated professional qualifications without an authorised person (NPI 2020).

The year 2020 was the last in the mandatory sustainability regime of the NSK2 project, and at the same time in November 2020, the contract on 'Ensuring the involvement of employers in the creation and revision of professional qualification standards', which was concluded between the National Pedagogical Institute of Czechia (NPI) with the Chamber of Commerce and Union of Industry and Transport, ended. Professional qualifications were included in revisions in approximately four-year periods, and proposals were created by working groups composed of representatives of employers - i.e. experts from practice. The result of the tasks of the working group was then validated in the Sector Councils. The NPI CR played a methodological role in this process. NSK is therefore processed by representatives of employers, specialists and experts from practice.

Since 2020, the focus of the work on the NSK has been on updating qualifications and ensuring their quality rather than on developing new vocational qualifications. In connection to this, the role of Sector Councils has been in practice discontinued. New possibilities of cooperation are now being discussed.

3.2 Validation in education and training

The situation regarding validation in the education and training sector has not changed since the last Inventory update in 2018. There is a national system for the validation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in Czechia with a focus on validation of vocational skills and competences. It concerns mainly continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and is partially connected with formal initial education and training. There is no national framework for VNFIL in higher education or general education. The CVET sector has been prioritised since the inception of the validation system because it has been and is still considered as the most important means of increasing employability of applicants, in finding better jobs and in solving skills mismatches in the labour market. The validation system and its tools were developed in cooperation with employers in projects funded by the ESF.

All four stages (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) are part of the validation system, but identification and documentation is not mandatory to apply for assessment and certification. The NSK provides the basis for identification both on a structural basis (in relation to the classifications of occupation) and on an individual basis (provision of descriptions and requirements). The PES is another important stakeholder in the identification stage. The documentation stage is supported also by the portfolio of Europass documents. Finally, assessment and certification relate to the authorisation system. Authorising bodies (ministries and other central authorities) provide authorisation to authorised entities (organisations and individuals) under legally specified conditions to provide vocational qualification examinations, assess applicants and certify successful candidates.

There are no prioritised industry sectors as the national approach is comprehensive. However, as previously demonstrated in the 2016 and 2018 update, in certain sectors there are considerably higher numbers of vocational qualification applicants than others. This imbalance is partially explained by the current labour market trends, however, the most notable differences are caused by specific legislation when a particular vocational qualification becomes mandatory for performing a particular profession (e.g. security guard).

Functional links can be seen in the possibility of combining certain vocational qualifications into a comprehensive vocational qualification and after passing a final exam to gain the qualification 'VET certificate' (výuční list), normally attained in initial vocational education and training (IVET) after three years of study. Currently this is the case for about 75 IVET qualifications at EQF level 3. About 52 IVET qualifications at level EQF 4 can be recognised as vocational part of the Maturita exam (leaving certificate enabling to apply for higher education). In order to attain Maturita certificate (EQF 4), the standardised part of Maturita exam (Czech language, English or Maths) must be passed as well (NPI 2022). However, there is no information about the number of applicants choosing this path.

In relation to validation in education and training, there was an ESF project run by NPI from 2018-2021 on "Connecting formal and informal education, including interest education - FNV" (NPI n.d.b). The project focused on providing methodological support to schools and organizations of informal education (including interest-based education) for effective mutual cooperation and linking educational activities of both areas. The methodical activity of the centres of collegial cooperation were accompanied by an information campaign to recognize the results of informal education, which will be aimed at increasing the awareness of workers working with children and youth about the possibility of having their professional competences recognized in the NSK.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

This section is based on the previous Inventories. As described in previous sections, the validation system is primarily focused on CVET, but, because the competences and vocational qualifications have been defined in Sector Councils in close collaboration with employers and their representatives (the Czech Chamber of Commerce, the Agrarian Chamber, the Confederation of Trade and Industry, etc.), the validation system and its tools are very much labour market oriented. The PES increasingly benefit from the NSK, which has been further incorporated into the national Active Policy for Employment (APE), the framework of measures stipulated by the Act 435/2004 on Employment. One of the key components of the APE is the concept of retraining (*rekvalifikace*) aimed at people with low or outdated qualifications and those at risk of long-term unemployment. The PES adopted the national policy of VNFIL, represented by the NSK, and has been linking retraining offers to existing vocational qualifications in the NSK. This provides the registered

unemployed with the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised qualification, with the related fees covered (if approved) by the PES.

3.4 Validation and the third sector

In the youth sector, a number of initiatives were implemented to support VNFIL for people who are either youth work professionals or volunteers. However, there are no activities running today. In the past, two important ESF-funded national projects 'Keys for Life' (2009-2013) and 'K2 – Quality and Competitiveness in Non-formal Education' were carried out by the National Institute for Children and Youth (today merged into NPI) to raise awareness and provide tools for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning attained by leaders working with children and youth (NPI 2021b). The first project developed, among other things, a set of occupational descriptions for a range of job positions related to youth activities, including a competence and assessment framework. A relatively large number of persons in organisations working with young people were reached through this project. The main idea was to support the recognition of competences of workers and volunteers in youth and children's organisations, independent of how these were achieved and in which organisation they were active.

The K2 project aimed at the dissemination of the Personal Competence Portfolio, a pilot supplement to Europass CV. Furthermore, six of the occupational descriptions have so far been transferred into vocational qualifications within the NSK (e.g. Coordinator of volunteers, Expert in the area of international cooperation with children and youth, Recreation leader for children and youth etc.). Every participant of Youth exchange within the Erasmus+ programme has the right to receive the Youthpass, where his/her learning experiences are recognised.

However, there is currently no running project focusing on validation initiatives in the third sector. The Ministry of Education is planning some activities in the future, especially supporting NGOs to be able to offer some courses to applicants of certain qualifications in NSK.

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The information provided in this section is based on the 2014, 2016 and 2018 Inventories.

Qualifications and qualification frameworks

Czechia has not yet decided whether a comprehensive national qualifications framework, i.e. a framework that would cover all sectors of education, will be developed (Cedefop 2021). The NSK, the main tool for VNFIL, is a register and a framework for vocational qualifications, but it does not cover formal initial general and vocational education, nor higher education. Since the formation of a comprehensive qualifications framework is not proposed in the Strategy for the Education Policy of Czechia up to 2030+ (MSMT 2020) it is highly unlikely it will be established before 2030. Despite efforts of the EQF National Coordination Point, namely the Working Group on the Implementation of the EQF, the majority of stakeholders and decision makers are not convinced about the need for a national framework, nor of its benefits. Therefore, the question on how to bridge the gaps between sub-systems, how to improve communication and cooperation among them and how to open up different pathways to access education programmes remains unanswered.

In 2011, Czechia referenced its national qualifications systems to the EQF, specifically secondary education qualifications, higher education qualifications and the vocational qualifications in the NSK. These three systems are regulated by three different acts. The National Register of Qualifications (NSK) functions as a qualifications framework for CVET with eight levels comparable to EQF levels. The qualifications framework for higher education was developed and proposed within the project Q-RAM in 2012, but it has not been officially approved and implemented yet. The NSK is closely linked to the procedure for VNFIL as all qualifications in the register can to be achieved through VNFIL. General education is not included in the validation system. The Maturita exam (the standardised upper-secondary leaving examination) is the requirement to enter higher education and no exceptions apply. In addition to it, higher education institutions can also decide to use specific entry examinations. Vocational certificates awarded within the VNFIL system differ from those awarded in formal IVET, because certification in IVET and in the VNFIL system are regulated by two different acts. Nevertheless, learners who have collected a certain set of vocational qualifications can apply for examination in secondary vocational schools that leads to obtaining 'VET certificate'. (For more information see Section 3.2)

Credit systems

There is no credit system as such in vocational education and training (VET). However, there are possibilities to accumulate learning outcomes achieved through VNFIL: persons who achieve a set of vocational qualifications through VNFIL can have these recognised in view of passing an assessment for the related IVET qualification. As noted above (Section 3.2), some vocational qualifications in the NSK are related to the formal IVET qualifications.

- When a person holds all the related vocational qualifications they are exempt from the formal training and can directly pass the final assessment;
- When a person holds a vocational qualification and wishes to pass an assessment for another (related) one, s/he should be exempted from an assessment for those competences that have already been assessed in the first certification procedure.

Data on practical use of the above possibilities are not collected. Vocational qualifications as defined in the NSK are not modularised, but by using qualification and assessment standards, education providers create programmes which can be modularised.

Further possibilities and advantages of modularisation including an opportunity for learners to have certain parts of a qualification validated was explored and developed during the implementation of the project KVASAR (Quality of Authorised Bodies and Retraining) running from 2017 till 2022. This pilot project of module retraining was implemented for the Ministry of Labour and among other aimed to make the system of requalification more flexible and shorter thanks to prior validation of certain qualifications.

Vocational qualifications are composed of individual 'vocational competences' that can be broadly regarded as units of learning outcomes. There is a methodology for creating units of learning outcomes based on NSK standards. ECTS is the credit system used in higher education. As there is no system for VNFIL in higher education, neither is there a defined link to the use of ECTS.

Regarding microcredentials, there is currently no development in connection to validation of learning outcomes, but there is plan for the future as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports intends to develop a framework for the microcredentials.

5 Standards

Each vocational qualification in the NSK contains the qualification standard, which is defined through a specific set of competences, and the assessment standard that defines methods and procedures used in the assessment and certification of VNFIL. These standards are also used as the basis for defining non-formal training programmes. The NSK platform contains English versions of qualification standards as well. The NSK qualification standards are based on the national occupational standards as published in the National System of Occupations (NSP) (MPSV n.d.). In formal IVET, the occupational and qualification standards are used for updating/revision of national core IVET curricula.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The arrangements have not changed much since 2018, so the table below remains virtually the same as in the 2014, 2016 and 2018 Inventories. However, there are some developments since the last reports. Due to the fact that the development of qualifications was completed in 2020, the role of the Sector Councils is currently less important, and they are now functioning more as a partner or advisory body. The role of the Sector Councils is now replaced by the role of the National Council for Qualifications (MŠMT n.d.a), which has two working groups. In relation to this, there are new stakeholders that were not part of the Sector Councils but are increasingly active as are part of the working groups. One of such stakeholders are the unions that started to actively participate in discussions about further education.

Finally, there are two new Authorising Bodies. The Ministry of Interior is no longer in charge of the qualifications concerning IT and this role has been taken over by the

National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NÚKIB) and Digital and Information Agency (DIA)³.

Table 1: Institutions involved in validation

Function/process	(Type of) Institution responsible
Qualification and assessment standards	Approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Developed by the Sector Council and currently managed by the National Pedagogical Institute of Czechia with a help from other bodies and experts.
Conception of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning process	The Ministry of Education and the NPI. The process and responsibilities of different institutions are defined in the Act 179/2006.
(Carrying out) Assessment of non-formal and informal learning (based on the standard) – for Vocational Qualifications	Authorised persons/institutions – these can be schools, private institutions and companies, as well as persons (for example a craftsman can become an authorised person). Some assessment standards require the presence of a jury (two or three people). In line with the assessment standard and the specified mode of assessment the authorised persons are responsible to choose the most appropriate assessment method, context, tools, as well as the exact definition of the assessment (i.e. the formulation of the question or the assignment, etc.).
(Carrying out) Assessment of non-formal and informal learning (based on the standard) – for comprehensive vocational qualifications	Upper secondary vocational schools only. In line with the regulation and specifications for the specific comprehensive vocational qualification. Note: final examinations for VET qualifications at upper-secondary level are all defined nationally and the same examination applies to regular students, as well as to people who have achieved vocational qualifications (in NSK) but have not participated in the full formal programme.
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. delivery of certificate) – for vocational qualifications	The certificate is delivered by the authorised person or the jury. Act 179/2006 specifies what information has to appear on the certificate.
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. delivery of certificate) – for comprehensive vocational qualifications	Only schools can award comprehensive vocational qualifications – these are the same certificates as those awarded by schools to people who have achieved the qualification through formal education and training (VET Certificate).
Quality assurance of the process	Act 179/2006 stipulates the requirements regarding documentation and archiving of proceedings. Appeals procedure: the applicants can request the authorising body (see below), to review the process.
Giving licence to authorised persons/institutions	This is done by Authorising Bodies, the ministries under which the given vocational qualification

³ DIA has been established in 2023

	falls. Authorisation is linked to a specific vocational qualification and is valid for a period of five years. Those interested in becoming authorised persons/institutions need to request authorisation. The process is set in Act 179/2006.
Monitoring and expertise for the overall approach	NPI (formerly National Institute for Education and National Institute for VET).

Source: 2018 Inventory on Validation – country report on Czech Republic, updated for 2023 version

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

Up until 2015 the development and functioning of the NSK was funded by the ESF within two national projects. This funding allowed creating and populating the NSK information system (the portal) with qualifications, to involve employers and other partners and to organise awareness campaigns. Since 2015, the NSK development has been funded mainly from the state budget and the main goal has been to maintain the register of qualifications, with less focus on outreach and awareness-raising, especially due to lack of funds. Also, no awareness raising campaign is currently planned.

A project Upskilling (NPI n.d.c) does some activities that raise awareness of the validation especially among schools. Last year, they conducted a survey about awareness about the NSK which found that PES have very high knowledge about the NSK, only about half of the schools surveyed know about this system, and finally, among employers, the knowledge of NSK is very low (about 10% heard about it). As part of the Upskilling project, workshops have been taking place after the first survey to increase knowledge about the system. Currently, the Upskilling project is conducting a second wave of the data collection on awareness and will present the results later this year.

Finally, a website called Education and Work (*Vzdělávání a práce*) (NPI n.d.a) run by the NPI was previously used to offer courses or work offers, but this role of the website was shifted. Today, the NPI aims to use the website to raise awareness about the validation among the public and to offer concise information about the NSK, careers or developments.

Although the system for validation had been put in practice for 11 years now, individuals are still very often not aware of validation opportunities and what benefits the validation system could bring them. How to inform people who would benefit most, such as young people and other target groups is still a subject of debate.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

In addition to the NSK portal, which has information about validation freely available, the portal, Education and Work, mentioned above offers more accessible information about development and careers. Moreover, the public employment services and their counsellors guide people towards the NSK and the possibilities it offers. The PES is gradually adopting the concept of vocational qualifications as the primary instrument offered to job-seekers in the system of retraining. The NSK technical assistance office in the NPI carries out presentations and lectures aimed at various audiences, including people in human resources, as well as guidance counsellors in public employment services (PES). Furthermore, the Ministry of

Education, Youth and Sports is also doing seminars for PES and for authorising institutions to inform about developments in the NSK.

The projects UNIV 1-3 that run from 2005 until 2014 helped to establish centres of lifelong learning in all 14 regions. These centres are usually groups of several schools. They offer adult education, career guidance and exams for vocational qualifications. The schools are not currently supported in these efforts by any project; their activities are linked to their own effort. There is not sufficient support for the inactive target group in Czechia: services related to career guidance are not widespread and the general public is usually not aware of them (Šímová et al. 2018). The PES should ensure that guidance is available for disadvantaged groups, but low motivation of difficult-to-engage persons is still viewed as a main obstacle in reaching out to them and involving them in learning. There is no specific policy measure that would deal with it.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

There are no changes from the 2018 report regarding the profile of validation practitioners. In most cases, practitioners in charge of assessment are either teachers or trainers, or professionals in the relevant sector. The assessment committee is often constituted of a mix of teachers/trainers and professionals in the given sector. However, any person can become a validation practitioner provided they comply with the qualification requirements defined in the assessment standard. If a person does not have the appropriate pedagogical qualifications, they must pass a preparatory course that is specific for the practice of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

There are no changes from the 2018 report, except for the new Upskilling project as described below. There is no mandatory or regular training of validation practitioners. The UNIV2 project trained VET school representatives, in particular VET trainers, on how to use the NSK qualification and assessment standards for the purposes of VNFIL. The UNIV3 trained authorised bodies and advisors on the use of assessment standards, the development of assessment tasks and examination specifications and also on how to guide candidates through the process. Participation in both projects was voluntary. The Upskilling project running until the end of 2023 is also focusing on training new authorised bodies to increase their number and also make the distribution of authorised bodies more even across Czechia. In total, 500 individuals are planned to undertake this training.

8.3 Qualifications and experience

There has been no change in the qualification requirements for validation practitioners since the 2018 update. For each vocational qualification the mandatory qualification requirements for the authorised person are specified in the assessment standard of particular vocational qualification (e.g. required qualification in the occupational field and/or years of practice in an occupation). The level of required education/qualification varies with the level of the particular qualification being assessed. As a general rule, assessors themselves have to be qualified in the given area.

In addition, general rules are valid for all vocational qualification validation practitioners, and these are:

- the person has to be either a qualified education professional, or experienced adult educator, or have passed a specific preparation course for recognition of non-formal and informal learning and work with adults (12 hours of courses);
- the person must have basic competences in working with computers and the internet.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

In 2007-2015, the development of the main tool for validation (the National Register of Qualifications, NSK) was funded by the ESF (CZK 651 million, approx. EUR 26 million). Also, many IVET schools were supported in their effort to become centres for adult learning and validation within three UNIV projects funded by the ESF. Since 2015, the administration of the NSK portal was funded mainly from the budget of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. It contributed EUR 1.3 million per year and employers provided EUR 0.5 million.

In 2015, the parameters of sustainability were set by the Ministry of Education and Culture's material "Proposal to ensure the implementation of Act No. 179/2006 Coll., on the verification and recognition of the results of further education and on the amendment of certain laws, in 2016 and beyond" (MSMT-6677/2015-1). Here it was decided to ensure funding for the creation of the NSK system from the state budget. Representatives of representative employers associated in the consortium of the Chamber of Commerce of the Czech Republic and the Union of Industry and Transport of the Czech Republic were involved in this process during the projects and after 2016 (in accordance with the law), even if their participation was paid in the form of agreements on the execution of the work, or since 2017, these activities have been handled by delivery and a contractual relationship with the NPI.

Since 2020, after the end of sustainability period, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports approved the contribution to the NPI to the agenda connected with the NSK in the amount of almost CZK 15 million (approx. EUR 620 000) per year. The contribution covers employee salaries, work group rewards, operation of ISKA (Information System for Qualifications and Authorizations) and IS NSK (information system of the National Qualifications System) and other minor expenses.

Distribution of costs

The procedure is designed so that the direct costs of the recognition procedure (assessment and assessors) are covered by the applying individuals. Individuals may seek co-funding from their employers in cases where the retraining is requested by the company. The current experience shows that employers are willing to cover the costs of the procedure if the qualification is related to a regulated profession or a licence to practice. The use of private funding should ensure that the system is demand-driven and sustainable. During the 16 years of existence of the system (2007-2023), there have been 306 546 successful assessments (as of February 2023) carried out. This indicates that the fees might not be a major obstacle for individuals to apply for validation procedures, although a substantial proportion of vocational qualifications awarded were mandatory due to relevant legal acts (e.g. in the case of the Security Guard vocational qualification).

The costs of examination are tax deductible for individuals. The taxpayer may deduct from the tax base of the relevant tax period fees of up to CZK 10 000 (EUR 370) for examinations which validate NFIL under the Act on VNFIL. Disabled taxpayers may deduct up to CZK 13 000 (EUR 480) over the course of a tax period and severely disabled taxpayers up to CZK 15 000 (EUR 550). Employers can deduct costs associated with adult education from the tax base as stipulated by the

Act 586/1992 on Income Taxes. It is for the authorised entity to set the fee and, in practice, this varies depending on the qualification and the material needed for the assessment (it can go up to several hundreds of euros). Initially there was a nationally defined price range set at national level. This was meant to ensure that there are no unreasonable differences in fees charged. However, it proved to be difficult to set in practice and the review of the legislation abandoned the use of such scales.

The organisations applying to become authorised entities have to pay a fee covering the authorisation process. The fee is CZK 1 500 (approx. EUR 60) for each authorisation.

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

The 2014, 2016 and 2018 reports indicate a total of 87 000, 139 000, and 183 904 vocational qualifications awarded respectively. Up to February 2023, this number has risen to 306 546. The following table gives an overview of the distribution of vocational qualifications among sectors represented by the different authorising bodies.

Table 2: Number of validation users as of Feb 2023

Authorisation organ - Ministry	Transport	Culture	Regional Development	Industry and Trade	Labour and Social Affairs	Education, Youth, and Sport	Interior	Health	Agriculture	Environment	Total
Number of authorised entities	11	6	243	277	158	283	165	165	156	5	1 469
Number of authorisations ⁴	26	18	624	1 295	294	371	254	336	551	4	2 478
Number of vocational qualifications	44	57	76	852	34	55	33	12	276	16	1 455
Number of vocational qualifications awarded	418	277	21 533	42 667	21 413	24 459	159 998	25 496	10 267	18	306 546

Source: NPI

Only data on validation of vocational skills as described in the NSK are collected. In that sector we see a stable number of people who undergo the process of validation completed with certification yearly, the number remained stable even during Covid. The average annual number of examinations is around 22 000. However, observable change is in the types of qualifications undertaken by the users, previously, vocational qualification guard was very popular, lately it shifted more to the vocational qualifications on assistants and lecturers of further education.

⁴ An authorized entity can hold authorizations for more vocational qualifications

9.2.2 Validation users

There is no data collection system set up in Czechia to identify the characteristics of validation users based on age, gender and qualification level or citizenship status.

However, even though by law, the records of the applicants are kept in a paper form, there is a non-mandatory information system (ISKA) which might be used more in the future in accordance with the Amendment to the Act 179/2006 Coll. Thanks to this system, the NPI wrote an evaluation based on the data from 2018 to 2021, which includes in total data about 69 344 applicants. The background information was not requested from the applicants so the information is based on their personal data retrieved mostly from their IDs. In relations to this, the NPI was able to analyse these users based on their age and gender.

The evaluation shows that in general, the applicants were 52% female, 47% male and 2% unidentified. Over the past few years, the proportion of women who want to take the professional qualification exam has been slowly decreasing, while the proportion of men, on the contrary, has been increasing.

The average age of candidates for the professional qualification exam recorded is 38 years old. Within the examined sample of data, it can be seen that the average age of men who are interested in the exam is slightly higher than the age of women. For men, the average age is between 39-42 years and for women it is between 37-39 years. There seem to be two age spikes among the validation users, one being 20-25 and second 40-45, this however differs by occupational field.

The number of foreigners is not recorded by the system, therefore there is no data. However, in relation to the war in Ukraine, NPI tried to find ways to help Ukrainian refugees to validate their qualifications, however, according to the Act 179/2006 Coll. The exam must be done in the Czech language and the language could not be changed due to legal consequences.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The validation system as set up and stipulated by the Act on VNFIL gives equal access to all. The system was not primarily intentioned to support disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, it is used by PES in retraining people and it can be used by early school leavers. As described above, a validation of vocational skills can be offered to those students, who do not fulfil the end of the school exam but are able to complete set of qualifications defined by the NSK. This would allow them to have a vocational qualification and therefore they would have a better position on the labour market.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

There has been no change in the methods used for the validation process since 2014, 2016 and 2018. The assessment takes the form of a complex examination in front of an authorised person or a commission. Portfolios are used as complementary materials. The applicant carries out the practical, written and/or oral parts of the assessment in front of the assessors.

The following three main assessment modes are used:

- Practical demonstration, where the person directly carries out the tasks or presents a finalised product, including simulations. This is the main method used frequently where possible and suitable.

- Written assessment, which covers both complex written assignments, as well as tests. (However, the use of tests is limited and recommended in certain circumstances only.) If practical assessment is not possible or not appropriate, written assessment is preferred to oral assessment.
- Oral assessment, which is recommended as a complementary method to practical assessment. For each assessment criterion the preferred mode is defined in the respective assessment standard. However, these modes can cover several methods.

Currently, the validation system is CVET and labour market oriented only. Application of methods is stipulated by assessment standards and is the same for all applicants, so there is only a limited room for customisation of procedures to the needs of target groups. ICT based assessment methods or EU templates are not used for validation.

As discussed, there will be amendment to the Act 179/2006 Coll. which might open qualifications for people under 18 years old, so that for example pupils who did not pass the end of school exam could validate their qualifications by passing the exam.

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

ICT has not been used regularly or systematically in validation. The information on the users that passed the certification has been collected in a paper form and voluntarily in the ISKA system. However, the novelisation of the Act 179/2006 Coll. is planned to digitalise this system so data will be collected online.

Competence certification cannot be done online by the law, it has to be done in person. However, teaching can be online, in person, or blended.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

The quality assurance framework for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Czechia has remained the same since 2018. The framework was set out in the Act 179/2006 Coll, which stipulates the approach and related regulations for quality assurance. It relies on the following pillars:

- The quality of the qualification and assessment standards: these are formulated by bodies (formerly Sector Councils now managed by the NPI) that feature a mixture of stakeholders from the labour market as well as from the education and training area. After that, proposed standards are assessed and commented on by three to five independent experts. There is also a national level guidance available concerning the process, e.g. how qualifications should be designed, defined and presented. Furthermore, there is an approval process for the standards by the relevant ministry.
- The quality of authorised entities, their expertise and material equipment: the overall criteria through which an individual or an organisation can become an authorised body, or an authorised person are defined at national level and each assessment standard specifies the particular qualifications and equipment that the authorised entities have to demonstrate. They are authorised by the relevant ministry. The authorisation is limited for five years.
- Definition of the assessment mode and material equipment at national level: for each competence defined in a qualification standard (unit), several assessment criteria are specified through the accompanying assessment standard. For each criterion the mode of assessment is defined and is hence homogeneous across

the country. The material needed for assessment is also generally defined at national level.

- The requirement to document the execution of the assessment: it is required that the authorised entities keep documentation of the procedure. It is also required that the assessment process is open to the public.
- The possibility for individuals to appeal: individuals can request a review of the process and the competent ministry has to give an opinion upon their request.

Furthermore, the authorising bodies can do field assessments of the tests and control the exams. This is used mostly in cases that ministry receives a feedback from the user, or where there is a suspicion of low quality exams. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior checks the validation more often as the vocational qualification guard is very popular and used very often. Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports focuses on organising seminars for stakeholders where they discuss the NSK systems and its recent changes to ensure the quality. Finally, thanks to finalisation of the NSK system and development of all the qualifications, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports can now focus more on the quality checks and control of qualifications, for example as part of revisions they unify competences in different qualifications thus making it easier for the users to have their exams validated across qualifications.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

There are no mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of the take up and success of validation practices.

However, there is one notable evaluation exception. The NPI created evaluation of the NSK for years 2018-2020 which was undertaken to mark the end of mandatory sustainability of the NSK2 project. This evaluation focused on the NSK and its development, it does not concern impact on validation users. The main topics in this evaluation include number of users, its development in time, background of the users, relation of NSK to legislation, its connection to the Employment Act, and many other topics.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

The validation system focuses on CVET and the labour market sectors. The value and benefits of the current validation possibilities are still not as widely understood and known as expected especially among the general public and employers, even though the validation results are now connected to Europass. Moreover, there is no comprehensive monitoring of visibility and trust of validation in society.

The only data on visibility of the NSK is in connection to a survey conducted by the project Upskilling (NPI n.d.d.) that analysed the visibility of the NSK among employers, PES, and schools (not among general public). The results showed that among PES, the knowledge of NSK is almost 100%, among schools it is about 50%, and, finally, among employers, the knowledge of NSK is very low (about 10% heard about it). Unfortunately, there is no campaign planned to increase the visibility of the NSK.

As written in the 2018 report, the prevailing view is that people are not sufficiently aware of the validation opportunities and do not feel the need to use it. Certificates from formal education are still more highly regarded as everybody knows and understands them. Major qualifications from formal education (VET certificate, Maturita exam, Diploma specialist, Bachelor, Master etc.) are used as reference points, although the notion and principle of qualification frameworks and their

potential benefits has been promoted and explained for many years. This general view has not changed since 2018.

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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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