

# European Inventory

on validation of informal and  
non-formal learning



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

SLOVAK REPUBLIC (draft)

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# Contents

PAGE

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<b>FOREWORD .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.0 PUBLIC SECTOR .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.1 Education Policy 2007 .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1.1 Key Stakeholders .....	3
2.1.2 Key Features .....	3
2.1.3 Barriers to Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning .....	4
2.1.4 Funding and Monitoring .....	5
<b>2.2 The existing initiatives .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.3 Special Projects .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3.0 PRIVATE SECTOR .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.1 Initiatives taken by individual companies .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.2 The Role of Social Partners .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4.0 THE THIRD SECTOR .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5.0 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>16</b>

## FOREWORD

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### **Purpose of this report**

This draft chapter has been written in 2007 by using a variety of national and international sources. Interviews with representatives of public agencies, voluntary organisations and social partners were also carried out both in 2004 and 2007.

The aim of the chapter is to provide a **brief overview** of the initiatives to assess and validate informal & non-formal learning in the country by building on to the work carried out for the Inventory in 2004. Thus, this version focuses on reporting developments from the past couple of years, and should be read in conjunction with the 2005 country report on the Slovak Republic (can be accessed from [www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory](http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory))

### **Comments and Feedback**

We welcome any feedback and comments on the chapter. If you feel we have misrepresented some facts or in case you hold additional information/reports that we have not included, please contact us by e-mail: [jo.hawley@ecotec.com](mailto:jo.hawley@ecotec.com).

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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On a national, public sector level, the validation of non-formal and informal learning has a much higher profile in the Slovak Republic now than it did in 2004, when the last inventory was written. Although there is currently no legal framework covering validation, a policy document has recently emerged entitled “Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme”, which gives validation of non-formal and informal learning a very specific focus. Furthermore, a legal framework is intended in the future, under the Lifelong Learning Act, which should be approved by the end of 2007.

In addition to this, the Slovak Republic is in the process of developing a new qualification system, which should be available in 2009. This will further support validation by adopting a credit system capable of offering parity between formal, non-formal and informal learning. Such initiatives have been considerably influenced by the EU policy agenda.

## 2.0 PUBLIC SECTOR

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The key public sector document emerging in recent years that is relevant to validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Slovak Republic is the “Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme”. Due to the fact that this document has been published so recently, it should be noted that work on implementing the policy has not yet started and work on validation of non-formal and informal learning specifically is not expected to commence until 2008<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.1 Education Policy 2007

This section of the report offers a summary of the Education Policy 2007 as relevant to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is the key policy document emerging from the SR since the last ECOTEC report was written in 2004.

#### 2.1.1 Key Stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is the central body responsible for lifelong learning (LLL). There is now a separate department dedicated to LLL, which will ensure the SR adheres to EU policies, implements the LLL strategy and within that supports the validation of non-formal and informal learning. They will work with other Ministries e.g. the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family, self-government and social partners in implementing the 2007 education policy.

#### 2.1.2 Key Features

The LLL Strategy itself has a number of priorities. For example, monitoring and forecasting the educational needs of citizens and employers, providing information services etc but those specifically relevant to validation include “*recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes*” and “*transmittance between the non-formal and formal educational systems*”.

In line with EU policy the LLL strategy relating to validation of non-formal and informal learning looks to:

- Verify knowledge, skills and competence gained in non-formal or informal learning;
- Validate non-formal and informal learning through the use of ‘credit’, which will allow parity to be achieved within the formal and non-formal education sectors;
- Allow flexibility across national boundaries e.g. EUROPASS, ECTS, ECVET;

<sup>1</sup> Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Published by The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

- Allow citizens to shape their educational activities according to their own need e.g. accumulating credits at his own discretion and according to his personal or work needs.

Work on this will commence in 2008 by the Ministry of Education. They will:

- Authorise “*natural and legal persons*” to recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes for the purpose of attaining partial or full qualifications or for recognising the non-formal education in itself by assigning credits to non-formal education programmes;
- Implement a system of quality management, which will be managed nationally and will allow educational institutions to accredit non-formal education “*in modular form with assigning credits to particular modules; to certify lectors and managers of non-formal education and career guidance counsellors*”<sup>1</sup>.

The focus on **quality management** is new and should be noted. It demonstrates progression against the last Inventory report (2004) which stated an absence of quality management systems. It is certainly a priority within the Education Policy 2007.

### 2.1.3 Barriers to Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning

Stakeholders are already envisaging some **barriers** to implementing policy relating to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Notably in “*resistance of the formal system towards validation in the non-formal system*”. Also in “*lack of interest within the decisive sphere to create conditions for implementation of innovative features into the non-formal system and resistance of formal educational system to accept these features*”<sup>2</sup>.

The SR recently carried out a SWOT analysis of their educational system and found that, in relation to non-formal and informal learning:

- There is a mutual separateness between formal and non-formal learning;
- There is an absence of recognition of non-formal education for the purposes of gaining a qualification;
- There is insufficiently guaranteed quality from the state for non-formal learning;
- There is not a transparent or effective way financing formal, non-formal and informal learning.

In recognising this, the LLL Strategy will aim to confront these problems.

<sup>1</sup> Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Published by The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

<sup>2</sup> Report on Education Policy 2007: National Report on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. Published by The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava.

#### 2.1.4 Funding and Monitoring

Considering the current issues with funding non-formal learning, the stakeholders will be implementing “financing tools” to finance non-formal learning according to the following criteria:

- Level of financial requirements to public resources;
- Administrative complexity of implementation and realisation;
- Multi-source principle including ensuring share of non-formal education participants;
- Transparency;
- Controllability and degree of misuses.

In addition to funding by the SR, there is expected to be financial support from the EU, for example through programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF).

The Education Policy 2007 does not talk specifically about monitoring any actions carried out as a result of validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, it does suggest that monitoring and forecasting will be important to the implementation of the LLL Strategy and this should include the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## 2.2 The existing initiatives

Due to the fact that work on validation of non-formal and informal learning has not yet started, the legal basis and the initiatives mentioned in the previous ECOTEC report are still relevant.

Vocational education and training (VET) for performance of specific vocational activities require the prescribed competency is covered by regulations of state administration for individual fields of activities. **Act No. 455/1991 on Small Business as amended**<sup>1</sup> stipulates special qualification requirements for doing business in handicraft industry or in selected crafts (e.g. blacksmiths, construction workers, food production etc.). The requirements may be fulfilled by the presence of a certificate of a formal vocational qualification in the relevant field or a certificate of completion of general education along with the proof of at least three years of experience in the given profession. These documents can be substituted by other certificates of a relevant or a ‘kin’ vocational qualification from other upper secondary, post-secondary or higher education and by documents certifying certain years of practical experience in the relevant or ‘kin’ occupation, whereas the number of years of experience stipulated in the law depends on the type of prior education. The certificate of completion of a training course in one of the accredited continuing training providers according to Act No. 386/1997 is not sufficient and

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.madeinslovakia.sk/zakony/zivz.pdf>

has to be accompanied by a qualification examination. Such examination is regulated by the **Decree No. 323/2001<sup>1</sup>**.

The purpose of the qualification examination is to verify theoretical knowledge (professional terminology, characteristics of materials and technology procedures) and practical skills (working procedures, mechanisms, machines, instruments, equipment, technology processes, etc.) used in the process of execution of the appropriate professional activity. The examination consists of the written, verbal and practical parts and is evaluated by the Examination Commission designated by the Regional Governmental Office. The proposals on the composition of the Commission come from the Slovak Small Business Chamber, which organises qualification examinations. Successful passing qualification examination grants the individual the same rights for execution of professions as to those who obtained their qualification in the formal education system. We cannot speak here of a large-scale practice: according to the results of the questionnaire answered by NARIC<sup>2</sup>, only 87 individuals passed the qualification examination by 2002, of which 48 were cosmeticians. Other professions were hairdressers, waiters, bakers, bricklayers, etc. The success rate was quite high with the drop out at around 10%.

The Act on Small Businesses in its later amendments on the one hand, introduces a real possibility to obtain qualification in a much shorter period of time by means of completion of a (re)training course (the length is not specified) and passing the qualification examination. On the other hand, the Act's later amendments (2001), restricted the earlier possibility given by the law to go through examination without any prior training or education, to get recognised practical experience or non-formal training<sup>3</sup> and to substitute formal qualifications by the prove of inventions, patents or patterns in the relevant trade<sup>4</sup>. From this point of view the current version of the law is more restrictive and gives less space for manoeuvre for older workers who might be very experienced in their performed trade but do not hold a formal qualification in the relevant field and do not wish to go into

1 Decree No. 323/2001 on Details of the contents of the theoretical knowledge and practical skills which are required for the execution of certain regulated professional activities, about the mode of the completion of qualification examination and issuing the certificate, Ministry of Interior. [http://www.szk.sk/ako\\_zacat/vyhlaska.pdf](http://www.szk.sk/ako_zacat/vyhlaska.pdf)

2 Finding the synergy between International Credential Evaluation (ICE) and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Questionnaire to NARICs, 2002, Results published at <http://www.nuffic.nl/ice-plar/pdf/NARICsonQuestionnaire.pdf>

3 According to NARIC's questionnaire until 2001, about 30 people managed to receive recognition of their prior informal/non-formal learning as a substitute to a formal qualification in accordance with the Small Business Act before its amendment. Finding the synergy between International Credential Evaluation (ICE) and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Questionnaire to NARICs, 2002, Results published at <http://www.nuffic.nl/ice-plar/pdf/NARICsonQuestionnaire.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning, Slovakia, ETF, 2002.

training. Such arrangement, may become a good stimulation for workers' participation in CVT but needs to be linked to an efficient system of counselling and guidance.

The Ministry of Education and Science issued the **Decree No. 41/1996 on Professional and Pedagogical Competence of Educational Staff**<sup>1</sup> on 26 January 1996 as amended later, which stipulates the qualification requirements and organization, contents and procedure for qualification examination for teachers in kindergartens, special, basic and secondary schools. Professional capacity is understood by the Decree as a set of vocational knowledge, skills and competences gained through the studies in higher education, secondary education and in professional experience. The decree stipulates that after 5 years of teaching experience certain conditions can be recognised as a substitute to the 1st qualification examination, fulfilment of which gives a right to obtain higher teaching positions and incorporation to a higher salary scale. Among others such substitute conditions could be:

- Completion of two-years specialised innovative course or two-years specialised qualification course accredited by the Ministry of Education;
- Taking the first to the third place in the national competition of independently developed, accredited and patented teaching tools submitted to the mass production,
- Authorship of textbooks and syllabi, approved by the Ministry of Education and published;
- Taking the first to the third place in the national competition in pedagogical reading.

Act No. 279/1993 on School Establishments regulates certain types of non-formal training, for instance, at state language schools, where learners can undergo preparatory training for the state language exam and/or pass the examination (with or without a preparatory course).

Non-formal training: is also regulated by other laws (e.g. Employment Act<sup>2</sup>, Labour Code<sup>3</sup>), without specific reference to validation of competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning.

An important legislative change was introduction of **8 self-governing regions** and the transition of some competencies from state administration to self-government, including those in the field of education and its establishments (Act No. 302/2001 on self-

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/1996\\_41.pdf](http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/1996_41.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> No. 397/1996

<sup>3</sup> No. 311/2001

government of higher territorial units, Act No. 416/2001 on transition of competences, and Act No. 596/2003 on state administration and school self-government)<sup>1</sup>.

Although the process of decentralisation and the administration reform has been criticised for insufficient transfer of responsibility to the regions and preservation of 'corporativism' in public administration. The decentralisation reform is associated with high aspirations in terms of (i) granting greater role for the social dialogue in training and human resource development, (ii) bringing training provision closer to local needs, (iii) better targeting and integration of various policies in the implementation at regional level. The weak role of social partners in lifelong learning is expected to be boosted by interaction with regional actors. The Regional VET Councils, whose creation is in progress, are expected to incorporate the dialogue on lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>. These can become important players in the development of the system of validation of informal and non-formal learning at regional level.

Slovakia adopted **legislation necessary to harmonise with EU requirements** in the field of recognition of qualifications<sup>3</sup>. The adopted Act No **477/2002** deals with recognition of certification of vocational qualifications issued in the EU Member States for the execution of regulated professions on the territory of Slovakia. It stipulates different means of recognising qualifications. In those professions where there is co-ordination of minimum educational requirements among EU Member States, there is automatic recognition (e.g. medical professions, architects) or special regime of recognition, which is practically automatic but under certain circumstances may involve an aptitude test (e.g. lawyers). Semi-automatic recognition involves a comparison of the length and content of the applicant's education with the host country's professional requirements. Substantial differences in length can be compensated by the proof of the work experience and major content discrepancies by aptitude test or an adaptation period. In some regulated professions like masonry, hairdressing, massage, and tourist guide services, qualification can also be recognised through work experience<sup>4</sup>. Although the law does not deal directly with the provisions for validation of non-formal and informal learning for the Slovak

<sup>1</sup> Vantuch, J., Jelínková, D. Current Status of Vocational Education and Training in Slovakia (Vocational Education and Training on the Verge of the Millennium). Slovak National Observatory of Vocational Education and Training, State Institute of Vocational Education and Training, Bratislava, 2002, p.57. See also: Vantuch, J., Pauk, J., Jelínková, D. Recent developments in vocational education, Training and employment policy in Slovakia (2003 Short Country Report for ETF). Slovak National Observatory of Vocational Education and Training, State Institute of Vocational Education and Training, Bratislava, 2003, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission Questionnaire, December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Act on recognition of vocational qualifications No 477/2002 reflecting European directives No 89/48 and No 92/51

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; also see interview with Mária Hrabinská, Head of the Slovak Ministry of Education's Centre for the Equivalence of Diplomas, in 'Spectator' periodical, 3/1/2004

citizens, it stipulates important legal, institutional and procedural arrangements, which can be applied for the validation in the future.

**The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)** was effectively introduced in 2002 under the **new Higher Education Act** and the following **Decree on the Credit System** (No. 614/2002<sup>1</sup>). Prior to 2002, several higher education institutions used a credit system but there was no standard model. According to the new law, all higher education institutions are required to introduce a credit system based on the ECTS by September 2005. Currently, ECTS or other credit point systems are largely used in the first two cycles of the tertiary education and to a lesser degree at the PhD level<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.3 Special Projects

### **The Leonardo da Vinci Programme**

The Slovak Republic is one of the members of the Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Credit Transfer”, which restarted its activities in 2006. The thematic group has a strong focus on<sup>3</sup>:

- The European Qualifications Framework (and related national frameworks),
- The European Credit Transfer System;
- The promotion of a single framework on transparency of qualifications and competences;
- The implementation and development of the Common European Principles on identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and;
- The Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

The projects that have been carried out specifically under the priority for ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning’ have not thus far included the Slovak Republic as a partner. However, outcomes of projects such as “Assessing Voluntary Experiences in a Professional Perspective”, “European Network for Valuation Prior Learning”, “FAIR” and “The Role of Social Partners and Public Authorities in Training System Development” should provide useful information to the SR in developing their own systems<sup>4</sup>.

1 [http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/2002\\_614.pdf](http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/2002_614.pdf)

2 Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report. Berlin Summit 2003, pp. 3-4, [http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Slovak\\_Republic.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Slovak_Republic.pdf); also Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.), p.25

3 Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer” Background Report 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme Thematic Group on “Transparency of Qualifications, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer” Background Report 2007.

The Institute of Lifelong Education at the Technical University of Kosice was created in 1996. It coordinates the activities in the field of open and distance learning in the region and it is a part of the Slovak Distance Education Network. The Institute aims to widen the existing cooperation with Košice institutions of higher education, private education institutes, local government, and education institutes of industrial enterprises. It provides continuing education and training, guidance, information and consulting services in the framework of university services for the region, contributes to the development of the systems of lifelong learning in cooperation with the local firms and industrial enterprises.

Among others the Institute of Lifelong Education of the Technical University of Košice in cooperation with the VSŽ *Vzdelávacie a poradenské centrum* (Educational, Training and Consulting Centre) and with a consortium of European partner institutions implemented a Leonardo da Vinci project EDUCRATOS (1998-2001)<sup>1</sup>. The project's aim was the creation of the centre of educational advisory and consultation services for vocational training, design of the methodology for identification and anticipation of training needs, development of educational standards and of the methodology for accreditation of prior experience and learning. The project's target group were consultants, trainers, training officers, training experts, manager training programs and human resource directors. The project elaborated a Methodology for identification of training needs<sup>2</sup> at the organisation, group and individual levels. It also developed a methodology for accreditation of prior experience and learning<sup>3</sup>, and for the development/adaptation of educational standards<sup>4</sup>, and ran a pilot course on APEL.

The Institute of Lifelong Education of the Technical University of Košice offers now a modular course of distance education combined with computer-supported and attendance-course training '**Person APEL**' (168 hours, 10 modules)<sup>5</sup>. The course is targeted at personnel managers in enterprises, employees in higher education, training providers and counselling and guidance services with a minimum of complete upper secondary education.

The course provides information on the approach and principles of accreditation of prior and experiential learning, instructs on how it can be used for the development and management of human resources. The main principles of APEL's application at various stages, including assessment of competences and identification of strong and weak points of employees and methods of the subsequent skills development of employees.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web\\_Educra.htm](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [Methodology for identification of training needs](#), 2000, 30 pp., English and Slovak versions.

<sup>3</sup> *Manual Accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL)*, 2000, 92 pp;  
[http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web\\_Educra.htm](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Educational standards*, 42 pp; [http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web\\_Educra.htm](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.tuke.sk/icv/kurzy/kurz\\_person-apel.php](http://www.tuke.sk/icv/kurzy/kurz_person-apel.php)

In cooperation with the European partners **the Technical University of Kosice** and the **University of Zilina** worked on the elaboration of a competence management tool entitled 'The European Record of Achievement' (**EuroRecord**) targeted at **the engineering industry**<sup>1</sup>. The EuroRecord is a software-supported tool for planning and recording individual training and development needs with the support of mentoring and guidance, in a dialogue with the employer, designed to record prior learning achievements and to link it to the individual strategy for personal and professional development and advancement. The tool supports a credit system recognising continuing training courses, experiential learning and accreditation of the in-company training. It is targeted at individual employees, employers, universities and professional organisations.

The EuroRecord helps individuals to manage their professional development and career providing methodology for documentation of competences, identification of the requirements for further learning and with the subsequent design of the development plan. The method records learning achievements and professional development, regardless of where and how they occurred. The EuroRecord was developed by a consortium of companies, professional organisations, trade unions, universities and other training providers in seven countries, along with a number of European networks and organisations. The project was completed in 2001. Information on the actual application of its results in the Slovak engineering industry is currently not available.

Another recent project which was funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme is the EPANIL (**E**uropean **C**ommon **P**inciples for the **A**ccreditation of **N**on-formal and **I**nformal Learning in Lifelong Learning) project<sup>2</sup> which ran from 2005-2006. The project was concerned with improving adult access to further education, for people with basic or no formal qualifications but who have experience of paid or unpaid voluntary employment. With reference to established European common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the project established a framework for accessing further VET for persons with basic or no formal qualifications, specifically in the economically deprived regions of the partner countries.

Project partners undertook a needs analysis of the informal/non-formal VET situation in established and new EU Member States. Both possibilities and obstacles concerning accreditation for informal/non-formal VET in central and east European countries were outlined and tools were developed to enhance accreditation in this area, based upon successful practices elsewhere. Educational courses for VET advisors were developed to enable them to deliver information about non-formal/informal learning. These courses were piloted with those with basic or no formal qualifications. An evaluation of the pilot informed

<sup>1</sup> The project was coordinated by European Society for Engineering Education, [www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/](http://www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.epanil.net/aindex.html>

the project's recommendations with regard to dissemination of project outputs and sustainability of the end results.

The evaluation of the EPANIL project<sup>1</sup> confirmed that “all the evidence points to a highly successful project, which has not only achieved what it set out to do, but has done so very well indeed”. Moreover, the evaluation went on to state that “in terms of sustainability and impact, the project has been a key player in the wider evolution planning and activity of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning in the three target countries and in the ‘Learning Region of Moravia’. It is clearly part of a significant and longer pathway of progress in this area.”

<sup>1</sup> Zamorski, B.,2006, Final Evaluation Report of the EPANIL Project. Taken from the world wide web, 14 September 2007. Available at: <http://www.epanil.net/download/evalrep.pdf>

## 3.0 PRIVATE SECTOR

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It is very difficult to find information relating to private sector initiatives in the Slovak Republic. One reason for this is because there is currently no overarching national strategy in place for validation and hence any initiatives that are being undertaken are limited to specific companies and sectors. However, it is also the case that there are simply very few private sector validation initiatives and those that are in place are mostly confined to large companies with foreign investments.

The public sector is however trying to create the conditions for acceptance of non-formal learning in the private sector. For example, by piloting surveys with non-governmental and private institutions that will help the government supply education to suit business needs.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Initiatives taken by individual companies

Foreign companies transfer their international know-how via their national branches to Slovakia. Therefore such initiatives are not strictly Slovakian. Some examples are listed below:

**Accor Services** - the Accor Group's second largest international line of business – aspires to improve the performance of companies and local authorities by fostering the well being of their employees and citizens.<sup>2</sup> Accor Services designs, develops and manages innovative solutions that enable businesses and local authorities to create new sources of motivation and loyalty for their employees. Among others, Accor Services offers a management tool enabling companies to meet their employees' needs in terms of information, psychological support and coaching, formative skills assessment and subsequent training of employees.

**Ibis Partner Ltd** - is a German-Slovak private training and counselling company. It was established in Slovakia in 1992. The company transfers modern international trends and know-how in the field of enterprise development, training and development of top management and human resources in enterprises. Ibis partners Ltd. provides assessment, training and counselling to enterprises, personal counselling and coaching also in specific cases of career change and development, new assignments for employees etc.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vladislav Rosa "Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer" An OECD Report.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.accorservices.sk/sk/abouttheorganization/anex/anex.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ibispartner.sk/>

**PricewaterhouseCoopers** - in the Slovak Republic provides human resource consulting to enterprises<sup>1</sup> The service Training and Development Systems includes an assessment of employees' potential, an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, and preparation of personal development plans. The company also performs a special evaluation method Individual and Group Psychological Evaluation (Assessment Centre): evaluation of abilities, skills and qualities, using proven standardized psycho-diagnostic tests and questionnaires, together with a structured interview conducted by a qualified psychologist. The Outplacement Program provides advice and effective support to employees who are forced to leave their jobs due to company downsizing, organisational changes, etc. It provides an individual approach to employees in all working positions, an in-depth assessment of their professional opportunities and training in the skills necessary for gaining an appropriate working position.

## 3.2 The Role of Social Partners

Social partners are not currently influential in shaping government policy on LLL/VET.<sup>2</sup> There is no record of sectors' participation in the development of the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovakia. One of the reasons for such situation is an overall weak interest of social partners to debate on lifelong learning. Social dialogue in this field is formally established at the top level but is very weak when it comes to sector and enterprise level. Trade unions concentrate on the 'traditional' agenda of wages and working conditions bargaining. Analysis of collective agreements for the period of 1999-2003 indicated that social dialogue very rarely touched lifelong learning issues and is limited to indirect general proclamations<sup>3</sup>. This is still the case today.

One of 'active' sector actors in education and training issues in general is the Guild of Motor Vehicle Dealers and Services. The Guild contributed to a major VET curricula innovation for **the rapidly growing automotive industry** in Slovakia<sup>4</sup>. The industry's demand for qualified workers is growing and the industry may be well interested in exploring the potential for validation of informal and non-formal learning of its workforce.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pwc.com/sk/slk/about/svcs/ghrs.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Vocational Education and Training (VET) System of Slovakia. Published by Cedefop.

<sup>3</sup> Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission Questionnaire, December 2003, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Cedefop Info 3/2003.

## 4.0 THE THIRD SECTOR

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Overall there is little information available relating validation of non-formal and informal learning to the third sector. As explained in the previous ECOTEC report, the third sector is not at the forefront of policy development and there are no third sector organisations driving the agenda forward. That said, since 2004, there has been work carried out as part of the EU Youth Programme, which has contained some validation of non-formal and informal learning. Some relevant examples are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- EDIN – this is an international voluntary programme of ecumenical council. They now offer certificates to volunteers describing their skills and experience gained through the voluntary sector;
- YOUTHPASS – this is a certificate confirming skills gained from the programme Youth In action;
- Implementing the ‘Common Objectives’ of the EU Youth Programme – the SR will be preparing a strategy to implement the common objectives. This will involve an action plan “*solving the question of consistent certificate of acquired skills and information necessary for lifelong education*”. It is hoped that this will promote the idea of participating in voluntary service. It is thought that the introduction of the credit system will further support the cause, for example by allowing voluntary service to be included in CVs and adding value when it comes to job applications or applying for studies etc.

<sup>1</sup> National Report on the Implementation of the Common Objectives for Voluntary Activities of Young People in the Slovak Republic (2006). Published by the European Commission.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

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The Slovak Republic currently does not have legislation in place to support validation of non-formal or informal learning. It does not have a National Qualification Framework capable of recognising formal, non-formal or informal learning collectively. The country does not have any experience nationally of developing methods or 'tools' to validate non-formal or informal learning and does not have the necessary quality assurance systems in place to ensure the quality of non-formal or informal learning.

However, since the last Inventory was written in 2004, the Slovak Republic has developed a Lifelong Learning Strategy (published in 2007) that addresses these issues. This means that legislation to support validation should be in place by the end of 2007. Work on developing quality assurance, authorising organisations to validate non-formal and informal learning etc should commence by 2008 and a national qualification system compatible with the European Qualification Framework should be in place by 2009. The Slovak Republic has therefore documented its commitment to these aspects of European LLL policy and is in the very earliest stages of implementation.

In implementing the plans for validation of non-formal and informal learning, the SR recognise the importance of learning from other EU countries, especially in developing standards and mechanisms for validation, developing methods of assessment etc. A recent OECD report confirms this view and states that the SR will need to build a "joint framework for continuous activity", establish a "database of effectual know-how", create an "interchange of experience amongst persons/institutions in various countries", establish a "collection of representative benchmarks" etc<sup>1</sup>. In short, the country is committed to the EU policy agenda but needs to learn from other countries that have more developed validation systems.

<sup>1</sup> Vladislav Rosa "Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and Credit Transfer" An OECD Report.