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

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1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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1.1 Introduction

In Slovakia validation of informal and non-formal learning is **a new issue on the policy agenda**. At present there are no systemic or legal provisions for identification, assessment and recognition of skills and competencies acquired through informal and non-formal learning or through the work experience in Slovakia. Although certification of completion of continuing training courses is regulated by legislation, the real weight of such certificates on the labour market cannot be compared to the qualifications attained in the formal system of education. At the level of policy innovation, a number of important strategic and programming documents have been adopted recently. Implementation of these decisions may create real preconditions for setting up a system of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Some examples of good practice of conceptual and methodological elaboration of approaches in validation of informal and non-formal learning, as well as its application, exist at the level of individual initiatives. Such initiatives have so far mostly been pushed by the need to comply with European policies and are supported by the European Union (EU). The main approach thus has so far been **EU-driven**.

1.2 Rebrview of existing initiatives: Public sector

1.2.1 Legal provisions

Continuing vocational training (CVT) is regulated by the **Act No. 386/1997** as amended (No.567/2001)¹. The Act recognises CVT as a legitimate part of the education system of the Slovak Republic and defines it as a part of lifelong learning. The Act sets conditions for establishment of CVT institutions, accreditation of programmes and issuance of certificates.

The CVT Act and its amendment only codify the current stage of development and do not create preconditions for further development in such fields as quality assurance and recognition of learning and competences. Moreover, there are no sufficient preconditions for integration of formal and non-formal learning, meaning in particular the content and organisation of education and training, its validation and recognition of certificates as well as horizontal permeability and openness of the subsystems. This has been recognised in *the Concept of Lifelong Learning in the Slovak Republic* (2004). The document stipulates incorporation of integrating mechanisms in the school acts and laws, ultimately a new 'integrating' CVT Act.

Vocational education and training (VET) for performance of specific vocational activities require the prescribed competency is covered by regulations of state administration for

¹ http://www.education.gov.sk/DVZ/ODV/AK/386_1997.pdf

individual fields of activities. **Act No. 455/1991 on Small Business as amended**² 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 prove 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 has to be accompanied by a qualification examination. Such examination is regulated by the **Decree No. 323/2001**³.

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 NARIC⁴, 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 training⁵ and to substitute formal qualifications

² <http://www.madeinslovakia.sk/zakony/zivz.pdf>

³ 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

⁴ *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>

⁵ 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*

by the prove of inventions, patents or patterns in the relevant trade⁶. 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 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**⁷ 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 Act⁸, Labour Code⁹), 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-government of

Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Questionnaire to NARICs, 2002, Results published at <http://www.nuffic.nl/ice-plar/pdf/NARICsonQuestionnaire.pdf>

⁶ Questionnaire on validation of non-formal and informal learning, Slovakia, ETF, 2002.

⁷ http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/1996_41.pdf

⁸ No. 397/1996

⁹ No. 311/2001

higher territorial units, Act No. 416/2001 on transition of competences, and Act No. 596/2003 on state administration and school self-government)¹⁰.

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 learning¹¹. 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 qualifications¹². 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 experience¹³. Although the law does not deal directly with the provisions for validation of non-formal and informal learning for the Slovak 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission Questionnaire, December 2003.

¹² Act on recognition of vocational qualifications No 477/2002 reflecting European directives No 89/48 and No 92/51

¹³ 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

614/2002¹⁴). 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 level¹⁵.

Slovakia has signed and ratified **the Lisbon Convention** on the Recognition of Qualifications. The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education is the Slovak ENIC/NARIC body, responsible for the recognition and evaluation of foreign credentials. Europass National Reference Point was established in 2004. There is discussion underway on whether it should remain to be part of the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education, or whether it should be transferred to the Ministry of Education. Currently higher education institutions are issuing a **diploma supplement** upon request from students. Secondary school certification supplement was also issued¹⁶.

Although there is no credit transfer system and the linked system of recognition at secondary and post-secondary levels or in the non-formal training, **the Slovak NARIC** is involved in a number of activities to recognize partial qualifications and courses especially those received abroad. For instance it issues authorized statements about the level of language knowledge and skills for employers with the view of *de facto* recognition of various certificates about command of foreign languages issued in the Slovak Republic as well as abroad. The statement is linked to formal education and distinguishes four levels of qualifications in foreign languages. About 150 statements of such type were issued by 2002. NARIC also reports on issuing recommendations to competent authorities on recognition of in-service teacher training courses and examinations attended abroad for the purpose of insertion of teachers to a higher salary scale. These are mostly teachers of foreign languages, music and visual arts at basic and high schools. About 20 of such recommendations were reported in 2002. Finally, NARIC also reports on limited number of cases of the academic recognition of parts of education and training (e.g. examinations, credits), attended abroad with the purpose of continuation of education and training, including (but not limited to) higher education. Such recommendations are provided to individual schools, including universities, in such study fields as ICT, foreign languages, arts¹⁷.

¹⁴ http://www.education.gov.sk/VZPP/VYHLASKY/2002_614.pdf

¹⁵ Realising the European Higher Education Area. National Report. Berlin Summit 2003, pp. 3-4, http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Slovak_Republic.pdf; also Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.), p.25

¹⁶ Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Slovak Republic, QCA Consortium, 2004, p. 25. http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Reports_Slovakia.pdf, p.26

¹⁷ *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>

1.2.2 *The context of the system*

Over 85% of the Slovak working age population achieved at least ISCED 3 level of education – a mark well above the EU average¹⁸. The share of enrolments to technical and vocational paths of initial education is almost 80% as compared to enrolments to general education¹⁹. Initial VET has a longstanding tradition in the country. Participation in CVT among adult population is also relatively high²⁰. CVT is provided by various education and training institutions, including basic, secondary and higher education schools, enterprise training establishments, sectoral administration training providers, private institutions etc. The third sector plays an additional or supplementary role in the CVT provision, especially in the fields, where state and private training providers are not too active²¹.

Quality assurance system remains a problematic area in non-formal training. In the non-formal system, training providers function on the supply-demand basis. The quality criterion is accreditation of the study programme, which however is compulsory only in case of retraining courses for labour offices, training of civil servants and other types of training supported by the state budget²². The Accreditation Commission Accreditation is carried out by, which is a consultative body of the Ministry of Education²³.

The graduates of the accredited courses receive a **certificate of completion** with the national non-limited validity²⁴. However, certificates obtained in the formal education system (“maturita” certificates, final examination certificates, diplomas) are fully accepted by employers, whereas certificates obtained in the non-formal education system, even in the accredited courses, (certificates of completion) are not comparable to formal qualifications. It is up to the employer what weight to assign to the given certificate²⁵. The framework standards, which could define minimum competence requirements for specific activities are absent. The content of non-formal training is not linked to a specific standard or objective of a specific learning outcome and therefore the certificates cannot be validated in the same way as qualifications with regard to certain occupations or activities.

¹⁸ Eurostat, LFS, 2001.

¹⁹ Masson, J.-R. *Thirteen years of cooperation and reforms in vocational education and training in the acceding and candidate countries*, ETF, 2003

²⁰ The data of the Eurostat LFS 2002 is 9% of 25-54 year olds participating in education and training in 4 weeks prior to the survey. The data for 2003 was however much lower due to break in series (Masson, J.-R., *Thirteen years of cooperation and reforms in vocational education and training in the acceding and candidate countries: Addendum*, ETF 2004, p. 48).

²¹ *Koncepcia celoživotného vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike* (Concept of lifelong learning in the Slovak Republic); Background Report, Bratislava, 2004.

²² Between 1991 and 2001, 1 452 training institutions were given accreditation to offer 12 000 training programmes.

²³ Act No. 386/1997 as amended No.567/2001

²⁴ Act No. 386/1997 as amended No.567/2001

²⁵ Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). *Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Slovak Republic*, QCA Consortium, 2004, p. 17. http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Reports_Slovakia.pdf

There is **no national qualification framework** in Slovakia, which could embrace outcomes of IVET and CVT. However, various steps have been taken towards the development of qualification standards. In 1996 a government resolution stipulated the task of “preparing qualification standards and educational standards derived from these”. Since then, the Ministry of Labour has supported an analysis of 470 occupations and over 300 of occupational characteristics have been presented to the State Institute of Vocational and Technical Education (SIOV) to be used in the development of educational standards.²⁶ Since 1999 expert commissions (EC’s) have been set up on a tripartite principle²⁷, which play a consultative and co-ordinating role in the development of the standards. In 2002 these EC’s were replaced by 14 new EC’s²⁸ responsible for the whole secondary VET. The main task of EC is to deal with the content of VET, and conceptual and methodological issues of VET. Activities of EC’s are co-ordinated by Coordinating Council created in 2002 and create basis for the decision-making with regard to VET in Slovakia²⁹.

Counselling and guidance services are based on a three-pillar system. The first subsystem is based on the traditional guidance system at schools. The second subsystem is based on institutions in the employment sector and represented by the network of psychological counselling centres providing career guidance and counselling as a sub-component of family counselling. The third sub-system covered by the network of regional and district labour offices focused on serving adults, in particular those who are unemployed³⁰.

The provision of information and counselling with regard to learning possibilities for adult population is felt being a deficit. Partial information systems are not integrated with each other and with the information on training opportunities not only for the unemployed but also for those who would like to learn further or to find an alternative path for self-fulfilment. The complex counselling and guidance system, which could interlink career choice guidance, information provision on employment opportunities and on education and training is missing³¹. Since 2004 individual employment action plans must be elaborated for each unemployed by employment services through their regional and local offices³². This may provide good grounds for integration of the formative assessment in the counselling and guidance system and linking its results to subsequent training. The approach however is only limited to those in unemployment.

²⁶ Ibid. , p.25.

²⁷ 16 expert commissions are led by an expert who represents the relevant ministry, and 18 commissions are led by an expert of the State Institute of Technical and Vocational Education.

²⁸ EC include representatives of SIOV, respective sectors, labour market institutions, professional chambers, employers’ associations and federations, companies, secondary schools, HEI, regional offices, institutions, etc. Over 200 professionals are expected to serve on the EC, with additional professionals participating in sub-commissions.

²⁹ Czesaná, V.; Matoušková, Z. (eds.). *Achieving the Lisbon Goals: The contribution of VET. Country Report: Slovak Republic*, QCA Consortium, 2004, p. 25. http://www.refernet.org.uk/documents/Country_Reports_Slovakia.pdf

³⁰ Ibid., p.8.

³¹ *Koncepcia celoživotného vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike (Concept of lifelong learning in the Slovak Republic)*, approved by the Government 25 February 2004 by the Resolution 157/2004.

³² 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.18.

Although the current three-pillar system of counselling and guidance does not create preconditions for formative assessment of competences attained in non-formal/informal learning and through work experience, the presence of the infrastructure and certain elements of the system can provide for future developments in this area.

1.2.3 Policy development

Although no specific measures to integrate systems of formal and non-formal learning with the provision for the validation mechanisms have been implemented, the whole policy area of lifelong learning has been undergoing an intensive debate and conceptual innovation. The debate was pushed forward; by the national consultation process the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2000) in 2001. It resulted in several important conceptual and strategic documents.

Lifelong learning was proclaimed one of the priorities in *the Programme Declaration of the Government of the Slovak Republic* (2002). For the school system *the National Programme for Education and Training in the Slovak Republic for the Forthcoming 15-20 Years* ('Millennium' programme) suggested the reform strategy for initial education as an integral part of lifelong learning³³. *The Concept of Continuing Training in the Slovak Republic* was prepared and approved by the Government in 2002. It characterized the current situation and discussed major preconditions for development until 2010.

Lastly, in February 2004 the Government approved *the Concept of Lifelong Learning in the Slovak Republic*.³⁴ The latter acknowledged the importance of certification of training outcomes for employers and the necessity to reconsider the system of recognition of certificates outside formal education. The document recognised that as the result of the economic transformation and greater demands for adaptability of the labour force, the number of the population who attain competences and skills outside the formal system of education has grown. Thus, the specific steps towards elaboration of the system of validation and recognition of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning have to result in the attainment of formal documents (e.g. certificates, attestations, confirmations).

The Concept also recognised that the absence of the system of recognition of informal and non-formal learning results in 'dead ends' between the school and outside-school subsystems. One of the solutions suggested is the development of a modular structure of education and training and the corresponding system of the credit-based validation of learning outcomes, but also in diversification of other forms of education and training.

The Concept put forward specific proposals and measures to assist implementation of the strategic goals set by the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. A number of suggestions would

³³ National Programme for Education and Training in the Slovak Republic. (*Národný program výchovy a vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike*), Bratislava, Ministry of Education
<http://www.education.gov.sk/main/dokument/konproj/krvv/npvv.rtf>

³⁴ *Koncepcia celoživotného vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike* (Concept of lifelong learning in the Slovak Republic), approved by the Government 25 February 2004 by the Resolution 157/2004.

create preconditions for implementation of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning³⁵:

- In the field of innovation in education and training:

- to support open/ modular/ credit system in education and training,
- to define key learning outcomes of the support/ supplementary programmes of the so called 'second chance' education,
- to complete the system of occupational and educational standards in mutual correspondence and reflecting the relevant key competences.

- In the field of valuing learning outcomes:

- to create preconditions for recognition of modules' completion in different types of formal and non-formal education and by those means to ensure permeability of the system and the necessary certification for the labour market (the responsibility assigned to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family);
- to create legal preconditions for recognition of the outcomes of learning outside of the formal system of education; to support recognition 'de facto', organised by the bodies that already have the experience with validation 'de jure' such as NARIC (the responsibility assigned to the Ministry of Education (MoE));
- to support international cooperation in modular development of non-formal training and their harmonisation with ECTS and recognition of competences acquired through practical experience (MoE);
- to involve social partners in the development of modules for formal and non-formal education and training, and in the sphere of recognition of learning outcomes (MoE).

- In the field of information and counselling:

- to integrate various components of the counselling and guidance in education, training and the labour market, and to make accessible complex information segments on occupations, labour market opportunities, education and training;
- to complete construction of the information and counselling centres at the local offices of labour, social affairs and family and to expand their services for a broader public.

The Concept of Lifelong Learning also proposed a number of concrete institution building measures, some of which are relevant for the development of the system of validation of informal and non-formal learning, such as:

- to stimulate the creation of the regional councils for lifelong learning,
- to support development and work of the information and counselling centres and other services for lifelong learning in municipalities,

³⁵ Here only some of relevant measures are mentioned.

- to support the development of the multifunctional training centres at municipal and regional levels as the centres of lifelong learning for all citizens, where the training and counselling functions will be combined.

Two other important programming documents were adopted: *National Employment Action Plan* (2003) and *the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources* (2004). The former stipulates elaboration of the commonly applicable system of national classification of occupations and, subsequently, of educational standards, in cooperation between state bodies, employers and education and training institutions. The latter puts the stress on the need to improve the quality of CVT, and on the validation and recognition of its outcomes.

In the policy document *Millennium Development Goals: Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion* (2004)³⁶ special attention is paid to the illiteracy levels, particularly among the population of segregated Roma settlements. Such situation leads to the inability to efficiently participate in social and economic life putting these people at risk of social exclusion. To address this problem, it is suggested in the document to differentiate the education offer at the primary school level and to increase supply of alternative education programmes in non-state schools in order to provide vocational education also on the ISCED 2B level. This would enable students to achieve the minimal qualification for entering the labour market either by the subsequent follow-up of courses at a secondary school or by completion of second-chance education, or by recognition of prior learning and on-the-job experience. The latter is recognised as an important mechanism in improving qualification situation of the low skilled.

In spite of many useful suggestions expressed in *the Concept of Lifelong Learning* and in other important conceptual and strategic documents, most of recommendations so far remain on paper. In *the Reply to the Commission Questionnaire on Implementing Lifelong Strategies in Europe* (December 2003) it was stated that in the field of accreditation of prior learning, methodologies and systems for assessment and validation of competences, 'the debates dominate over effective actions. Accreditation of prior learning is considered a priority under the influence of European players rather than as the result of the reflection of national needs. There is some experience gained from international projects, however, there is little experience from the relevant methodologies and there are no legislative provisions backing APEL type activities'³⁷.

1.2.4 Overview of existing initiatives

Despite scarce legislative and systemic provisions, there are a number of initiatives in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

First, such initiatives are often supported **through EU programmes and networks** (mostly Leonardo da Vinci). The National Agency of the Leonardo da Vinci programme itself

³⁶ Blaho, A. et al. Millennium Development Goals: Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion. UNDP2004. http://mdgr.undp.sk/DOCUMENTS/MDG_Regions.pdf

³⁷ Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution. Reply to the Commission Questionnaire, December 2003. APEL stands for 'Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning' [author's note].

contributed to the development and understanding of the concept of recognition of learning outcomes in Slovakia by the dissemination of information on various approaches and examples of good practice³⁸. Training of Trainers Network (TTNET), another EU initiative coordinated by Cedefop, proposed establishing a working group on the issue of recognition of non-formal and informal learning³⁹. TTNET-Slovakia, coordinated by the National Observatory of Vocational Education and Training which is part of the State Institute of Vocational Education and Training, intends 'to boost the issue of accreditation of prior and experiential learning' in Slovakia⁴⁰.

Second, **the academic sector** has been particularly active in the participation in and in the coordination of the EU funded projects in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovakia.

Third, **enterprises**, particularly those with the share of a foreign capital, sometimes apply certain elements of the formative assessment, validation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

Projects in the academic sector

So far universities have been the most active in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovakia taking the initiative in exploring approaches, developing and applying new methods and tools.

The Institute of Lifelong Education of the Technical University of Košice⁴¹ 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 at widening 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)⁴². 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

³⁸ e.g. presentation of Krempasky, P., the National Agency of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, 25.06.2003 Bratislava.

³⁹ http://www.siov.sk/siov/dokhtm/7sno/ttnet/ttnet_prez/a_vantuch.ppt#14

⁴⁰ 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.9.

⁴¹ <http://www.tuke.sk/icv/en/index-en.php>

⁴² http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm

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 *Methodology for identification of training needs*⁴³ at the organisation, group and individual levels. It also developed methodology for accreditation of prior experience and learning⁴⁴, and for the development/adaptation of educational standards⁴⁵, 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)⁴⁶. 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.

In cooperation with the European partners **the Technical University of Kosice** and **the University of Zilina** worked on elaboration of a competence management tool entitled '*The European Record of Achievement*' (**EuroRecord**) targeted at **the engineering industry**⁴⁷. 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. The information on the actual application of its results in the Slovak engineering industry is not available.

⁴³ [Methodology for identification of training needs](#), 2000, 30 pp., English and Slovak versions.

⁴⁴ *Manual Accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL)*, 2000, 92 pp;
http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm

⁴⁵ *Educational standards*, 42 pp; http://www.tuke.sk/icv/educratos/Web_Educra.htm

⁴⁶ http://www.tuke.sk/icv/kurzy/kurz_person-apel.php

⁴⁷ The project was coordinated by European Society for Engineering Education, www.control.ethz.ch/eurorecord/.

1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private sector

There is hardly any information available about the initiatives in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning in the private sector in Slovakia. The scarce examples of identification and the formative assessment of acquired competences among employees. Provided by private international training and consulting companies who offer similar services, in a number of countries. Such companies transfer the international know-how via their national branches to Slovakia. Therefore such initiatives are not ones of the Slovak private sector *stricto sensu* but rather a reaction to the demand in this field emerging in Slovakia. Some examples are mentioned 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

PricewaterhouseCoopers in the Slovak Republic provides human resource consulting to enterprises⁵⁰ 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.

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

⁴⁸ <http://www.accorservices.sk/sk/abouttheorganization/anex/anex.asp>

⁴⁹ <http://www.ibispartner.sk/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.pwc.com/sk/slk/about/svcs/ghrs.html>

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 proclamations⁵¹.

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 Slovakia⁵². 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.

1.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector

There is very little information available about the initiatives of the third sector in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning. The sector, including social partner organisations, is not in the forefront of the development of the system or in taking individual initiatives in the field (see above).

Tradesmen and entrepreneurs are organised in civil societies according to the law on Citizens' Association in various forms such as communities, guilds, associations etc., which operate on regional level or as professional associations. The **Slovak Small Business Chamber** was established to support development of small and medium sized enterprises (SME). It organises education and training, counselling and guidance for SME, cooperates with the education sector on curriculum development, practical training and final examination at secondary vocational schools, issues an opinion on certain businesses' execution, and organises qualification examination which test specific skills and competences for execution of business in handicraft industry or in selected crafts according to the Small Business Act (No.455/1991). For the latter it nominates the examination board members and prepares documentation for qualification tests to check professional theoretical knowledge and on-the-job training of technical or technological processes⁵³.

Some organisations within the education and training sector have a non-governmental status. In certain cases apply elements of formative or summative assessment of prior learning. Such an example is **the Academy of Education** – an independent non-profit public association, it is an oldest institute in the field of training of adults in Slovakia with 37 branches throughout Slovakia. The Academy trains over 80 000 students each year. Over 14 000 students obtained accredited certificates valid in Slovakia⁵⁴. It provides language courses and prepares for tests for internationally recognised certificates. It also holds the exclusive licence for the European Language Certificates. Most of language testing can be passed after a consultation with or without undergoing training.

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² Cedefop Info 3/2003.

⁵³ http://www.szk.sk/menu_aj/activities.htm

⁵⁴ <http://www.aveducation.sk/onas.php?id=1>; also see <http://www.gemeinsamlernen.de/euconet/Projects/Bratislava/academy?language=en>

The Academy of Education was also a partner on the Slovak side in the Leonardo da Vinci project *Defining and assessing language skills for the workplace* (2000-2002) coordinated by International Certificate Conference⁵⁵. The project consortium developed a European Inventory of work-related language skills applying the concept of portfolio and competence-based assessment in Slovakia and Romania based on the UK experience. The resulting materials are targeted at trainers as a training package on assessment of workers' competences in foreign languages.

The examination for the International Management Award run by the Academy of Education can be undertaken with or without prior training in the modular combined distance-attendance training course for low and middle management. The Academy also applies few elements of formative assessment in the training provision for groups at risk aimed at the improvement of their situation on the labour market.

1.5 Conclusions

Although there are no systemic and legislative provisions for assessment and recognition of informal and non-formal learning in Slovakia, many efforts have been found in policy development. Recent policy documents suggest concrete steps in implementation of the system and assign responsibilities to relevant ministries.

The existing initiatives are mostly concentrated in the academic sector. Universities have been in the forefront of projects' implementation in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning. These projects were initiated in the framework of EU-funded programmes. Enterprises and sectors have not been active in this field so far. The record on implementation of the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the private sector is very scarce. The existing initiatives demonstrate only some aspects of the implementation as a result of transfer of the international know-how. The non-governmental sector, although takes an active part in discussion of lifelong learning policies, has not tackled the issue of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

No serious progress could be achieved without active involvement of social partners in the process. Social dialogue at all levels, especially at sector and enterprise level, needs to take the initiative in discussing with other actors implementation of the system. The process of decentralisation in Slovakia certainly opens a space for more active debate and actions at regional and local level in a joint effort of all relevant players.

The so far scarce efforts in implementing validation of informal and non-formal learning in Slovakia have been pushed by the policy debate and activities initiated from the European Union. It is crucial that actors at all levels in Slovakia verify the advantages of various approaches and recognize the actual needs of the country.

⁵⁵ www.saaic.sk/leonardo