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

## THEMATIC REPORT:

Systems and arrangements to increase  
awareness of opportunities for validation of  
non-formal and informal learning: Outreach

Author: Monika Auzinger



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## CHAPTER 1.

# Introduction

### 1.1. Focus of the report

This thematic report focuses on arrangements to increase awareness of opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Previous editions of the Inventory have pointed to a persistent lack of awareness about validation and its value. In many countries, validation opportunities are still under the radar in the sense that the general public is still largely unaware of the possibilities that validation of non-formal and informal learning can offer.

It is interesting to note that the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning pays little explicit attention to outreach and awareness raising activities related to validation. The 2016 Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways, however, visibly places greater emphasis on the topic. The recently updated European guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning pays significantly more attention to this aspect than the previous edition (Cedefop, 2023).

The 2020 study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning reported for several countries the need for improvements in providing information, advice and guidance, despite there being recognition of the importance of public outreach to publicise uptake of validation. The study identified a lack of information on mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which could be linked in some countries to a fragmented provision of validation services. The study concluded that effective outreach continues to be a challenge regarding certain target groups, and that the lack of awareness of validation constitutes a major barrier to access (European Commission, 2020).

These reported key challenges remain valid to date for several countries – although visible progress in awareness raising and outreach activities can be reported across several countries.

As a general observation, in many countries, the provision of validation generally involves several different actors, with different actors setting awareness-raising activities only for their respective initiatives, with little overall coordination. This leads to a situation where in many countries, awareness-raising and outreach activities related to validation remain rather fragmented.

Low awareness levels amongst the population continue to hamper the take-up of validation initiatives. With a focus on validation opportunities that result in

certification, exemptions, or other similar types of outputs, the aim of this thematic report is to explore how information on validation is made available and the type of outreach measures used to reach a range of different target groups. Key consideration is thereby given to the following aspects: types of actors involved and coordination among them, type and availability of information provided, as well as target groups addressed.

A key focus of this thematic report has been to explore the extent to which schools, VET centres or universities and guidance services – including other organisations such as PES, social services and services for migrants, NGOs – provide information on validation and are engaged in networking activities in this regard, although the amount of information that could be obtained on this aspect remains rather limited.

Finally, this thematic report also explores the extent to which both public databases and private platforms for qualifications/credentials include information on validation opportunities, identifying the extent to which they provide information on whether the qualification/credential can be achieved via validation of non-formal and informal learning.

## 1.2. Methodology

This report is primarily based on the analysis of data provided by the Inventory's network of country researchers, this includes the detailed country reports produced by the researchers and data provided in response to targeted questions related to the thematic topic. This is complemented with additional desk research and interviews with representatives from two featured initiatives (from Finland and Ireland).

The report addresses the following questions:

- (a) what types of measures or methods are in place to increase awareness of validation?
- (b) who are the main actors involved?
- (c) when awareness raising actions are in place, what sort of information do they provide, and how can this make validation feasible and attractive for users?
- (d) has the take-up of validation among different groups increased in recent years as a result of awareness raising?
- (e) to what extent is awareness raising information targeted to different groups and their specific circumstances?
- (f) to what extent are outreach measures, promotional activities, and information on validation coordinated between the different actors involved and connected to other relevant services and support structures?

- (g) do public databases/private platforms contain information on the qualifications/credentials that can be achieved via the validation of non-formal and informal learning?
- (h) what are the main elements that contribute to the success of existing awareness raising campaigns? How is the attractiveness of the awareness-raising campaigns measured?

It is important to note that the delimitation of what constitutes a validation-related awareness raising or outreach activity is not always straightforward. Considering the overall low level of awareness-raising activity related to validation in many countries, this report applies a rather liberal definition in this regard.

## CHAPTER 2.

# Key characteristics of outreach activities to increase awareness in validation

This section provides an overview of how countries and systems set awareness raising and outreach activities related to validation. It examines the topic from different perspectives, including the types of measures and methods placed, the content of information provided, the main actors involved, the coordination of awareness raising and outreach activities. Examples are presented to illustrate how countries put awareness raising and outreach activities into practice. It should be noted that regarding information on impact assessment and the key success factors of awareness raising activities, country reports provide little evidence (see also Section 2.5).

### 2.1. Overview on outreach activities in validation

Almost all countries analysed provide examples of awareness raising and outreach activities related to validation. However, in many countries, awareness activities seem to be fragmented, with very limited evidence of coordination with other services and across different sectors. At the same time, the Inventory country reports also showcase instructive examples where great efforts have been undertaken to improve the coordination of information provided to target groups, and to identify effective forms of communication. Yet, the existence of 'one-stop shops' for information on validation still represent the exception rather than the rule.

In several country reports, a strong emphasis on outreach and awareness raising in policy objectives can be identified. For example, in the Netherlands, the ministerial project *MBOin2030* [VET in 2030] is geared towards providing an infrastructure in VET in which learners can learn anywhere, formally and informally. In the *MBOin2030* ministerial programme for the VET sector, outreach and raising awareness are crucial activities.

In terms of the content of information provided, existing awareness raising actions tend to focus either on the benefits of validation or describing the characteristics of the procedure. In terms of forms of communication, storytelling-based approaches have been increasingly used to communicate the benefits of validation, as the examples from Ireland, Slovenia and Iceland show.

## 2.2. Types of measures or methods to increase awareness of validation

In terms of the types of measures or methods used to promote awareness of validation, for many countries, information provided online, on websites, forms the key means to raise awareness of validation opportunities. In many cases, information is spread over different websites, e.g. provided by different ministries or agencies, or at regional level. In some cases, specific validation-themed websites are maintained that mainly focus on promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is, for instance, the case for the [Recognition of Prior Learning website](#) and social media accounts set up through the RPL in HE project in Ireland. The website shares information on RPL in higher education institutions for learners, as well as resources and tools for higher education staff and employers. Additionally, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and individual HEIs provide information about RPL on their websites.

In France, where the VAE validation procedure has been in place for almost 20 years, every individual has the right to receive information, advice and guidance on the VAE validation process. The [national VAE \(1\) portal](#) is a one-stop-shop that provides information services for potential candidates, employers and validation practitioners. The portal is by the French Ministry of Labour. It is intended to provide different stakeholders with all the information and required administrative documents in the same place, while also providing access to trained counsellors. The VAE portal is complemented by sector-specific websites which are maintained by ministries or bodies with a public service mission, by branches or bipartite training funds, such as <https://vae.asp-public.fr/> for health and social care sector.

In Slovenia, the website dedicated to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) is the main vehicle to raise awareness of validation<sup>2</sup>. It addresses different target groups, including counsellors, education and training providers, employers, employees, trainers, young people, and adults. It includes an extensive video section to raise the visibility and attractiveness of NVQ and validation opportunities, as illustrated in the box below. The [NVQ portal](#) furthermore includes a database of occupational standards, catalogues of vocational knowledge and skills, a database of institutions conducting validation, as well as a database of licenced members of the NVQ commission and validation practitioners.

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(1) VAE, *validation des acquis de l'expérience* refers to the French procedure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

(2) National Vocational Qualifications can be fully awarded based on the validation of non-formal learning.



### Box 1. Use of different types of videos as part of the NVQ portal in Slovenia

The website contains well-structured information for future candidates, potential members of the NVQ commission, for counsellors and for institutions conducting the validation process related to [National Vocational Qualifications \(NVQs\)](#). The website uses different video formats which includes both informational videos (e.g. on how to acquire an NVQ), animated video stories and testimonials from holders of a NVQ qualification.

The animated video stories, which have a duration of between 90 seconds and four minutes, take a fictional character, Peter, through different steps related to the NVQ process, such as: 'Peter wants to know how someone can become a member of the NVQ commission', 'Peter wants to know about the function of the personal portfolio in the NVQ system'; 'Peter wants to know how a new NVQ catalogue is prepared'; 'Peter is interested in the benefits of NVQ for the companies and where the concept of NVQ comes from'; 'Let us see what advantages the NVQ certificate can bring to Peter'; etc. The video testimonials are available for approximately 20 different occupations, ranging from accountant to web designer, and have a duration of between 90 seconds and three minutes.

The website additionally hosts a database of occupational standards, [catalogues of vocational knowledge and skills](#), a database of institutions conducting validation, as well as a database of licenced members of the commission and validation practitioners.

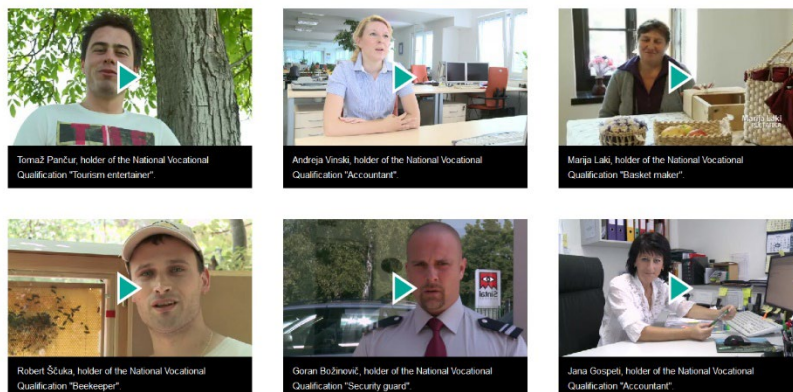
Figure 1 Screenshot: Animated video story 'Peter learns how to obtain a NVQ certificate'



Source : <https://npk.si/en/nvq-stories/>

Figure 2. **Screenshot: Video testimonials from holders of a National Vocational Qualification**

Declarations by holders of a [National Vocational Qualification](#)



Source: <https://npk.si/en/user-statements/>

In Portugal, the [website of the Qualifica Programme](#) () is the key information source for validation in the field of professional and adult education. Additionally, the [website of the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training \(ANQEP\)](#) provides information on validation procedures.

In Belgium (Wallonia), the [website of the Consortium de validation des compétences](#) (CVDC – Consortium for the validation of skills) is one of the key sources of information on validation. It has two entry point: one for the general public and one for professionals (i.e. counsellors, companies, practitioners in the validation of skills).

In several cases, detailed information on validation opportunities is offered as part of platforms or websites that have a wider focus:

- (a) Iceland: The information and guidance platform [Next step](#), operated by the Education and Training Service Centre, provides information on available validation pathways. Through so-called 'screening lists', interested individuals can self-assess their eligibility for a validation procedure through an online questionnaire, which will then refer them to the nearest LLL centre for further guidance.
- (b) Romania: The main tool used for raising awareness about validation is the [website of the National Qualifications Agency](#). The website also lists the authorised assessment centres and provides information on occupational standards, next to further information related to various aspects of the qualifications system.
- (c) Belgium (Wallonia): For validation in higher education, the [mesetudes.be](#) website, a portal dedicated to higher education in Walloon-Brussels

Federation, provides information about validation procedures in all universities and other higher education institutions.

Online information provided on websites may include elements of storytelling (e.g. in Iceland, Slovenia) or targeted online campaigns (e.g. Italian region of Piedmont). Several countries use testimonials or individual success stories of validation users to promote validation arrangements. This is based on the idea that potential validation users might find it easier to relate to a successful user experience, which could function as a motivator for potential validation users. The Recognition of Prior Learning Website for Ireland (see above and Box 2 in Section 3.1) as well uses case study videos and testimonials from beneficiaries, employers and practitioners. The Slovenian NVQ website (Box 1 in Section 2.1) includes both animated video stories and video testimonials from NVQ holders.

### **Social media**

Certain countries (e.g. Iceland, Netherlands, Ireland) actively promote validation through various social media channels. In Iceland, for example, for each validation project <sup>(3)</sup>, a steering group identifies the most suitable channel for awareness raising and recruitment of candidates, depending on the sectoral landscape. For most projects, ads are placed on social media or in local or national newspapers. The RPL in HE project in Ireland maintains an active social media presence both on X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn (Box 2 in Section 3.1).

### **Traditional media**

Besides Iceland, several further countries use traditional media, such as press, radio or television to promote validation of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. Cyprus, Italy, Spain).

An example from Italy dates back several years but is still an interesting case to mention. In 2015, the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (INAPP) in cooperation with the National Italian television broadcasting RAI and financial support from the ESF, produced a documentary called *L'esperienza vale* (Valuing experience, see [trailer](#)). The documentary was an experiment and a new way of informing citizens and communicating public policy about validation of non-formal and informal learning. The pilot focused on Italian and foreign stories of learners who found work, built their own ambitions for integration, or returned to training thanks to the system of validation and certification of their competences.

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<sup>(3)</sup> In the Icelandic context, this refers to a group going through validation in a specific curriculum.

## **Awareness-raising campaigns**

Awareness-raising campaigns have for example been launched in Finland, Malta, Portugal, Spain, and in the Italian Piedmont region.

In Finland, since 2021, validation has been supported by a large scale, collaborative awareness raising campaign called Reveal Your Skills (*Osaaminen nakyytiin*).

In Portugal, the Qualifica Programme Campaign launched in October 2022 is narrower in scope compared to the Finnish example, focusing in promoting the Qualifica Programme through various media and communication channels. The goal of this campaign, which is titled 'Take hold of yourself and improve your future' has been developed to address the effects of the COVID19 pandemic, which led many adults to interrupt their validation processes. As a result, the government has been trying to reinforce the campaign around the Qualifica Programme and also in the dissemination of the Qualifica Accelerator (financial support given to adults who complete their validation routes).

In Spain, campaigns have been organised at regional level. This includes campaigns on television, radio, newspapers and social and online media provide information on the benefits of validating skills.

The Italian region of Piedmont launched a campaign titled 'Show off your skills!' (*metti in luce le tue capacità!*) to promote its validation offer. It includes inspiring online videos highlighting individual success stories. (Regione Piemonte, 2024)

In 2021, the Maltese Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) led a campaign to promote the value of VNFIL. The slogan used was 'Validate your experience'. It was partly aimed at migrants, to help to increase their chances of employment. The campaign was considered successful for raising awareness of the importance of recognising skills and competencies.

In Belgium (Wallonia), CVDC (Consortium de validation des compétences – Consortium for the validation of skills) organises a digital communication campaign every year between October and December. It aims to inform individuals about the possibilities for the validation of competences.

Several countries referred to awareness-raising activities carried out as part of projects implemented within Erasmus+ or ESF.

In Austria, for example, information activities carried out in the context of the Erasmus+ project TRANSVAL-EU <sup>(4)</sup> can be considered as an awareness-raising

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<sup>(4)</sup> TRANSVAL-EU (2021) was one of the largest European policy experimentation projects on VNFIL, finalised in 2023. It was coordinated by the National Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria (OeAD, Agency for Education and Internationalisation) on

activity at national level. This activity includes, for example, the strategic exchange on validation in general and the validation of transversal competences in particular in the framework of the 'Austrian Forum TRANSVAL-EU' as well as the dissemination activities of the project partners, for example on the project results and the national and international events.

In Lithuania, the 'Development of the Lithuanian Qualifications System (Phase I)' project, financed by the European Social Fund, was used for dissemination of information.

In Slovakia, awareness-raising activities were launched as part of the national ESF project 'System of verifying qualifications' (SOK project, 2019-2023). These included dissemination of project leaflets, promotion through website articles as well as social media posts (Facebook and Instagram).

### **Employer engagement**

Outreach through employer engagement seems to play a rather limited role, but was still reported by a small number of countries (e.g. Germany, Iceland, Ireland).

In Ireland, for example, the Donegal ETB RPL coordinator reaches out to employers to find out if RPL could be of use to their employees. Cork Institute of Technology (now part of MTU) meanwhile has held over 40 "Learning clinics" within employer organisations to inform employers and employees about RPL. In Iceland, guidance practitioners and staff from LLL centres, visit companies to provide information directly to individuals.

In Belgium (Wallonia), the consortium for the validation of skills (CVDC) has in recent years stepped up its efforts in promoting the validation of competencies towards companies. CVDC actively promotes the validation of competencies to companies as an opportunity to further develop their 'brand image', their human capital development as well as corporate social responsibility.

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behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and co-funded by Erasmus+ KA3 Policy Reform – Policy Experimentations. The project had 16 full partners from 7 countries.

## Events

Several countries organise events on a regular basis, with a view to bringing together key stakeholders and practitioners for the purpose of awareness raising, networking and mutual exchange.

In Ireland, for example, the national-level RPL practitioner network runs regular events bringing together practitioners and stakeholders to network, share good practice, raise awareness and contribute to policy.

In Austria, occasional events (conferences, workshops) are organised to inform specific target groups about validation opportunities. In January 2023, for example, a joint expert conference on the topic of validation procedures in the Austrian higher education area took place at the University of Teacher Education Vienna. The symposium provided a cross-sectoral overview of validation procedures in the Austrian higher education area, complemented by recommendations on the design of validation procedures.

Awards ceremonies are considered an opportunity to raise the profile of validation as a means of obtaining a qualification in further education and training. Awards ceremonies make validation more attractive by showing that individuals can obtain a qualification through validation.

In some higher education institutions, welcome days for first-year students are used to inform about the possibilities of validation of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. reported for some HEIs in Hungary).

## Calls for innovative projects

In the **Netherlands**, as part of the [MBOin2030 ministerial programme](#) for the VET sector, outreach and awareness raising are considered as crucial activities <sup>(5)</sup>. These are mainly achieved through an integral communication strategy involving the formation of an open network via LinkedIn, a website for information and exchange, and live meetings. One particularly interesting element are the so-called innovation challenges ('innovatie challenges'). Through a call for innovative projects, organisations are invited to submit innovative ideas for the application of validation of non-formal and informal learning, thereby strengthening connections between learners, education, and the labour market.

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<sup>(5)</sup> The ministerial project MBOin2030 [VET in 2030] is geared towards providing an infrastructure in VET in which learners can learn anywhere, formally and informally. The role of VPL in this infrastructure is paramount for providing quality-assured linkages between personal, qualification and occupational standards. In the MBOin2030 ministerial programme for the VET sector, outreach and raising awareness are crucial activities.

### 2.3. Specific target groups

Although in many cases, specific target groups for validation initiatives have been identified, they do not necessarily lead to targeted outreach measures being put in place in the countries.

Examples of awareness raising activities targeting specific audiences include the following:

- (a) Migrants: In Malta, the 2021 'validate your experience' campaign was partly aimed at migrants, to help to increase their chances of employment. In France, integration measures for migrants have recently, in March 2023, been bundled into a new 'Experience without borders' scheme (Expérience sans frontières, Gouvernement Français, n.d.). It aims to promote the recognition of prior experience (both from formal and informal learning) as an asset for finding long-term employment in France.
- (b) Employed without qualifications: Communication campaigns in Spain mostly address employed individuals who do not have educational diplomas.
- (c) Ukrainian refugees: Relatively few cases have been reported where awareness-raising activities have specifically set to address Ukrainian refugees. In Finland, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment launched an awareness raising campaign that explains in a nutshell the rights of people under temporary protection in the labour market, covering also the early stages of validation. In Ireland, an education helpline was set up to support Ukrainian refugees, while information and resources on validation were provided to the helpline staff, ensuring that refugees could find out about opportunities that might help them to access education or employment in Ireland. In Romania, the website of the National Agency for Employment (NAE) provides information and tries to raise awareness about the services they offer to Ukrainian refugees. These services include validation of non-formal and informal learning, for those who do not already possess a certificate <sup>(6)</sup>.
- (d) Returning migrants: in Romania, the Romanian Presidential Administration with the help of the National Qualifications Agency and the National Agency for Employment have developed a guidebook on validation opportunities for Romanians living abroad. This is intended to help them understand the steps for validating, in Romania, and obtaining a certificate for their professional

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<sup>(6)</sup> Detailed information on validation initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees can be found in the thematic report on this topic produced as part of the 2023 European Inventory.

- competences gained while working abroad. The guide was disseminated online among Romanians living abroad.
- (e) Individuals interested in entering the teaching profession: A highly demand-driven example is reported from the Netherlands. Teacher training institutions actively use outreach and awareness raising activities to address shortages in the teaching profession. They are working to strengthen opportunities for individuals with relevant work experience to enter the teaching profession, by providing information about the required competencies and opportunities that validation provides.
  - (f) Guidance practitioners: In France, while guidance practitioners are generally well informed about the VAE validation process, with the current system being in place for almost 20 years, a number of specific initiatives are in place at regional and local level to enhance awareness levels of VAE among guidance practitioners. The region of Ile-de-France, for example, through its VAE information service (*Pôle Régional Information Conseil en VAE*) organises regular information sessions on VAE for all practitioners working in the field of vocational guidance, labour market services and social inclusion.

## 2.4. Main actors involved and coordination of activities

The 2020 study supporting the evaluation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning noted that raising awareness of the benefits of validation, and improving its visibility by the same token, is best served through strategic collaboration between public sector institutions and the business community (European Commission, 2020).

In most countries, several groups of key actors are involved in coordinating and running awareness-raising and outreach activities related to validation (e.g. national authorities such as ministries, education agencies, public employment services, educational institutions). The involvement of sectoral organisations has been reported in some cases. In the case of Spain, also trade unions launch campaigns for awareness raising. Overall, the degree of coordination among the different stakeholders varies considerably across countries. While coordinated approaches can be observed for some countries, in most others validation-related awareness raising activities could benefit from increased coordination.

The integrated approach in the Netherlands foresees that the government is responsible for raising awareness of the merits of validation of prior learning in the education route, while the social partners have this responsibility for the labour market route. They work together as covenant partners in this. In this covenant – which is being reviewed two-yearly – the commitment of the stakeholders to raising



awareness, quality-assurance and linkage of the two routes are agreed upon <sup>(7)</sup>. At the micro level, registered validation of prior learning (VPL) providers and schools/universities offering VPL are the main source of information for people interested in validation. In addition, a regional structure has been set up with *Leer Werk Loketten* <sup>(8)</sup> across the country. Everyone – jobseeker, employee and employer – can visit such a centre and receive free advice on learning and working opportunities. Amongst other institutions, these centres facilitate cooperation between VPL providers, schools (VET and HE) and employees and/or employers.

In France, awareness raising is the joint responsibility of different stakeholders located at different levels of governance. The Ministry of Labour maintains the general VAE online information portal. At regional level, a network of VAE Counselling Centres (*points relais conseil – PRC*) act as a focal point to provide basic information about the validation process and to refer potential applicants to the relevant awarding body. Information provided by the PRCs is personalised and free of charge. Further stakeholders include public employment services, guidance providers as well as sectoral social partners.

In Iceland, outreach and awareness raising activities are coordinated by the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in cooperation with 14 regional lifelong learning (LLL) centres. ETSC operates the ‘Next step’? information and guidance platform, whereas LLL centres advertise validation opportunities through various media, including local or national newspapers and social media. Interested individuals are directed to the nearest LLL centre for further guidance. Furthermore, guidance personnel at public employment services and rehabilitation services also play a role in raising awareness of validation opportunities.

In several other countries, outreach and awareness raising activities take place with less coordination at national level, with awareness raising activities seemingly taking place in a rather fragmented way.

This can, for example, be observed for Austria, where outreach and promotional activities are usually carried out separately for the different validation opportunities, i.e. by the organisations responsible for a validation initiative, the respective ministries or regional authorities, or by social partner organisations. Relevant information on opportunities for validation is usually made available on websites (but content and comprehensiveness of the information varies depending on the initiative). More systematic approaches to support overall awareness raising and outreach towards validation opportunities have not been developed so far.

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<sup>(7)</sup> At macro level, relevant ministries and the social partners is in charge. At meso-level, information is distributed by the sector partners (employers and trade unions).

<sup>(8)</sup> A ‘leer werk loket’ is a central place where all information can be found in the region on careers, training and combining learning and work.

In the case of Poland, information – while available online – is provided in a rather fragmented way - with each of the validation institutions operating within a narrow scope. The Educational Research Institute (IBE) provides information on the [Integrated Qualification System](#). The Ministry of Family and Social Policy, on the other hand, provides information on professional qualification standards and occupational descriptions.

Fragmentation of the information provided to users can also be observed in the case of Sweden. The provision of validation in Sweden involves a significant number of actors <sup>(9)</sup>. Additionally, many sectoral validations are led exclusively by sectoral partners. While the inter-agency cooperation on validation has been enhanced in recent years (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has a coordinating role in this regard), the provision of information to the user to date remains somewhat fragmented in the sense that it is spread out across different institutions and websites.

In Italy, most activities to increase awareness of validation are undertaken at regional level, with some regions appearing more active than others in this regard. One of the more active regions is, for instance, Piedmont (see example mentioned above). National-level activities are undertaken as well. However, they mostly refer to workshops and conferences with overall limited audience. A national communication strategy for promoting validation is currently not in place.

In several cases, awareness raising and information on validation is delegated almost entirely to the institutional level, with very little or no overall coordination at national level. This is, for instance, the case in Hungary. While the website of the [Education Authority](#) provides some information and publications on validation, the provision of information almost exclusively takes place at the level of the institution providing validation of non-formal and informal learning (i.e. higher education or adult training institutions).

### **The role of educational institutions**

Schools, VET centres and universities in their role as validation providers also play an important role in outreach and raising awareness of validation opportunities. This is the case in countries where a coordinated provision of information related to outreach and awareness raising is absent at national level (as mentioned in the case of Hungary above). Sometimes educational institutions that offer validation services have the obligation to provide information on validation; this is, for

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<sup>(9)</sup> Including the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, the Swedish Council for Higher Education, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, the Swedish Public Employment Service as well as sectoral organisations and industries.

example, the case in Belgium-Wallonia (for higher educations), in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, or Slovenia.

In Portugal, Qualifica centres, which are centres specialised in adult education, play a key role in raising awareness of validation opportunities at local level, together with Public Employment Services. In Estonia, each educational institution is responsible for informing current students about validation options. This applies to both VET and HE institutions.

Specifically, in higher education, it is typically up to each individual institution to provide information and guidance about validation to their learners.

The extent to which higher education institutions promote validation opportunities, however, varies significantly across countries and institutions. In general terms, it can be said that many higher education institutions often provide information about validation opportunities on their website, through their admissions and guidance services, and through events (e.g. education fairs or welcome days) for prospective students.

In a few cases, higher education institutions have formed a network towards providing a more coordinated approach to validation.

In Ireland, for example, the pilot framework for RPL in HE <sup>(10)</sup> sets out a principle that 'appropriate user-friendly information and advice [must be] readily available to all involved in the RPL process' and that information on RPL must be visible and accessible to learners. (Recognition of Prior Learning, n.d.) Of the 14 Irish higher education institutions involved in the overarching RPL in HE project, 12 had developed dedicated webpages for RPL developed by the time of writing this report, with the remaining two expected to follow shortly thereafter.

In Switzerland, the website of the *Réseau romand de la VAE* presents the validation procedures offered by three institutions in Romandy (French-speaking part of the country): University of Geneva, University of Lausanne and University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland. The website also includes information videos on the validation procedure as well as a short quiz to test one's suitability for the validation procedure.

### **Public employment services**

The role of public employment services (PES) in raising awareness of validation opportunities at local level has been reported in a few countries, including Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Czechia, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovakia and Finland.

In Belgium (Wallonia), for example, counsellors in public employment services play a key role in providing information about the VDC validation of skills procedure

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<sup>(10)</sup> The Pilot Framework for RPL in Higher Education was developed collaboratively by fourteen higher education institutions and agreed in principle by their Registrars.

(*validation des compétences*) to persons who might benefit from validation. They provide information about the existence of the VDC scheme and point them to validation centres. A guide for counsellors is available, which was developed by Consortium for the validation of skills (*Consortium de Validation des Compétences*, 2008).

In Belgium (Flanders), VDAB, the Flemish public employment service, actively informs, advises and guides possible candidates, mostly jobseekers, towards validation arrangements. Furthermore, VDAB also maintains [dedicated pages of the EVC procedure for professional qualifications on their website](#).

In Cyprus, specialised employment counsellors are aware of the VQS procedure and encourage unemployed persons to participate.

In Czechia, public employment services and their counsellors play a key role in informing and guiding individuals towards validation related to the NSK (National Register of Qualifications, considered CVET). More specifically, public employment services are gradually adopting the concept of NSK vocational qualifications as the primary instrument offered to jobseekers for retraining.

In Finland, public employment services play an important role in providing information on validation as part of wider career guidance activities (in addition to services provided by the education and training institutions, and multi-professional guidance services). Public employment services provide information on job opportunities as well as validation. In order to improve the quality of services, a Nordic workforce service model was introduced in 2022, covering both identification of competence and service needs.

### **Career guidance and counselling services**

In several countries, career guidance and counselling services provide information to users on opportunities to validate their non-formal and informal skills.

In Belgium (Flanders), local educational counsellors (*'leerwinkels'*) play a role in informing and directing individuals to validation service, complementing the activities of VDAB (PES) and sectoral funds.

Related to higher education, Belgium (Wallonia), for example, requires by decree that each higher education institution (i.e. universities and *hautes écoles*) must provide guidance to inform individuals about the possibilities to valorise their prior learning. This is generally done through validation counsellors in the HEIs.

Multi-professional guidance services in Finland play a key role in raising awareness of validation possibilities (next to education and training institutions and the PES). Multi-professional guidance centres help individuals discover, clarify, assess and understand their own experience and explore available alternatives and strategies for validation. These include Competence Centres for Immigrants

in eight cities with the largest number of immigrants. There are also about 70 multi-professional Ohjaamo guidance centres targeting young persons under the age of 30. Their support and guidance are provided free of charge.

## 2.5. Impact of awareness raising activities on take-up

There is a lack of data and information on the impact of awareness raising and outreach activities on the take-up of validation. Very few countries set specific measures to measure the attractiveness of awareness-raising activities or campaigns. For most countries, there is no information on any measured impact in this regard, i.e. data on any correlation between awareness raising activities and the take-up of validation seems to be largely unavailable or not collected. Information on evidence of an impact of awareness raising activities on take-up has for example been reported for Iceland, Lithuania and the Netherlands. In the case of Iceland, more women are now taking part as statistics from the ETSC reveal for the year 2022. For the first time they are a percentage point above the men. That is also due to that vocations where women are in majority are now increasingly being advertised at the centres.

For some countries, an increase in take-up was noted but with no hard evidence available that this could be linked to an increase in awareness-raising activities, as reported for Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Romania. In the case of Ireland, at least, the increased demand for validation in further education and training appears to be the result of increased awareness through word-of-mouth. In a few cases, it was reported that the short time span passed since awareness-raising activities have been implemented has so far not allowed to measure their impact (e.g. Poland).

## CHAPTER 3.

# Conclusions: success factors and challenges

### 3.1. Success factors of awareness raising actions

Information on the success factors of awareness raising actions is available from a relatively small number of countries, including Iceland, Ireland Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Finland. Recurring aspects include a positive spin on communication, targeted information to different groups as well as continuity of information provided and coordinated follow-up to actions. Story-based forms of communication appear to work very well for some countries, for example interviews and success. In terms of tools, short videos and social media advertising have been described as particularly effective. Furthermore, the accessibility of measures seems to play a role, e.g. through different participation formats (e.g. online, in person or hybrid events) and multilingual activities.

In Ireland, the RPL in HE project makes extensive use of social media platforms, and story-based forms of communication. Recently, greater emphasis has been put on awareness raising with employers. The box below provides insights into the key success factors of this approach.

#### Box 2. Key success factors of RPL in HE project in Ireland

The RPL in HE project has 14 partners – higher education institutions – across Ireland. Awareness raising mainly addresses staff in higher education institutes, i.e. people that are or might be doing RPL.

The RPL in HE project uses various channels of communication to raise awareness of validation. This includes a project website, active social media presence on X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn, as well as a YouTube channel. Recently, increased emphasis has been placed on raising awareness with industry.

- Awareness raising is a central plank in all activities related to the RPL in HE project. It should be taken into consideration that this takes significant time and effort to do this.
- Effective awareness raising requires identifying your audiences and figuring out what you are trying to say and share. What should be the call to action?
- Validation needs a 'human face'. There is a risk to get caught up about technicalities when talking about recognition of prior learning. 'Humanising RPL' by reporting on stories of those doing it or benefitting from it has proven an effective form of communication.
- In cooperating with industry, take into account that RPL is very relationship-driven.
- Focus on network and community building. RPL in HE seeks to bring relevant HE institutions together on a regular basis, both through online and face-to-face

meetings. These meetings seek to facilitate sharing of learning between the institutions. Additionally, working groups, masterclasses or guest speakers may be added.

- Use and build on existing networks whenever possible. Building a network of validation institutions from scratch would be very time-consuming.

Links

[RPL in HE website](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[X \(formerly Twitter\)](#)

[YouTube](#)

Box 3 describes the key success factors of the Finnish Reveal your Skills campaign.

### Box 3. **Key success factors of the Reveal your Skills campaign in Finland**

Key success factors of the Reveal your Skills campaign in Finland

- The focus was on communicating positive ideas about validation identifying and making visible and valuing skills can competences that people have, rather than focusing on deficiencies.
- The communication and events were targeted at different groups: working-age adults, young people, experts, industry changers, job seekers, part-time workers, immigrants, personnel representing different fields, and different study and hobby groups.
- A simplified overall goal of the campaign was established. More detailed goals of the campaign were tailored for individuals, communities and society.
- The key messages were developed around the idea that the identification of skills applies to all working-age people, regardless of their educational background, life situation and labour market situation. All people should be encouraged to identify their own learning, competence, expertise and recognise that everyone has a variety of valuable skills.
- The key messages were approached from different perspectives: from the perspectives of learning at work, wellbeing at work, finding a job, continuous learning, and inclusion and wellbeing.
- To enable a maximum number of people to take part in the campaign, all events and activities were made available free of charge.
- To reach out to underserved groups, intermediary organisations were mobilised:
- A diverse set of concrete outputs, tools and exercises were developed by the campaign and its collaborating organisations. To make validation more accessible to all, they were made available on open access website: a full

portfolio of events, blogs, radio talks, tools, expert tips, stories, videos, podcasts, cartoons, etc.

- Measures were taken to ensure that the awareness raising campaign was followed up in different ways.

### 3.2. Challenges

Although the data available is not directly comparable to the previous editions of the European Inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning, it still allows to conclude that for a number of countries, intensified efforts to enhance outreach and awareness raising activities related to validation can be observed. Nevertheless, a lack of awareness of validation possibilities among individuals remains a key challenge in many countries.

In the case of Italy, for example, it has been reported that more than 90% of the lifelong learning processes lack the interest of firms and employees (as they do not understand the advantage of this process).

In Romania, little progress has been reported related to active awareness-raising activities compared to the 2018 Inventory. As a result, outreach and awareness-raising activities still lack the volume, support and resources needed to reach all potential beneficiaries.

In the case of Portugal, there were concerns that the most recent campaign launched to promote the Qualifica Programme (in October 2022) could fall short of expectations. With middle- and lower-income households being particularly affected by the worsening economic situation, their participation in validation procedures could potentially decrease.

The fragmentation of awareness-raising activities and information provided observed in a number of countries (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Poland, but also several others) leads to a situation where a number of institutions inform about a 'slice' of the system, without being able to provide a comprehensive overview of validation opportunities provided. Even if the relevant information is available online, it may appear scattered and incomplete to the user. Ultimately, existing information channels fall short of reaching wider audiences and thus prevent more effective outreach.

Countries with overall low levels of outreach and awareness raising activities include Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Liechtenstein and Lithuania. While in many cases, national websites provide some information on validation procedures, awareness raising efforts, if at all, tend to be found only at the level of individual providers or as part of ongoing projects.



The need to enhance outreach and awareness raising related to validation was emphasised (but not only) in the Inventory country reports for Bulgaria, Czechia and Spain. Both Belgium (Flanders) and Cyprus reported on (unspecified) planned activities in the future.

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## Abbreviations

ANQEP	National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (Portugal)
CVDC	Consortium de validation des compétences (Consortium for the validation of skills) (Belgium - Wallonia)
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
ESF	European Social Fund
ETB	Education and Training Board (Ireland)
ETSC	Education and Training Service Centre (Iceland)
EVC	Erkennen van Verworven Competenties (Recognition of competences) (Belgium (NL))
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
INAPP	National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (Italy)
LLL	Lifelong learning
NAE	National Agency for Employment (Romania)
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
VAE	Validation des acquis de l'expérience (French system for validation of non-formal and informal learning)
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
LLL	Lifelong learning
MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
NSK	National Register of Qualifications (Czechia)
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PES	Public employment service
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
VDAB	Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (Public employment service of Flanders)
VET	Vocational education and training

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

This thematic report focuses on systems and arrangements to increase awareness of opportunities for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Low awareness of validation continues to impede the take-up of validation as the potential benefits of validation opportunities remain relatively unknown.

With a focus on validation that results in certification, exemptions, or other similar types of outputs, this report aims to explore how information on validation is made available and the type of outreach measures employed to reach different target groups. Key considerations include the types of actors involved, the coordination of awareness-raising activities and their connection with other support services.

The report also examines the content of awareness raising campaigns, the availability of information at different stages of the validation process, channels for presentation of the information, and extent to which information is accessible to different target groups. Finally, the report explores the extent to which both public databases and private platforms for qualifications/credentials include information on validation opportunities, identifying if they provide information on whether the qualification/credential can be achieved via validation of non-formal and informal learning. Success factors for awareness raising actions include a positive spin on communication, targeted information to different groups as well as continuity of information provided and coordinated follow-up actions. Furthermore, story-based forms of communication appear to work very well for some countries, particularly in connection with social media advertising and short videos.

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

**CEDEFOP**European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE  
Postal address: Cedefop service post, 57001 Themi, GREECE  
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: [info@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:info@cedefop.europa.eu)

**visit our portal [www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)**