

European Inventory

on validation of informal and non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning ROMANIA

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This national report aims to provide an overview of developments related to validation of informal and non-formal learning in Romania, with a particular focus on developments that are taking place in the context of the newly-adopted national policy for lifelong learning and the concrete steps that have been taken for its implementation.

The European Commission policies and papers that provide a strategic framework for building up the European lifelong learning community have been analysed and discussed in Romania in order to enhance a culture of lifelong learning and also to follow the EC guidelines. The country has, in fact, seen significant developments in the legislative and policy spheres for recognition of informal and non-formal learning – and indeed, is one of the few new Member States with an established system to recognise prior learning in the adult education sector.

Despite these wide-reaching developments, Romania is yet to develop a national system for the assessment of prior learning, which can be applied/adapted to all educational environments. This report contains references to political and practical initiatives regarding the on-going development of validation systems and processes in the public sphere as well as in the private and voluntary ones. The existing practices reveal that there is a growing consensus for the need to develop a global approach to validation of both informal and non-formal learning.

The final section of the report synthesises the key issues and the main strategies and suggests the actions required to build a comprehensive framework for the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Romania.

2.0 PUBLIC SECTOR

The public sphere has seen a great number of developments in relation to the validation of informal and non-formal learning since the Inventory of 2005 was written. We start off by describing the historical context, key policy developments and changes in the relevant legislation.

The second section provides examples of existing initiatives (most importantly, the certificates for the recognition of prior learning awarded by the National Adult Training Board) and projects implemented to develop the system to recognise prior learning outside the adult education system (under the EU Phare programme). It also discusses the role of validation in the higher education sphere and in compulsory schooling.

The final section discusses the main barriers for the development of coherent lifelong learning policies, including development of one coherent national system for validation of informal and non-formal learning.

2.1 **Background: legislation and the development of national policies**

Romania is a country with a solid tradition of lifelong education, especially in adult education. This developed in different socio-economic, political and cultural environments over the past 100-150 years. During the fifty-year communist period adult education lost its status, although it became a mass phenomenon during the very same period. During this period, a strong institutional network was built up but theoretical approaches and scientific research were neglected, especially in the eighties.

In the nineties, in spite of considerable efforts¹, the educational policies focused on sectoral approaches (formal education, VET system and higher education) rather than on a holistic approach to lifelong learning. However, the negotiations on EU membership and then the full membership from 1st January 2007 accelerated the development of lifelong learning. In fact, due to the fact that Romania has constantly striven to follow European trends in education, the country was the first in Central and Eastern Europe to start developing competency-based occupational standards. Since the late nineties, VET in Romania has been using vocational training standards to develop broadly formulated competence-based learning outcomes that provide young people with access to a range of occupations.

¹ We refer especially to the projects co-financed by the World Bank for the reform of pre-university education, of university scientific research and human resources development, as well as Phare-VET Program.

Romania is yet to finish the development of a national integrated strategy for lifelong learning. Nevertheless, the decision-makers' and experts' interest in the development of a coherent national lifelong learning strategy has increased considerably¹. As a result, the principles for lifelong learning have been included as priorities in policy documents related to education, continuous training and employment. For example, the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP) and the Sectoral Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources (SOPDHR) are the main Romanian policy documents for attaining the benchmarks set in the Lisbon Agenda for education, training and employment.

Some lifelong learning objectives are also explicitly found in sectoral strategic documents, such as²:

- The National Employment Strategy 2004-2010 (The Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family (hereafter MLSSF), 2004)
- The Short- and Medium-Term Strategy of Continuous Vocational Training 2005-2010 (MLSSF, the Ministry of Education and Research (hereafter MER), National Adult Training Board, (NATB), 2005)
- The Tripartite Agreement on Development of a National Qualification Framework – the strategic document regarding the NATB and the setting up of Sectoral Committees - signed in 2005 by the Romanian Government representatives, employers and trade union confederations representatives at national level
- The Ministry of Education and Research Strategic Guidelines for 2006-2008 (MER, 2005).

At the level of public authorities, a series of initiatives have been introduced mainly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity (MLSS), Ministry of Culture and Cults (MCC) and the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) to establish specialised institutes or departments dealing with lifelong learning issues, including the validation of informal and non-formal learning. For example, the Culture Vocational Training Centre is a public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Cults, where specific activities for continuous vocational training, lifelong learning and management in the culture field are developed. From 2007, the Centre has been authorised as an assessment centre for informal and non-formal learning for three qualifications.

¹ National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania. Bucharest, 2007.

² National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania. Bucharest, 2007.

Under the Law 132/1999, the National Adult Training Board (NATB) was established. Its role has developed over time from being consultative in 1999 (the development of CVT policies and strategies), to decisional in 2003 (Law 253/2003 - the coordination of the CVT providers' authorisation process; the authorisation of the Assessment Centres of informal and non-formal learning; the approval of the occupational standards). Since 2004, the NATB has been the National Authority for Qualifications (Law 559/2004).

The establishment of the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ) is an ongoing process started in December 2006 by the Phare project 2004/016-772.04.02.02.02, the first stage of the multi-annual technical assistance project financed under Phare 2004-2006 – Establishment of National Authority for Qualifications, within the sub programme Economic and Social Cohesion, Priority B – Human Resources Development.

The Adult Education Act no. 375/2002 (which completed and changed the Government Ordinance no. 129/2000 - The Adult Training Law), which entered into force in 2004 and the National Strategy concerning continuing professional training, adopted by the Government Decree 875/2005, are probably the most important elements of legislation to support lifelong learning measures passed so far. The Law 129/2000 (completed and changed by the Law L375/2002 and Governmental Ordinance 76/2004) stipulates that assessment centres are accredited by the NATB to conduct assessments and to deliver the certificates issued by NATB for the recognition of a professional competency, based on the assessment of the individual against an occupational standard.

These occupational standards are already the reference points for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. At the local level, there are accreditation committees for the training providers, without any involvement in the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Another key development from the past few years is the Order No. 3329/81/2005, which was issued by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity in 2005. The Order establishes the procedures for the evaluation and certification of informal and non-formal learning. The Rules of this Order outline that any individual, young or old, should be able to access an evaluation that is based on the occupational standards, carried out in centres of validation. If they are successful at demonstrating the skills and competences that meet the occupational standards, they receive an official certificate. The certificates are issued by the National Adult Training Board (hereafter NATB) – and the impact of this initiative is discussed in the following section.

Although these recent pieces of legislation are a move forward in the development of policies that recognize learning gained outside the formal education system in Romania, they still do not create one single framework for validation of informal and non-formal learning. In addition, though these laws are modern and designed with a view to lifelong learning, many of the provisions regarding the vocational training of adults are still non-functional, especially those regarding the recognition of learning achieved in non-formal and informal contexts¹. Besides, the National Development Plan for 2007-2013 and the National Employment Action Plan define lifelong learning as a fundamental principle, but the implementation strategies and the running programmes often fail to reflect the developments which have occurred in the initial vocational education and training system.

In February 2005, the Romanian Government concluded a tripartite agreement with the national employer and employee organisations in order to promote a national and coherent framework of qualifications for the initial and continuous training. The agreement officially defines the institutional responsibilities specific to the development of such a framework, with the sectoral committees playing a very important role in the process.

The external assistance programmes are providing important support to the NQF policy development. As indicated above, the multi annual Phare 2004-2006 project 'Establishment of National Authority for Qualifications', started in December 2006, has as a general objective the creation of a national-level qualifications authority for vocational education and training, in order to support the enhancement of the coherence between the initial vocational education and training and the continuous vocational education and training in a LLL perspective, benefiting from the active participation of the social partners through sectoral partnerships.

Another example is the Investment in Social Partnership (2005 – 2008) Project, initiated by the British Council and NCDVTE in cooperation with NATB, aiming to transfer British experience in order to support the establishment and development of sectoral committees².

¹ Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Romania. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

² National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania

2.2 Examples of existing systems and projects

2.2.1 Certificates awarded by the National Adult Training Board (NATB)

In the previous section we briefly touched upon the introduction of the Order No. 3329/81/2005, which establishes the procedures for the evaluation and certification of informal and non-formal learning. The Rules of this Order outline that any individual, young or old, should be able to access an evaluation that is based on the occupational standards, carried out in centres of validation and if they are successful at demonstrating skills and competences that meet the occupational standards, they receive an official certificate.

The certificates are an integral element of the Romanian National Adult Training and Learning system, which encompasses three key elements¹:

- Process of assessment of competences against endorsed national standards (National Standards)
- Offers recognition for informally acquired skills, knowledge and competences (Assessment)
- Provides recognition with national certification process (Certification).

The certification is a collaborative process between the National Adult Training Board and recognised Assessment Centres. Certificates are issued by the NATB and delivered by Assessment Centres to customers of the on their successful completion of the assessment process. In addition, a number of major companies (e.g. McDonalds Romania) have been significantly engaged in both the development and piloting of the system².

The Assessment Centres are accredited by NATB.

For accreditation, all Centres must meet the following eight quality requirements

1. Records Management
2. Appeals Process
3. Materials Development
4. Access Arrangements
5. Assessment Processes
6. Information Distribution
7. Facilities and Personnel
8. Up-to-date knowledge & expertise in the occupations being assessed

¹ Emerging initiatives in the EU Partner Countries – Romanian National Adult Training Board. Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, OECD, Paris, January 30-31, 2006. Conference proceedings.

² Duvekot et al (2005) The unfinished story of VPL; valuation & validation of prior learning in Europe's learning cultures.

The generic model for setting up an Assessment Centre is as follows:

1. Organisation discusses with NATB to become assessment centre
2. Plan developed for setting up an assessment centre
3. Facilities prepared
4. Assessors certified
5. Assessment instruments developed and tested
6. Assessment recording system installed
7. Assessment centre self assesses against NATB quality standards
8. External verification by the external verifier certified by NATB
9. NATB accreditation

The assessment process has several different components. The assessment starts off with an enquiry from a candidate, review of available information between the candidate and assessor and is followed by the candidate's preparation for the enrolment. The process then continues with an agreement on the assessment plan. This agreement is made between the applicant and the assessor, and includes information on the actual assessment procedure.

The results of the assessment are recorded, and they include information on whether the individual meets all the occupation requirements or whether she/he needs to undertake training or develop specific competence areas.

The actual assessment procedure is followed by a process of internal verification, and an opportunity for the applicant to appeal against the decision. Certificates issued by NATB are delivered by the assessment centre to the successful candidates.

The assessment process in brief

- Identification of aim and scope of assessment;
- Identification of competences;
- Setting up assessment methods and assessment instruments;
- Planning and organising the assessment process;
- Selection of the assessment instruments;
- Analysing evidence produced by the candidate and making decision upon competence;
- Final feedback for the candidate;
- Recording and reporting the results
- Deliver the certificate to the successful candidates

Source: Emerging initiatives in the EU Partner Countries – Romanian National Adult Training Board. Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning, OECD, Paris, January 30-31, 2006. Conference proceedings.

The Training and Resources Centre in Social Occupations Pro Vocație (TRCSO Pro Vocație), which was set up in 2002, is an Assessment Centre for a number of social occupations. More detail of the work of this Centre is given in the box below:

Training and Resources Centre in Social Occupations Pro Vocație

The Training and Resources Centre in Social Occupations Pro Vocație was actively involved in elaborating the occupational standards in the social field. It has been authorised as an assessment centre for the following occupations: trainer and home care, social worker, personal assistant for persons with severe disabilities, foster care, baby sitter, elderly home care, illness home care, socio-educative animator, trainer and nurse. The centre also offers training courses, modularised on competences, to those who are unable to give evidence that they have all the specific competences required for a certain qualification/occupation.

Pro Vocație elaborated its own internal procedures for the development of the assessment processes (accessible to the candidates), the contestation process, and for the registration of the assessment results.

To be certified through the Pro Vocație, each candidate, assisted by an assessor, analyses his/her own professional performance in relation to the occupational standard's content. The professional competences assessor explains and gives detail of the content and the stipulations of the occupational standards, and, according to the results of the self-assessment, the assessor recommends to the candidate to join the assessment process for the whole standard, for a part of the standard or not to join the assessment process. The ultimate decision to join the assessment process lies with the candidate.

Assessors use a transparent assessment process, which ensures the quality of the competence assessment. The assessor presents to the candidate the assessment methods that he/she will utilise and establishes the developing programme of the assessment process, together with the candidate. The developing programme of assessment is approved by the management team of the Assessment Centre Pro Vocație.

The Assessment Centre Pro Vocație has produced sets of documents for each occupation. These include: direct observation, simulation, written test, oral test, project, portfolio, report, to which are added the assessment file, the self-assessment, and the feed-back of the whole assessment process. For the assessment of each candidate, at least three methods are used, one of which must be direct observation. These are completed at the beginning of the assessment by the self-assessment and at the end, by the feedback of the whole assessment process.

The decision concerning the candidate's competence is established for each competence unit that the candidate was assessed for. Individuals who are pronounced 'competent' after the assessment process, obtain a certificate of professional competence for the relevant competence units. Individuals who are pronounced competent for all the competence units specific to an occupation / qualification, obtain a certificate of professional competences that represents the entire professional competences specific to the occupation/ qualification in accordance to the occupational standards. In accordance with the existing legislation, these certificates have national recognition and the same value as the graduation/ qualification certificates, released in the formal system of professional training.

If, after assessment, the candidate is not satisfied by the decision "not yet competent", reported to some competences units, he / she has the right to contest the decision. The Centre nominates another professional competences assessor, who organizes a new assessment process for the competences units that do the object of the contestation.

By March 2007, Pro Vocație had issued a total number of 1590 competence assessments.

With regards to take-up and impact, between 2003 and June 2007 the NATB issued 6,050 certificates in 38 assessment centres¹. Certificates were available for 84 different occupations/qualifications, of which the most popular were construction, social assistance, agriculture, commerce.

The number of qualifications awarded increased rapidly in recent years. For example, in 2004 only 9 assessment centres were authorised to carry out assessment in 25 different occupations.

The certification process however needs to be further developed in order to better integrate it with the emerging National Qualification Framework.

2.2.2 Validation of informal and non-formal education in the higher education sphere

Validation of informal and non-formal learning has to date only been available in non-academic sectors². However, some initial efforts have been made to bridge VET and higher education, which in turn *could* set the foundations for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Higher education institutes are also experimenting with European projects dealing with recognition of prior learning.

Furthermore, in addition to the National Adult Training Board, which acts as the National Qualification Authority, Romania has established a specialised body with a focus on higher education. The National Qualifications Authority for Higher Education (ACPART) is the national authority for the development of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, according to the Government's Decision no. 1.357/ November 3rd 2005. ACPART operates within the Bologna framework and is committed to the promotion of outcome-based qualifications in higher education³. With the support of the Phare RO 2004/016-772.05.01 Project named 'Development of Qualifications Framework in Higher Education', ACPART has developed during the first six months of 2007 a Methodology for the development of a qualifications framework for the higher education in Romania. This methodology is original by the fact that it put together the principles of the Bologna process regarding the common construction of the European Higher Education Area with the most recent documents and recommendations of the European Commission for the life long learning qualifications framework.

In fact, starting in 2007, new qualification profiles in HE will be developed by eight university consortia, which will pilot the new qualifications developed in terms of learning

¹ NATB website

² Radu Mircea Damian (2005) Bologna process national reports 2004-2005: Romania.

³ Developments in vocational education and training (VET) at EU-Level, in the Member States and in acceding and candidate countries – July 2005 to March 2006, published by CEDEFOP.

outcomes. The qualifications will be developed for those economic sectors recommended by the labour market survey results.

Moreover, ACPART is the promoter of a two-year project named *"Developing Key Methodological Units for the Implementation of EQF by Means of NQFs – EQF by NQFs"*, co-funded by the European Commission under the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2006-4607/001-001 LE2 707EQF) .

The two general objectives of the project are: to develop and test modular grids of competences and key methodological units comprising principles, mechanisms and guidance tools for ensuring the transparency of process and procedures related to the implementation of EQF by means of NQF; to exchange experiences through the development of partnerships among European, national, regional and sectoral organisations that will allow the conception of national and sectoral frameworks using the EQF as a common reference point and thus ensuring the comparability and compatibility among all NQFs involved. The partner countries in this project are: France, Ireland, Netherlands, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom. During the project modular grids for two sectors will be developed (informatics and economics), which will be based on the recognition of the prior learning and the agreement between secondary and tertiary education.

2.2.3 Validation of informal and non-formal learning in compulsory education

In the early nineties the length of compulsory education was cut down from ten to eight years, at the request of parents who did not see benefit in the education system. In 2003 the duration was extended to 10 again.

The extension of the school system included the creation of common learning standards for all pupils / students. Common standards are used, both in current assessment and in the final tests at the end of an educational cycle. The tests are set at the local level but national standards are used, in addition to lifelong learning portfolios.

These portfolios include the results of learning gained in the formal contexts and competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning, too. This means that students attending the theoretical (general), military, theological, sportive, artistic and pedagogical high schools, may receive, depending on the area of specialisation, a Competences Certificate.

This view on assessment of the non-formal learning is particularly relevant to the re-integration of those who have left / dropped out of the education system.

2.2.4 The Phare VET projects in the development of systems for validation of informal and non-formal learning

The **Phare 2001 VET programme (RO0801)** has contributed to the development of an institutional framework for the validation of informal learning in Romania. The project started in April 2003 and ended in 2005, covering the provision of initial and continuing (vocational) education and training, as well as non-formal and informal learning. With regards the outcomes, based on the proposal of the Phare TVET 0108.01 Project, and according to the recommendations adopted by the Phare ESC Sub-Committee on the Human Resources Development (hereafter HRD), MoLSSF and MER decided to designate NATB as the National Authority for Qualifications in 2003.

The multi annual **Phare 2004-2006 project Establishment of National Authority for Qualifications**, started in December 2006, has as a general objective the creation of a national-level qualifications authority for vocational education and training, in order to support the enhancement of the coherence between the initial vocational education and training and the continuous vocational education and training in a LLL perspective, benefiting from the active participation of the social partners through sectoral partnerships.

Specific objectives of the project Phare 2004/016-772.04.02.02.02 (*first stage* of the multi annual project) are:

1. Strengthening the capacity of the NATB and of the Sector Committees for the development of the National Qualification System
2. Development of a coherent and transparent qualification system, which links the qualifications through a credit transfer system compatible with the EQF
3. Development of an operational methodology for the certification of qualifications and competences, based on the common principles specific for initial VET and CVT, taking into account the formal, non-formal and informal context of learning outcomes achievement
4. Development of the national registry for qualifications as a basis for obtaining information regarding the quality, accessibility and recognition of qualifications and the link with the labour market.

The implementation period for the Phare 2004 project is from December 2006 to November 2007. The envisaged results are:

- Strengthening the institutional capacity of the ANC through achievement of required competences
- Full participation of social partners and interested parties in the development and validation of qualifications, through enhanced sectoral committees

- Development of a coherent and transparent national qualifications system, which points out the link between qualifications, through a credit transfer system
- Development of an operational methodology for the certification of qualifications and competences, correlated to the TVET system
- Development of technical specifications for the database of qualifications of the National Register of Qualifications.

The *second stage* of the multi annual project - Phare 2005 /017-553.04.02.02.02 supports the National Adult Training Board and the sectoral committees in the continuing development of a national transparent qualifications system in vocational education and training, in a lifelong learning perspective.

The project will assist NATB and sector committees to achieve the following objectives:

- building capacity as regards the development of the National Qualification System;
- applying the methodological framework developed under the Phare 2004 sub-project for qualifications development and certification;
- developing the Professional Qualifications National Register database and the related portal based on the specifications of requirements developed under the Phare 2004 sub-project
- developing the common quality assurance principles for Vocational Education and Training
- disseminating the project's results.

2.2.5 Other projects

The most recent programmes and projects in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning are as follows:

1. Ministry of Education and Research Programme – “Education and Vocational Training 2010” – Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal education;
2. “CALIST” Project – National Research Programme in Evaluation;
3. “Operational Sectoral Programme for Developing Human Resources 2007-2013” – promoted by POS – DRU from Ministry of Education and Research;
4. Phare RO R02/IB-SO-03 Project – “Supporting the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family in Continuing Vocational Training” – in partnership with Ministry of Education from Denmark;
5. Phare RO 02/IB/SO-01 Project – “Setting up The National Agency for Equal Chance between Women and Men”;

6. "ICOVET" Project - Informal Competencies and their Validation, Leonardo da Vinci Pilot Project, 2004-2006 (www.icovet.eu);
7. "ACE – Adult Craft Education" Project (www.crsfts4u.ro).
8. The most recent project 2006-2894/001-001LE2-73MOT between the Italian Leonardo da Vinci National Agency (ISFOL; project coordinator) and ANPCDEFP (Romania) "TG4 - Transparency of qualifications, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Credit transfer".

2.3 Barriers to further development

It is recognised that the stimulation of interest in developing systems to recognise learning achieved in informal and non-formal settings can contribute to the development of and participation in life-long learning, and it would also contribute to the introduction of Europass and increase the possibilities for labour mobility. Yet a lack of standardised methodologies for the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is seen among the main obstacles for the development of a national strategy on mobility¹.

Ensuring coherence in formal, non-formal and informal education and promoting lifelong learning remain among the main strategic objectives for reform and investment priorities in the development of the Romanian education system². However, the key obstacles for promoting and developing the validation of informal and non-formal learning are mainly related to the fact that this process is still relatively new:

- There is a lack of an integrated and coherent approach towards lifelong learning, with a view of the whole educational progress of an individual³. Each of the educational levels

1 Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme: 2005 Progress Report. Romania. European Commission. Education and Culture. Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies. Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies. Brussels, December 2005.

2 1. The Strategy of the Romanian Pre-university Education for 2002-2010. The prospective planning until 2010 (updated in 2002). Bucharest: Ministry of Education and Research, 2002. <https://www.edu.ro>

2. The Strategy of the Romanian Higher Education for 2002-2010. Bucharest: Ministry of Education and Research, 2002.

3. The National Development Plan 2007-2013. <https://www.mfinante.ro>

4. The Government Programme. Chapter 5 – The policy in the education field. <http://www.guv.ro>

5. The Law no. 133 of 21st July 2000 which approves the Government Ordinance no. 102/1998 on the organization and functioning of the lifelong learning system in the educational institutions - opened the way to a common framework.

6. GO no. 129/2000 on the vocational training of adults, republished and the related methodologies and rules

7. Common Order MER no.4543/23.08.2004 and MMSSF no.468/08.09.2004 on the approval of assessment and certification procedure of competences acquired in learning context other than formal education.

3 Ibid.

and segments and active employment measures have developed their own legal framework, which include some principles of lifelong learning. However, they do not link to a common framework of public policies. It is, thus difficult to ensure coherence and flexibility.

- There is a divide between initial and lifelong learning. For example, the main law concerning education - the Education Law - only includes recommendations for reforming programmes concerning initial vocational education and training, while a different law – the Law of Vocational Training for Adults (Law no. 375/2002) – defines VET for the adult population.
- There is a gap between the provisions of laws and their actual implementation¹. In terms of declarations, the measures are connected with the most advanced lifelong learning European approaches, including aspects such as access to training, recognition of prior learning and quality assurance system for the training provision. But in most of the cases, the provisions lack actual content to make them work in practice i.e. aspects are presented in very general terms, without being followed by concrete strategies and measures, without establishing deadlines and performance indicators for impact assessment.
- Romania has not yet reached a partnership agreement on the adoption of a national strategy for lifelong learning, which includes in a comprehensive and integrative manner all the aspects related to lifelong learning.

At the end of 2006, there were no proposals for methodologies or tools to apply the recognition of non-formal and informal competences in the adult education and training system as a transversal measure characterised by coherence and unity².

¹ Ibid.

² National Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme in Romania

3.0 PRIVATE SECTOR

3.1 The developing role of social partners

The role of the social partners in VET increased in 2002. Regional consortia have been set up with representatives from county school inspectorates, county employment agencies, regional development agencies and social partners. The regional consortia have a role in all Phare-funded HRD activities, including VET projects and the CVET Twinning project. The Local Development Committees have been active in the planning for TVET in all counties, and county employment agencies have witnessed the start of the activities of county tripartite boards. These developments give social partnership an important local and regional dimension. However, sectoral issues are not raised, because sectoral representation of social partners is still relatively weak.

A leading part in developing the Romanian National System of Vocational Qualifications is played by the Sectoral Committees – recently established structures which involve social partners – under the coordination of the National Adult Training Board, acting as the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ). Sectoral committees are social dialogue structures within the context of vocational training. They have, generally, a multipartite structure (social partners, government, professional associations, trade chambers, training providers), work with technical staff (permanent and short time experts) and have the following responsibilities:

- Participation in the development of the normative framework for training, evaluation and certification of competences;
- Promotion of the competence-based training and evaluation system;
- Development and updating, under the coordination of the National Adult Training Board, the relevant qualifications for each domain;
- Validation of qualifications and associated standards;
- Identification of specialists in order to carry out occupational analysis, define competences, qualifications, evaluation methods and certification based on standards;
- Encouraging participation of organisations and individuals in continuing vocational training and in technical and vocational education.

3.2 Individual companies

The importance of different fields of lifelong learning varies according to activity sector, company size and property type. For instance, in the public sector, a special focus is on foreign language learning, in the private sector on trade and marketing issues, whereas in mixed property units the target is personal skills development.

More and more private institutions offer courses for career progression, especially in the fields of IT and telecommunications, foreign languages, management, etc. Not all of them impose a quality standard in the respective targeted area or internationally recognised certificates. A good example of a centre which does is the Centre for IT Training that also offers Microsoft Certificates.

Labour legislation obliges enterprises to record the functions of employees in their staff registers only on the basis of formally recognised qualifications. However, there are individual Romanian companies that are interested in developing validation methodologies. Indeed, there are companies that have utilised the certification system of the National Adult Training Board to assess and certify competencies of employees that have been gained in informal and non-formal settings. For example, the Romanian Commercial Bank had an assessment centre for the validation of the competencies specific for occupations within the banking field. The Romanian Crafts Foundation¹ also promotes professional certification of competences, acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

The Centre for Rural Assistance – AGROTOUR – is currently implementing a Project *Trainers' training in agro-tourism sector from Belgium, Poland and Romania* (AGROTOUR TOT), which is due to be finished by the end of 2007. The main aims of the project are the improvement, assessment, validation and dissemination of the curriculum for agro-tourism learners as well as the promotion of innovative and qualitative educational instruments addressed through the teachers and trainers in vocational sector. The outcome of the project is expected to be an educational model for the agro-tourism sector for three different regions: Wallonia in Belgium, Nowy Sacz in Poland and Timis, Caras-Severin and Constanta in Romania, which will include a framework for the validation of competences and a procedure for the adult learners.

Radiocom, the national radiocommunications company, has employed validation techniques since 2000, as outlined in the box below:

¹ <http://www.crafts.ro>

Validation at Radiocom, the National Radiocommunications Company¹

The certification of competences (knowledge and abilities) is considered to be a necessity in the radio communications industry. The communication sector is subject to fast transformations and evolutions and there is a need for individuals to maintain the level of competence required by market conditions and changes in modern technology.

Radiocom is keen to maintain a high professional standard and at the same time, for its employees to acquire new competences. In addition, the company also allocates a special moral and material importance to the certification and validation of competences. Thus, the company has implemented processes to validate work-related competences, including observation, simulation, reports from third parties, written tests, oral questions, project work and portfolios. Assessments are then conducted by internal assessors (specialists in the field of the respective occupation) who are certified as assessors of competencies by the National Adult Training Board.

Since 2000, when the validation processes were introduced, Radiocom has issued 240 competency certificates, out of which 51 certificates have been issued for the employees of other companies. These certificates have national recognition and are treated similarly to the study certificates obtained through formal learning. Individuals who partake in the validation processes thus benefit from regular performance assessment, as well as career and salary progression. For the employer organisations, the benefits are: achievement of better working collectives, reduced time of the personnel to adapt to the new technologies introduced in the system and reduced time for personnel to learn, know, work and monitor equipment.

Scattered initiatives in the private sector show that there is already a need and potential for using better developed and more standardised assessment and recognition methodologies and procedures to validate non-formal and informal learning of employees. The process of creating a suitable foundation and environment has already started at the national level, which in turn will lead to better take-up of life long learning by the private sector. There will gradually be a revival of the lifelong education traditions Romania had in the 19th and the first part of the 20th centuries and which are so necessary for developing the knowledge economy and society of the country in the 21st century.

¹ Information based on the text of an interview, supplied by a representative of the NATB (National Adult Training Board), Romania

4.0 THE THIRD SECTOR

Within the third sector, some informal and non-formal learning initiatives can be identified which have been implemented by different NGOs. These training courses cover a range of fields:

- a. Second-chance courses, for those who have dropped out of school early, without gaining any qualifications or for people who wish to gain a new qualification. A good example of a validation methodology within such a programme was:

Euro-Child-Centre¹, funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme (2001-2004). This project was promoted by the Romanian Save the Children Foundation and coordinated by Economic Software Systems International, Romania. There were a number of partners from other European countries. One of the project aims was to develop vocational training and certification for educators and social workers in this field. The intended results were curricula and educational modules for educators and social workers - traditional and ODL courses, finalized with certification at the level of the participating countries.

- b. Courses for personal development, especially organised in people's free time, where the participants attend on their own initiative, mainly for their overall cultural development. In many cases, the participants' indirect aim is socialisation.

The National Association of Folk Universities in Romania (NAFUR), a provider of cultural courses, has contributed significantly to the development of validation methodologies. In 2001, for instance, these universities were the main providers of courses in the cultural area and organised 2,467 courses, attended by 42,785 participants who received different types of certificates.

- c. Courses for community education development focusing on topics such as: democracy, intercultural education, political culture, etc., which are part of larger projects, with mixed activities (festivals, exhibitions, conferences, etc.). In most cases, a clear-cut distinction can not be made between the different types of courses, as the participants have a mixed motivation or the organisers' target is combined (e.g. vocational training courses also used for the participants' personal development).

¹ <http://www.eurochild.ro/>

A good practice in this respect was the contribution of the Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning to the European Project entitled Animated Debate - Computer animation workshops for disadvantaged groups with a view to foster European partnership (funded through the Minerva action of the Socrates programme).

This project took place between 2003 and 2005. The coordinator was Bielskie Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Teatr Grodzki, in Poland. Partners from across Europe participated in the project, including Societatea Romana de Educatie Permanenta, Romania. The main objective of the AD Project was to create a new learning environment in which disadvantaged young people can develop artistic talents in close cooperation with their European counterparts. This was facilitated by communications technology. Specific Objectives were: to encourage the use of new technologies and multimedia in institutions providing care for disadvantaged children and young people; to record and disseminate the results of experiments with new forms of art based on multimedia and ICT; and to advocate the promotion of traditionally overlooked talents, especially those that relate to visual domain.

In the voluntary sector, a very good, efficient program was Art for Social Change (2000-2004) organised by European Cultural Foundation and implemented in Romania in partnership with the CONCEPT Foundation.

This program, through its component for Eastern Europe entitled 'Play against Violence' introduced theatre as an education method for young people facing violence, in order to prevent the effects leading to quick changes of attitude or conflict situations. To achieve its main target, the program offered training courses for artists and other professionals (teachers, psychologists, social assistants, educators) who work with young people, as well as support for running local and regional projects carried out by the persons already trained in this respect.

Another target was to contribute to social change by providing for the young generation instruments that could help them to participate in the (re)construction of civil society. The beneficiaries in 2002, for instance, were about 200 young people (12-21 years old) from 16 institutions of Constanta and Targu Mures and also over 30 artists, psychologists, social assistants from Bucharest, Constanta and Targu Mures, who were trained in the respective field. In 2003 two resource centres for the youth facing violence were set up to help them.

This section has considered qualitative and quantitative information on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Romania. Further efforts should be made to bring added value to this ongoing work at local, sectoral, regional and national level, as validation is a question of sound methodologies and transparent institutional arrangements, but it

represents also a question of making political choices on how to value knowledge and experiences. As Romania is now a member of the EU, its endeavours to contribute to the development of a set of common European principles on validation are even more relevant.

5.0 Conclusions

The long tradition of adult education in Romania has demonstrated its synchronism in time, and more importantly, also at the conceptual level, with the European concerns and developments in this field. In the context of the EU accession strategy and very recent post-membership developments, the efforts of this country have been focused on harmonising lifelong learning with today's standards in the Member States.

As key action points in this area, priority has to be given to:

- Support for non-formal and informal learning by social and managerial recognition, extension and diversification of learning provision;
- Promotion of training and education incentives within economic, social and regional programs;
- Provision of an increased and diversified number of training opportunities to stimulate a greater demand.

A much needed policy is to increase the accessibility of guidance and counselling services for adults and members of the local community, as well as for these services to extend beyond the strictly vocational and educational dimension and to include more and more social and citizenship aspects.

NATB is coordinating the developments of the VET qualifications system and is the national authority for the development of the VET National Qualifications Framework. It also has responsibility for designing, implementing and maintaining the National Register of Qualifications as a tool for identification, registration, permanent consultation and updating of qualifications.

In spite of the general efforts and obvious progress made in Romania in implementing the EU Memorandum on lifelong learning, there are still many drawbacks, difficulties and constraints, which must be tackled and solved appropriately over time. The wide range of initiatives aimed to promote various aspects and compound elements of lifelong learning are currently rather scattered.

In the near future, further policies and measures are necessary to break down the existing divisions between formal initial and continuing (vocational) education and training and non-formal and informal learning. One of the locally accepted tools to achieve this goal is a common National Qualification Framework (NQF). Although the conceptualisation of the NQF is incorporated in existing Phare projects under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research or the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and Family, there

is a risk that implementation will be fragmented. It is anticipated that progress will be slow without a common endeavour in which these two ministries and the social partners are equal participants¹. In order to ensure the labour market value of the NQF, the development needs to be facilitated through social dialogue taking into account sectoral interests. This implies measures to strengthen sectoral representation of social partners².

This national chapter has tried to identify good practices and validation initiatives already used in Romania, which are interesting to report, as they significantly illustrate the process of reasoning and also the state of progress in this particular field.

Significant progress has been made, including further development of the Romanian National Adult Training and Learning System, the establishment of the National Authority for Qualifications, further development of national occupational standards and the establishment of additional assessment centres and the number of qualifications to be assessed, in order to foster the validation of professional competences based on occupational standards. All these actions show considerable steps forward in developing a national framework for lifelong learning. Parallel developments such as the activities of the National Agency for Labour Force Employment and the establishment of a specialised body focused on higher education - the ACPART agency - also prove that the issue is very relevant, although complex and that the major work is still ahead in order to bring these single initiatives into the one whole.

¹ *Review of Progress in Vocational education and Training Reform in Romania*, European Training Foundation, Turin, 2003.

² *Ibid.*