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

COUNTRY REPORT:
LITHUANIA

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Acknowledgements

Disclaimer:

Contents

1   Abstract

All major Lithuanian laws related to education and employment recognise the rights of individuals to access validation of non-formal and informal learning. Besides legislation, validation in Lithuania is also covered by several national strategies and programmes. Validation is part of the education and training, including vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE), and the labour market policies. The remaining drawbacks of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania relate to the lack of awareness and outreach activities, the lack of use of ICT in validation, the lack of publicly available data on validation activities and the monitoring and evaluation system.

2   Introduction

Validation in Lithuania is an integral part of the lifelong learning system and is covered by national strategies and programmes. Qualifications at all levels of the national qualifications' framework may be acquired either through formal education programmes or through gaining professional experience or independent study (Lithuanian Government 2010). Lithuania has multiple legal frameworks covering validation. In vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) any learning or working experience may be assessed and recognised. There is no evidence that validation is used in general education.

Lithuania has in place validation arrangements which make it possible to assess non-formal or informal learning in VET and HE. The skills and competencies acquired outside formal education are assessed against standards or programmes used in formal education. The results of the validation are recognised by the education system and lead to formal qualifications which are linked to the national qualifications framework. Persons wishing to formalise their non-formal and informal learning must apply to an appropriate VET or HE provider. Each of them has an internal quality system which also applies to the assessment of learning outcomes. The arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET and HE includes all elements (i.e., identification, documentation, assessment and certification) as specified in the Council recommendation (EU Council, 2012).

In 2021, the leaders of the parliamentary parties signed the Agreement on Education Policy until 2030, which aims to be the most important landmark for the decade and give an impetus to the entire education system (Lithuanian Government, 2021). Several articles relate to non-formal and informal education and its validation. In particular, one aim is by the year 2027 to expand the range of non-formal education opportunities available to children and provide access to children as young as three years old, with priority given to children from socially at-risk families or with individual learning needs. Implement an achievement evaluation model, which can be used by children in general education schools to form a portfolio of competencies acquired through non-formal education. In addition, by 2024 establish a self-education and recognition system for competencies acquired through non-formal means and ensure its accessibility to all those who wish to continue their formal education program.

The 2021 Implementation plan for government program provisions aims to establish a favourable system for lifelong learning with a focus on validating non-formal and informal learning (Lithuanian Government, 2021). The plan includes actions to standardize recognition services for formal, non-formal, and self-directed learning, develop a comprehensive lifelong learning system model, and provide tools and support for less-educated groups to participate in formal and non-formal education programs. The plan also aims to prioritize governance, quality assurance, financing

system elements, and legal regulation of the model in the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education.

Further developments of the validation system include the introduction of a new cumulative assessment approach, covering learning outcomes acquired outside formal education into general education (Lithuanian Government, 2017). It was also planned to create a digital tool, which would provide information about the possibilities to validate non-formal and informal learning and would also direct an applicant to a certain validation provider. This tool would allow initial testing and monitoring of applicants' competences[1].

However, there is still room for improvement. The validation arrangements do not cover all sectors of the education system. Although the level of awareness about the validation of non-formal and informal learning amongst the public is rather poor, it is not currently among strategic priorities and lacks necessary funding. The information about validation users is not monitored. There is also a lack of validation reference material, methodologies and tools. The provision for the development of the professional competencies of staff involved in the validation process is missing. The quality of VET students' competencies assessment, which also covers validation of non-formal and informal learning, is insufficient (KPMPC, 2017).

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

All major Lithuanian laws related to education and employment recognise the rights of individuals to access validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The Law on Science and Studies (Lithuanian Parliament, 2023) Article 57 deals with the assessment and recognition of competencies acquired through formal and non-formal education and self-education. It stipulates that:

a) individuals may apply to higher education institutions for assessment and recognition of their competencies acquired through formal and non-formal education and self-education related to higher education;

b) recognition of competencies acquired through formal education, for those who wish to continue their studies at a higher education institution, is carried out as part of the study program by the higher education institution according to the procedure established by the Minister of Education and Science;

c) the Minister of Education and Science establishes the general principles for the assessment and recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal and self-education related to higher education. The assessment and recognition of these competencies are carried out by higher education institutions according to their procedure.

The Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education's (Lithuanian Parliament, 2021) Article 11 also provides for the recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education:

a) the general or specific competence acquired through non-formal education or self-education by an individual may be recognized as a part of a completed formal education program (except for study programs) or as a part of a study program,

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[1] The national project 'Further development of the system for evaluation and recognition of competences acquired in different ways', which started in June 2018, aimed at developing the tool. However, the tool is still in development.

according to the procedure established by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport or according to the procedure established by a higher education institution;

b) the general or specific competence acquired through non-formal education or self-education may be recognized and legalized, following legal acts, as a competence necessary for performing work or a function regulated by laws;

c) The general or specific competence acquired through non-formal education or self-education may be recognized and legalized as a qualification corresponding to a certain level determined in the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework.

The Law on Vocational Education and Training's (Lithuanian Parliament, 2023a) Article 23, amended in 2022, provides for the evaluation and recognition of formal and non-formal education and self-education acquired competencies. It states that a person seeking to obtain a qualification, or a financing institution responsible for the acquisition of the person's qualification, may apply to vocational training institutions for the evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education or self-education related to the desired qualification. The procedure for the evaluation and recognition of these competencies is established by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport.

A Law on Employment (Lithuanian Parliament, 2016) for the first time introduced validation of non-formal and informal learning as one of the measures supporting learning. The law establishes that the unemployed person is free to choose a validation service provider[2] and that the budget shall not exceed 0.6 of the minimum monthly payment approved by the Lithuanian Government. The law also states that the number of validation services should be limited to three per year for one unemployed person; and that the labour exchange shall organise assessment and recognition of competencies acquired outside formal education for unemployed people. Following the procedure for implementation of employment support measures (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2017) it is stated that the labour exchange shall organise validation of non-formal and informal learning if it is necessary for unemployed people to fill a vacancy or start their own business[3].

Besides legislation, validation in Lithuania is also covered by several national strategies and programmes.

The national progress programme for the period of 2021-2030 (Lithuanian Government, 2020) includes a strategic goal to increase the inclusiveness and effectiveness of education to meet the needs of individuals and society. Among the actions related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning are:

a) increasing the inclusiveness and accessibility of various levels of formal and informal education, including for those with special educational needs, disabilities, experiencing poverty, psychological and other difficulties, to ensure everyone's right to participate in education and receive a high-quality education, necessary support, and an environment tailored to diverse learning needs;

b) adapt the education system to the mobility of learners and strengthen the readiness of the education system to fully integrate children who have arrived (or returned) to Lithuania, providing them with opportunities to properly integrate into the preschool education system, and schools, and participate in non-formal education. The aim is to encourage children from the Lithuanian diaspora to return to their homeland, as well as to attract those coming from abroad, create favourable conditions for them to enter vocational training institutions and higher

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[2] The service provider shall be authorised to carry out the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes.

[3] According to the data of the labour exchange, since the introduction (2017) of this measure 60 unemployed people participated in the validation of non-formal and informal learning and 30 of them received qualification recognition.

education institutions, and organize education for young people who have emigrated from Lithuania in various forms of training and studies;

c) increase the level of lifelong learning for adults - create a common lifelong learning system that integrates measures previously carried out by separate institutions and insufficiently coordinated. Strengthen the motivation (demand) for adult learning and create a unified system for providing and improving adult qualifications and competencies, which should ensure the opportunities for all adults to learn and acquire qualifications or competencies that meet the needs of the labour market.

The national progress strategy 'Lithuania 2030' (Lithuanian Parliament, 2012) seeks to ensure the development, application and recognition of individual skills. The key initiatives for change in the area of Smart Society[4] include the development of a competence assessment and self-assessment framework as well as reorganization of the examination system to become a system of accumulation and recognition of various learning achievements.

The long-term education strategy 2013-2022 (Lithuanian Parliament, 2013) foresees the creation and implementation of a system for validating non-formal and informal learning[5].

The Employment Enhancement Programme 2014-2020 (Lithuanian Government, 2013) provides for the development of a system for competencies (acquired in different ways including non-formal and informal learning) assessment and recognition[6].

The non-formal adult education and continuing training development programme for 2016-2023 (Lithuanian Government, 2016) also aims to create and implement a system for the validation of competencies acquired through all forms of learning.

The most recent Implementation plan for government program provisions, adopted in 2021, aims to create a lifelong learning favourable system (Lithuanian Government, 2021). The following actions are relevant for the validation of non-formal and informal learning:

a) standardize and enable "one-stop-shop" formal, non-formal, and self-directed learning recognition services that allow for flexible transition from one level of education to another;

b) develop a model for a comprehensive lifelong learning system that includes principles for governance, prioritized groups and programs, quality assurance, financing system elements, and institutionalize legal regulation of the model in the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education;

c) create tools and increase support for society's less-educated groups (Third Age Universities and seniors, individuals with lower qualifications, and low-income earners) to engage in formal and non-formal education programs.

In 2021, the leaders of the parliamentary parties signed the Agreement on Education Policy until 2030, which aims to be the most important landmark for the decade and give an impetus to the entire education system (Lithuanian Government, 2021). Several articles relate to non-formal and informal education and its validation:

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[4] According to the 'Lithuania 2030' changes will take place in three areas: smart society, smart economy and smart governance. The Smart Society is a happy society, which seeks greater personal and economic security and dynamism, as well as fairer income distribution, cleaner environment, better social and political inclusion, better access to education and training, skills improvement and good public health.

[5] A new strategy to replace it has not yet been adopted as of the time of the writing of this update.

[6] A new programme to replace it has not yet been adopted as of the time of the writing of this update.

a) Article 5: Integrate cultural content, artistic forms, and creativity-promoting methods into formal and non-formal education systems to ensure comprehensive educational opportunities and address pressing educational issues;

b) Article 9: By 2027, expand the range of non-formal education opportunities available to children and provide access to children as young as three years old, with priority given to children from socially at-risk families or with individual learning needs. Implement an achievement evaluation model, which can be used by children in general education schools to form a portfolio of competencies acquired through non-formal education;

c) Article 17: By 2024, establish a self-education and recognition system for competencies acquired through non-formal means and ensure its accessibility to all those who wish to continue their formal education program.

Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) do not yet exist in Lithuania; however, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports has initiated inter-institutional discussions about them, and in May 2023 a Law Nonformal Adult Education and Continuing Education was amended legitimating ILAs. It is planned that the system will start operation in Autumn 2023.

There is a database of qualifications that can be obtained through validation in Lithuania. The database is published on AIKOS system (https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Registrai/Kvalifikacijos/SitePages/Pagrindinis.aspx?ss=6c 823af0-f6e6-4d9d-947e-6e30771960da) .

Skills audits/assessments of skills and competencies in the area for formal and non-formal VET in Lithuania are mainly coordinated by the Lithuanian Employment Service and the Lithuanian Qualifications and Vocational Training Development Centre (KPMPC).

The Employment Service provides free skills audits/assessments to unemployed individuals to help them identify their skills and competencies, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and develop a plan for their future career development. The skills assessment includes a range of tests and exercises to evaluate the individual's skills and competencies.

The KPMPC, on the other hand, is responsible for the development of qualifications and vocational training programs in Lithuania. They work with employers, industry associations, and other stakeholders to identify the skills and competencies that are required for different occupations and industries. They also coordinate organisation of assessment of persons' competencies and preparation of assignments for theoretical and practical parts of examination.

3.2   Validation in education and training

Lithuania has multiple legal frameworks covering validation. In VET and HE any learning or working experience may be assessed and recognised.

There is no evidence that validation is used in general education. However, some elements can be identified, for example, the civic education of young people is obligatory in general education. Civic education is integrated into the subjects of the education programme and is also carried out through social practices (e.g. participation in the mutual assistance initiative, help for students with special educational needs, and voluntary work in non-governmental organisations and social care institutions). Social practices depend on the choice of students themselves, teacher advice and the needs of the school and the local community. The reflective assessment method is used to evaluate the outcomes of social activity. It is also recommended that a so-called Social Activity Portfolio be developed, which shows examples and evidence of skills and experience gained during social practice (Education Development Centre, 2015). Thus, students go through several validation

phases, namely identification and documentation. Furthermore, these results could be validated when applying to VET or HE programmes.

In vocational education, the procedure for competencies assessment (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015) defines that a person wishing to formalise learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at EQF level I-V shall apply to an appropriate VET provider. The applicant must submit a portfolio, which includes documented evidence of learning outcomes acquired outside formal education. The VET provider assesses the skills and knowledge of the applicant based on sectoral qualification standards and relevant formal VET programmes. Furthermore, the applicant and VET provider agree on a timetable of additional training if necessary. The final assessment of the qualification is the responsibility of specifically accredited institutions. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded a VET diploma.

Persons willing to formalise learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at EQF level VI-VIII can apply to an appropriate HE provider. HE institutions have internal procedures for recognising candidates' non-formal and informal learning. In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science issued general principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017). These are as follows: accessibility, flexibility, transparency and objectivity, comparability and volunteerism. It is stated that the validation process in HE shall include four stages, namely: information, consultation, assessment and decision. Assessment is carried out according to an appropriate formal HE programme. If the evaluation is positive, the applicant is awarded a transcript of records issued by the HE institution. If the applicant seeks to acquire a HE qualification, the non-formal and informal learning is recognised as a part of a relevant study programme and the person is awarded a diploma of HE after successful completion of this study programme. The maximum credit limit given for recognised prior learning is 75% of the total study programme volume.

3.3   Validation and the labour market

The law on employment (Lithuanian Parliament, 2016) introduced the validation of non-formal and informal learning as one of the measures supporting learning. Article 39, amended in 2022, outlines the recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education. According to it, the recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education is organized in the form of a bilateral agreement between the Employment Service and an unemployed or employed person, whose competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education will be recognized, under the conditions set by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania or its authorized institution. Based on the agreement, the Employment Service issues a document of the form approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania or its authorized institution to the unemployed or employed person, in which it undertakes to pay a certain amount of money to the company that has the right to recognize competences acquired through non-formal education and self-education (hereinafter referred to as the "competence recognition organizing company").

The recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education is carried out by the competence recognition organizing company, which is chosen by the unemployed or employed person. The funds allocated for the recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education cannot exceed 0.5 times the minimum monthly wage approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. Recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education according to the provisions of this article can be organized no more than three times per year. The costs of travel, accommodation, mandatory health check-ups, and vaccinations against infectious diseases incurred in the organization of the recognition of competencies acquired

through non-formal education and self-education, mutatis mutandis, are reimbursed under certain conditions[7].

The four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, and certification) are not explicitly stated in the legislation.

3.4   Validation and the third sector

The Lithuanian Association of Non-formal Education (LANE)[8] in cooperation with partners in 2015-2017 implemented a strategic partnership project 'Trusted Badge Systems'. The project aimed at strengthening cooperation between non-governmental organisations and companies and ensuring better recognition of competencies acquired in a non-formal setting through the technological standard of open badges. An open digital badge is a digital certificate that encrypts information[9] related to the learning process, achievements, or competencies of the badge owner. It is a digital tool to recognise learning and skills that are often too difficult to measure within the programme/process of non-formal education (soft skills, acquired attitudes, participation, personal hobbies, etc.)[10]. Digital Open Badges serve as a bridge between various stakeholders and actors to communicate the value and meaning of youth work programmes and their outcomes.

Based on the open badge standard, the LANE developed a specialised online system, the so-called achievement programme 'Discover Yourself'. The achievement programme is aligned with the eight key competencies for lifelong learning: learning to learn, digital competence, civic competence, cultural awareness, entrepreneurship, mathematical competence, science and technology, mother tongue and foreign languages. Each competence has three-level badges and a mandatory number of tasks to complete. Badge earners can manage their achievements using a Badge Wallet application. They are free to choose which achievements to share and where (e.g. on Facebook, and LinkedIn). The achievement programme is open to 'Discover Yourself'[11] participants who are involved in the Youth Voluntary Service, i.e. a young person must first participate in the project and then commit to volunteering at one of the host organisations for at least one month. The impact research revealed that the achievement programme is seen as a way for volunteers to take initiative, stay active and curious and get to know each other[12]. It also showed that there is a considerable lack of knowledge and wider awareness about the usefulness of Open Badges. Thus, the role of mentors is essential in informing young people about the role and benefits of Open Badges. The benefits of the programme include: the trusted badge systems

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[7] The reimbursed accommodation expenses cannot exceed 35% of the Republic of Lithuania Government approved basic social allowance per day. The reimbursed travel expenses to the vocational training location and back are calculated taking into account the distance from the unemployed person's place of residence to the nearest vocational training provider offering vocational training according to the chosen vocational training program.

[8] The Lithuanian Association of Non-formal Education unites people who apply non-formal education principles into their practice and seek recognition of non-formal education. This Association creates training and development opportunities for those working with young people and contributes to the development of non-formal education quality. http://www.neformaliai.lt/apie-mus/

[9] Each badge has information built in on the achievement: name, description, criteria, the issuing body, evidence, the date of issuing and other additional information.

[10] Six badge systems were created and tested during the project. All badge systems are free and publicly available for use at badge library within the badge management platform www.badgecraft.eu.

[11] From September 2015, the Youth Volunteer Service is a part of the youth guarantee initiative's project "Discover Yourself" in Lithuania. The project is coordinated by the Department of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and the Lithuanian Labour Exchange. Voluntary service is open to any young person who is between the ages of 15 and 29 and not in education, employment or training. The duration of voluntary service in the "Discover Yourself" project is from one to four months. Young people undertake to volunteer from four to eight hours per day, up to 25 hours per week and up to 100 hours per month.

[12] Young people mentioned that Open Badges were a helpful tool in dealing with the uncertainty of starting something new and a way of integrating into a new group of people.

can be accessed and used by any youth work organisation or institution; now already volunteers can get 0.25 points (out of 10) during the admission process to the University; this programme is endorsed by the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists and the Lithuanian Employment Service.

Currently, the LANE is implementing the long-term project "Reimagining Recognition" (LNUA, 2023). During it, the association is planning to develop and test a system for assessing and recognizing competencies acquired in a non-formal way in social-civic activities using digital open badge technology. A key aspect of it is a digital platform hosted on the municipality of Vilnius website (Vilnius, 2023). On the platform, it is possible to publish and discover various learning and development opportunities on the interactive map of Vilnius city. The organizers of the activities can create, and students can join digital and local activities organized with the help of learning playlists ("Learning Playlists"). Digital badges record the time spent in the activity, the experience gained and the learning achievements that will be stored in the electronic profile.

4   Links to credentials and qualifications

The Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (LTQF) was approved by the government in 2010 (Lithuanian Government, 2010). It is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)[13]. The LTQF aims to ensure the clarity and accessibility of the processes of definition, acquisition, evaluation, and recognition of qualifications; to enable the facilitation of workforce mobility on both a national and international scale; to encourage lifelong learning through the application of all forms and methods of formal, non-formal and informal learning to move between different levels of qualification.

Qualifications at all levels may be acquired either through formal education programmes or through gaining professional experience or through independent study. The provisions of the LTQF shall apply to the development and approval of qualifications (please see section 4), the development and implementation of formal VET or HE programmes[14], and the evaluation of the knowledge and skills acquired in different ways.

According to the law on VET (Lithuanian Parliament, 2017) the results of validation should be recognised as a part of a whole formal qualification. The general principles for assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in HE (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017) define that if an applicant wishes to acquire an HE qualification, prior learning is recognised as part of the chosen programme. If not, then the HE institution issues a certificate indicating the number of acquired study credits.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning of unemployed people is linked to the LTQF as it should be implemented following the procedure for competencies assessment in VET. According to the information available the validation initiatives in the third sector are not linked to the LTQF.

In Lithuania, the validation of non-formal and informal learning can lead to a range of tangible outcomes, including the award of (partial) qualifications, exemptions, and access to formal learning opportunities. The specific outcomes depend on the type of learning being validated and the requirements of the relevant education and training institutions.

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[13] The LTQF levels directly correspond to EQF levels.

[14] VET and higher education programmes are based on learning outcomes.

For vocational education and training (VET), the validation of non-formal and informal learning can lead to the award of partial qualifications or modules that can contribute towards a full VET qualification or award of full qualification.

For example, the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the field of hairdressing can lead to the award of a partial qualification in hairdressing techniques, which can contribute towards a full qualification in hairdressing. Similarly, the validation of learning in the field of construction can lead to the award of a partial qualification in masonry, which can contribute towards a full qualification in construction.

In addition to the award of qualifications, the validation of non-formal and informal learning can also lead to exemptions from certain courses or modules within a qualification. For example, if an individual has already acquired the necessary skills and knowledge through non-formal or informal learning, they may be exempted from certain courses or modules within a VET qualification.

Micro-credentials are not yet widely recognized or used in Lithuania.

5 Standards

In Lithuania, the same standards are used for both development of qualifications in formal education and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The developed Sectoral Qualifications Standards[15] and Descriptions of Study fields[16] aim at improving the correspondence of education to labour market needs and they are linked to the LTQF.

Formal VET programmes are developed following the corresponding Sectoral Qualifications Standard (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015a).

The basis for the development of HE programmes is Descriptions of Study fields. A VET or HE provider assesses the non-formal and informal learning of the applicant based on the relevant formal education programme. If applicants wish to continue education according to an appropriate VET or HE programme, prior learning is recognised as part of that programme.

It is difficult to assess how the interaction between methods and standards/reference points influences the validity, reliability and scalability of validation. Since the standards are being implemented by HE, VET and accredited competence assessment institutions, a comprehensive study would be required to assess the application of standards by them. At the moment, no such study has been identified.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The **Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MES)** implements the national system of formal and non-formal education. This encourages social attitudes in favour of education and creates conditions for lifelong learning in a changing democratic

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[15] Seeking to improve the qualification development system, sectoral qualifications standards were given a legal basis in 2007. They are being developed for a specific sector of the economy and describe the most important qualifications in this sector at all levels of the National Qualifications Framework. Currently 24 sectors of economy have been developed https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/kvalifikaciju-formavimas/standartai-2/profesiniai-standartai/.

[16] Descriptions of study fields are benchmark statements for different discipline areas (for example informatics, technologies, engineering). They have to be developed by a working group comprising representatives from both higher education institutions and employers. Descriptions should serve as guiding documents for study programmes' development, implementation and evaluation. Thus it is expected that study programmes will better correspond to labour market needs. 53 drafts have been developed during the period 2012-2014; the majority of them came into force in 2015.

society including validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports accredits the following, upon the approval of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre: institutions that seek to gain the right to assess individual competencies, refuse accreditation, suspend accreditation validity, revoke accreditation suspension and withdraw accreditation following laws.

This Ministry also supervises the final assessment of qualifications.

The **Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre** – an overall objective of the Centre is to ensure the development of a lifelong learning system which corresponds to the needs of the national economy within the global context. Among its core activities are the development of sectoral qualification standards, organisation of the development of modular programmes, the implementation of the LTQF, development of the VET credits system; quality assurance, and acting as the National Coordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework. The Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre submits the candidacy of an institution that seeks the right to become a competence assessment centre to the Ministry of Education and Science for approval.

The **Lithuanian Ministry of Economy and Innovation** participates in shaping human resources development policy, takes part in developing and implementing VET policy, shapes national policy in recognition of regulated professions, and participates in the preparation of legal acts in the area of competencies assessment. Together with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economy defines the structure of qualification and VET standards and the procedure for their development and approves them. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour remains responsible for social affairs, including training issues for unemployed people.

The **Lithuanian Public Employment Service and local client service departments** implement an employment support policy. They provide information, counselling and employment intermediation services to unemployed people or employees who have been given a notice of dismissal.

The **stakeholders (employers and trade unions)** initiate and support the development of new qualifications, occupational standards, education, and training programmes.

The **HE institutions** provide validation services of competencies relevant to qualifications at EQF level VI-VIII and acquired in the non-formal and informal adult education system.

The **VET institutions** provide validation services of competencies relevant to qualifications at EQF level I-V and acquired in the non-formal and informal adult education system. The final assessment of knowledge and skills that are needed to acquire formal qualification is the responsibility **VET institutions**. 15 VET institutions in 22 sectors were nominated to support other VET providers. Accredited competence assessment institutions are in charge of nominating evaluators representing labour market to the exam commissions, validate assignments and deal with appeals. The list of nominated VET providers and accredited institutions is published on the website of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre[17]. A VET provider awards a qualification diploma to the applicant if the results of the final assessment are positive.

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[17] Information and list of nominated VET institutions is available at https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/profesinis-mokymas-3/asmens-igytu-kompetenciju-vertinimas/pasitelkti-teikejai/ The list of accredited competence assessment institutions is available at https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/profesinis-mokymas-3/kompetenciju-vertinimo-instituciju-akreditavimas/

A recent KPMCP study concluded that there is often a lack of strong cooperation between client service departments of Lithuanian Public Employment Service, educational institutions, and providers of validation services for competencies acquired through informal education or self-education (KPMCP, 2020a). Therefore, representatives of territorial client service departments of Lithuanian Public Employment Service may not always be familiar with the possibilities offered by vocational education institutions and may not be able to offer job seekers services that meet their real needs. Similarly, representatives of vocational education providers may not always have a good understanding of the needs of the Public Employment Service. Therefore, it is necessary to organize more joint events (discussions, seminars, etc.) for employees of territorial employment offices and pedagogues of vocational education providers, during which information is exchanged and various aspects of the validation process of competencies acquired through informal education or self-education are jointly improved. Perhaps it is worth organizing such regional events for public employment services, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, and vocational education providers.

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

There are no specific awareness-raising campaigns in Lithuania. Generally, awareness-raising and recruitment are the responsibility of formal VET and HE providers. However, the publicly available information on validation options is rather poor. In the case of HE, the procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are placed on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science. In addition, individuals can find this information on the websites of HE providers[18]. Concerning VET providers, there is almost no publicly available information concerning the validation process.

Some efforts to raise awareness on validation matters could be observed only at a project level.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

Usually, information, advice and guidance are delivered to validation users after they apply to a VET or HE provider. The VET or HE provider informs the applicant about the validation process.

The validation process in HE includes four stages, namely: information, consultation, assessment and decision (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017). The first stage is intended to familiarise the applicants with the validation principles, procedures, possible assessment results, and studies according to individual needs. Information is free of charge. If the applicant further decides to undertake validation, then the consultation stage starts. The HE institution appoints a consultant who helps the applicant to prepare for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The cost of a consultation is included in the fee for validation.

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[18] According to the data available, 33 (out of 43) HE institutions provide validation of non-formal and informal learning: http://www.smm.lt/web/lt/smm-svietimas/suaugusiuju-svietimas/neformaliu-budu-igytu-kompetenciju-formalizavimas

8   Validation practitioners

8.1   Profile of validation practitioners

A person wishing to formalise learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at EQF level I-V can apply to an appropriate VET provider. The director of this institution appoints VET teachers who assess the applicant's non-formal and informal learning. If necessary, there could be consultations arranged with employers or employees from companies acting in the field of activity related to an appropriate VET programme (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018). In the case of the final qualification assessment, the accredited competence assessment institutions are responsible for the selection of practitioners and VET teachers who carry out the assessment.

An HE institution carries out validation of non-formal and informal learning following its procedures and general principles laid down by the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017). Usually, validators are HE, lecturers. The final decision on validation is made by the validator or validation Commission (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017).

8.2   Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The training for assessment practitioners is not compulsory. Generally, non-formal training is offered to assessors. For instance, in HE most validation initiatives have been developed as part of an ESF-funded project, which usually included such activities as the development of methodology for the non-formal and informal learning assessment, consultation and training of assessors, etc.

The other example of an initiative supporting validation practitioners is the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project ReOPEN – Recognition of Valid and Open Learning (2016-2018). The results generated by this project include training material on the recognition of non-formal open learning results in a formal curriculum. The training material consists of theory and practical tasks. It provides good practice examples in the areas of successful integration of open learning offers into formal curricula, as well as of existing recognition procedures already applied in Europe. It also includes guidelines and checklists that support open-learning providers in designing their offers[19].

From 2021 Lithuania has been participating in the Erasmus+ KA3 Policy Reform – Policy Experimentations project "Validation of transversal skills across Europe – TRANSVAL-EU". The project produced a set of training toolkits and programmes and standardised competence profiles for validation/guidance practitioners with a specific focus on transversal skills. Additionally, fields trials of recognising transversal competences in VET institutions have been organised.

8.3   Qualifications and experience

There is no mandatory requirement for assessors to undertake training. There is also no requirement for VET or HE teachers, who are appointed to assess non-formal and informal learning, to have a certain level of qualification. However, for a final qualification (at EQF level I-V) assessment, the assessors are required to have a minimum of two years of practical work or four years of VET and learning outcomes assessment experience. Those who prepare tasks for the final assessment are

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[19] The project countries are Lithuania, Spain, Germany, Croatia and United Kingdom: http://reopen.eu/training-material/

required to have no less than two years of task preparation experience. In addition, the qualification level of both assessors and those who prepare tasks should not be lower than the level of qualification which is to be awarded to the applicant (Ministry of Education and Science, 2012).

9   Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1   Funding and costs

Usually, applicants are required to pay a certain fee for the validation process. The education provider (VET or HE) decides how much to charge for the validation.

According to the overview of VET status (KPMPC, 2017) VET providers have difficulties in the taxation of validation services. The conversation with VET providers reveals that validators do not receive any additional money for the validation process.

If the applicant decides to continue learning according to a chosen VET programme, prior learning (including non-formal and informal learning) is recognised as part of their training programme. In this case, the final validation is financed from funds that are allocated for the implementation of the VET programme[20].

According to the law on employment (Lithuanian Parliament 2016), an unemployed person is free to choose a validation service provider[21] and the budget should not exceed 0.5 of the minimum monthly payment approved by the Lithuanian Government. The number of validation services should be limited to three per year for one unemployed person. The Public Employment Service organises assessment and recognition of competencies acquired outside formal education for unemployed people.

The extent to which there is a lack of financial support preventing certain groups from entering validation is difficult to assess. According to a KPMPC study, on one hand, a significant number of individuals who seek to assess the competencies acquired during informal education or self-education or to participate in the validation process of their existing or acquired competencies often take advantage of various programs offered by state or individual institutions for competency assessment or recognition and often receive partial financing according to the funding procedure established by a specific state program or individual institution (e.g., Lithuanian Public Employment Service) (KPMPC, 2020). For example, the state always sets the amount of funding allocated to an individual who has completed a regular vocational training program and wishes to take a qualification exam. However, this funding amount is determined, for example, by assuming that candidates will verify their qualifications in a group, thus saving the necessary funds for each candidate. Another example may be the funds allocated by the state for the recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education by the unemployed. The amount of these funds is determined by the Law on Employment of the Republic of Lithuania. It is difficult to imagine that an institution assessing or recognizing individuals' competencies in these cases could require any different fees than those set by the laws or regulations in force in Lithuania.

On the other hand, there may be situations that current laws and regulations do not provide for (KPMPC, 2020). For example, a person independently contacts a vocational training institution and wants to evaluate his or her acquired competencies urgently, without waiting for a group of people to assemble, and is willing to pay for the competency assessment himself. Or as often happens, a person or an institution

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[20] In this case, the applicant studies according to a chosen programme as a student (not applicant) and takes the final qualification exam (please also see section 2.2.)

[21] The service provider is authorised to carry out the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes.

referred by someone independently contacts a vocational training institution, his or her competencies acquired during informal education or self-education are assessed, and it becomes clear that the person acquired some of the necessary competencies but not enough to be recognized as qualified. Then, such a person may be offered a specially prepared learning program, which he or she will have to pay for using his or her own or other funds, which would allow him or her to eliminate the gaps in his or her learning and practical experience identified during the qualification assessment. The cost of such individual learning programs must be specially calculated at the vocational training institution. In summary, no laws or regulations can describe all situations arising when recognizing competencies acquired through non-formal education and self-education and evaluating individuals' competencies acquired in various ways.

9.2   Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1   Validation trends

A validation indicator is set by the national education strategy (Lithuanian Parliament, 2013). It is foreseen that the number of recognised qualifications per 10 000 population shall be 5% by 2017 and 10% by 2022. However, there is no evidence of the achievements of the set targets.

The data on validation users is fragmented[22] and currently is not collected on a national level.

Some available information suggests that one VET provider delivers validation services for at most three to four individuals per year. Most often these are the persons aged between 25-40 years old and have HE qualifications and working experience abroad (e.g. waiters).

9.2.2   Validation users

No public data was found concerning validation users.

9.2.3   Validation and disadvantaged groups

No public data was found concerning the disadvantaged groups.

10   Validation methods

10.1   Methodologies and methods

The most common methods for documentation, assessment and certification that are usually used in Lithuania include the portfolio method, interview, tests and examination.

According to the existing procedure (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015; Ministry of Education and Science, 2018), a person wishing to formalise learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at EQF level I-V should apply to an appropriate VET provider. The applicant must submit a portfolio, which includes documented evidence of learning outcomes acquired outside formal education. The VET provider assesses the skills and knowledge of the applicant based on sectoral qualification

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[22] Public Employment Service collects information about validation of unemployed persons' non-formal and informal learning since 2017. Some information is collected by VET and HE education providers but usually it is not publicly available.

standards and relevant VET programmes. The VET provider must use the assessment methods which are specified in the relevant VET programmes. Usually, these methods include tests, individual tasks, demonstrations etc. VET providers report that they also use the structured interview method. After the assessment of the skills and knowledge of the applicants, the VET provider fills in the conclusion on recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal education or informally. The template of this document was approved as an annexe of the amended Description of the Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning Attainments (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018). Furthermore, the applicant and VET provider agree on a timetable of additional training if necessary and a final qualification exam.

The final assessment of the qualification is detached from the training process and is the responsibility of nominated VET providers. Examination consists of theoretical part (test) and practical part (practical assignment to demonstrate practical skills). Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded a VET diploma showing the respective LTQF/EQF levels.

Persons wishing to formalise learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at EQF level VI-VIII apply to an appropriate HE provider. The majority (33 out of 43[23]) of HE institutions have internal procedures for recognising a person's non-formal and informal learning. These are developed in line with the general principles issued by the Minister of Education and Science in 2017 (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017), according to which HE providers could apply various methods for the assessment of non-formal and informal learning. Analysis of the documents reveals that the most popular is the portfolio method. In addition, institutions use other methods such as interviews, demonstrations, exams etc. Where the evaluation is positive, the applicant is awarded a transcript of records issued by the HE institution. If the applicant seeks to acquire an HE qualification, the non-formal and informal learning is recognised as a part of the study programme and the person is awarded a diploma of HE after successful completion of an appropriate study programme.

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

No specific information about this aspect was found.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

Persons wishing to formalise their non-formal and informal learning must apply to an appropriate VET or HE provider. According to the Law on Education, the quality of education is the responsibility of education providers. They are encouraged to periodically carry out self-evaluation. An external quality evaluation according to the existing legislation is carried out periodically as well. All education providers have internal quality assurance systems (including the quality of the assessment of learning outcomes) in place. There are no special quality assurance frameworks for the evaluation of the validation process.

Recent years competence assessment and recognition system has been reformed. Qualifications and VET Development Centre from 2018 has been implementing an ESF funded project "Improving the system of evaluation and recognition of competences and qualifications acquired in various ways". The changes include systemic revision of competences assessment tasks and assignments, creating a bank of theoretical competence assessment tasks, improving capacity of organisation

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[23] http://www.smm.lt/web/lt/smm-svietimas/suaugusiuju-svietimas/neformaliu-budu-igytu-kompetenciju-formalizavimas

of competence assessment at nominated competence assessment centres and improvement of quality and trustworthiness of examination procedures. This system applies for competence assessment and recognition system when aiming to acquire a qualification at NQF level I-V. These changes support also competencies validation procedures. Additionally, an online information system for candidates and for competence assessment centres has been developed: https://eksternams.nsa.smm.lt/eval-exam/eval-procedures-and-services.

A recent overview of VET status (KPMPC, 2017) revealed that the validation know-how varies greatly between VET providers. There is a lack of validation reference material, methodologies, and tools. The VET providers lack the motivation to deliver validation services. Based on the overview results, the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning lacks completeness and is fragmented; the information about individuals participating in validation is not collected.

The recent KPMPC study showed that there are already visible problems that should be addressed at the national level, for example, some problems related to the allocation of funds for job seekers (e.g., reimbursement of travel expenses during competency assessment), different requirements for candidates from vocational education providers, and different competency assessment procedures and durations, among other issues (KPMPC, 2020a). Another feature of the competency validation process is that it currently only focuses on the qualification exam, without considering other competency validation evidence recognized in the labour market. All of these problems reduce the Public Employment Service's ability to help job seekers. Therefore, it would make sense to create a joint, ongoing, and periodically convening working group of employees from the Employment Service and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, which would analyse how to better adapt the recognition of competencies acquired through informal education or self-education currently in use to changing labour market needs. This working group, if necessary, would initiate changes to the model and process of recognizing competencies acquired through informal education or self-education in the country's legislation.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

There is no validation monitoring system in place.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

There are no data available to estimate what is the extent of validation availability, visibility, and trust in society. Interviews reveal that the public knows very little about the validation initiative and the results and benefits are not made public. There is no validation monitoring system in place. It was also stated that there are no funds allocated to improving awareness. Thus, the position of validation in society, its visibility and trust can be assessed as low.

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13.2 Sources

Ministry of Education, Science and Sports

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

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

The European inventory is the product of a long-standing cooperation of the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF on the field. The inventory was endorsed by the Council recommendation of 2012 on validation and works together with the European guidelines as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakehold-ers developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.