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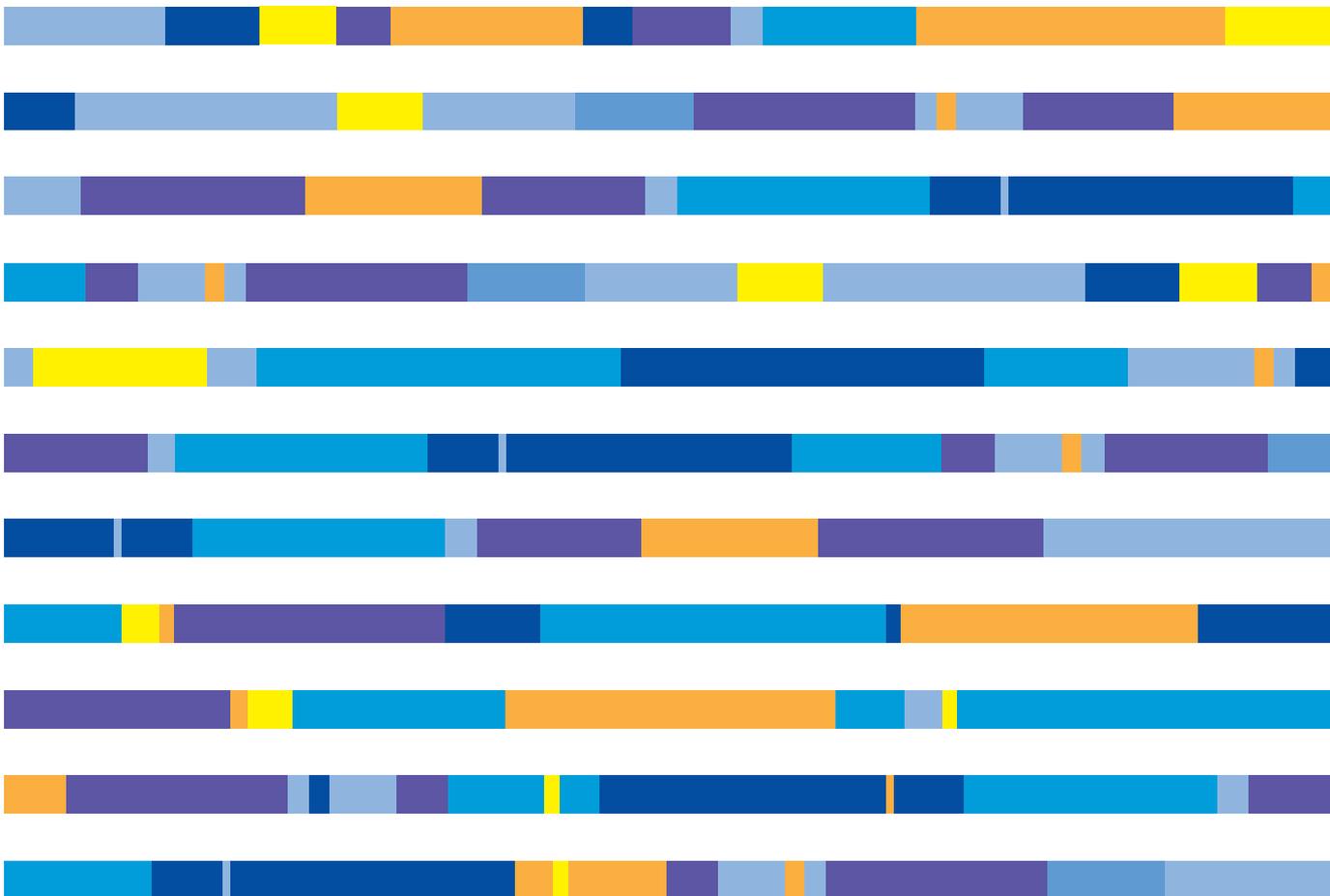
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT:
ROMANIA

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Acknowledgements

This country update was produced by Delia Lupescu, as part of the 2023 update to the European Inventory on validation, a project managed by ICF (lead consultants: Manuel Souto-Otero, Michael Richardson, Ilona Murphy, Valentina Musso and Flora Dussine) in association with 3s (lead consultants: Karin Luomi-Messerer, Monika Auzinger, Julia Fellingner, Mariya Dzhengozova and Daniel Unterweger) under the supervision of a Steering Committee formed by the European Commission (Koen Nomden, Aline Juerges and Klara Engels-Perenyi), Cedefop (Ernesto Villalba-Garcia), and the ETF (Maria Rosenstock).

The report has benefitted from feedback from the European qualifications framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) members for Romania as well as other national-level quality assurance (QA) contacts with expertise in validation.

Work was carried out under DG EMPL Implementing Framework Contract EAC-01-2019 - Request for Services VT/2021/059.

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Please cite this publication as:

Lupescu, D. (2024). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Romania*. European Commission and Cedefop.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning-2023-update-Romania>

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1 Abstract

Romania introduced the legal framework for validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2004. Validation services are coordinated by the National Qualifications Authority, responsible for authorising the assessment centres, certifying the assessors, ensuring the quality of the validation processes and for most of the outreach and awareness raising activities. Validation is a paid voluntary service, with several steps, all taking place within the assessment centre. The validation process starts when the validation user submits a request to an active authorised assessment centre. A validation practitioner is assigned to the case and provides counselling to the validation user, explaining the validation and career opportunities available. Then, the validation user has to submit proving documents, if there are any, for his/her previous learning experiences in relation to a specific occupation or profession. The assessment centre then decides the best assessment methods to be used for the case (written/oral test, practical demonstration, observation, project etc.). The assessment is done against respective occupational or professional standards. If successful, the validation user receives a validation certificate for those competences that he/she proved. Validation certificates enable access to the labour market.

In 2018, the legislation was partially updated according to the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation, but practices still have to be updated. In the first quarter of 2024, NQA aims to fully complete the update of the legislative framework specific to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, emphasizing the correlation with the European recommendations in the matter.

2 Introduction

Romania is among the early adopters of the validation framework in the European Union. The country introduced its validation system in 2004, providing a legal and institutional framework and putting in place specific mechanisms and tools for this. However, after an intense effort to build the framework and some of the corresponding practices until 2018, the process slowed down. Partly due to the pandemic context, partly due to economic difficulties, the legislative framework was not yet met by the corresponding practices. At the moment of drafting this report, there are initiatives to update the legal framework to more recent international recommendations and practices, and the timeline for their formal adoption is April 2024 (see <http://www.anc.edu.ro/dezbatere/>).

The main progress since the 2018 Inventory is represented by the adoption of the Government's Decision no. 132/2018 which redefined validation of non-formal and informal learning as `the process of confirming by a competent authority that a certain person reached, in non-formal or informal learning contexts, learning outcomes measured by correspondence with a relevant standard, process which consists in four distinct phases: identification, through dialogue, of the specific individual experiences, documenting for making visible those individual experiences, a formal evaluation of those experiences and a certification of the learning outcomes which can lead to a partial or full qualification` (art II, Annex 3, GD no. 132/2018). The same document redefines the learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, aptitudes, responsibility, and autonomy – considered a step-forward from the way previous legal documents defined the learning outcomes. Other legal documents adopted in the meantime updated the criteria for the authorization of assessment centres and the criteria for the certification of validation practitioners.

One must mention that the previous definition of validation, from the National Education Law No. 1/2011, is still used and the validation practices have not been yet updated to the new definition from the GD no. 132/2018. At the time of writing this report the National Education Law is under revision and new versions of it are in the

approval process, with an estimation that they will be adopted by the end of the current academic year, according to the official adoption calendar¹.

Just like in 2018, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is a volunteer process, initiated by the potential beneficiary who must submit a request at one of the authorized assessment centres. The centre assigns to the case a validation practitioner, who offers career counselling to the potential validation user and guides he/she through the validation process until certification. After a first discussion with the validation practitioner, the beneficiary decides if he/she wants to go on with the process or not, and files the corresponding documents proving any previous experience to the assessment centre. The centre decides the best ways to evaluate the competences of the beneficiary against the respective occupational standard – including a written test and a practical method of assessment, which are mandatory according to the law. Upon evaluation of his/her competences and skills, the beneficiary can obtain a validation certificate for a partial or complete qualification – corresponding to those competences that he/she proved. The validation certificated is called, in Romanian, “*certificate de competente profesionale*”. The certificate obtained this way only allows access to the labour market and cannot be used to continue education.

The list of authorized assessment centres, that are allowed by law to conduct validation processes, is available on the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) website. This list also provides information about the qualifications that can be gained through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Volunteer experiences can be among the contexts recognised through this procedure, but otherwise there is no specific validation process for the third sector².

There are Quality Assurance mechanisms in place implemented by the NQA. They include the authorization of the assessment centres and the publication of the national registers – of authorized centres, of certified assessors and of validation users³ – which functions as instruments of transparency for the validation processes and practices. The main sources of information about the legislation, processes and practices in the field are the NQA website and the communication done by them during the EU-funded projects they are implementing, as well as the website of the National Agency for Employment (NAE).

Another change since 2018 is that, for the first time, Romania has a national initiative of offering counselling, recognition of prior learning, validation of competencies – gained in formal or nonformal/informal contexts - and employment opportunities to the Ukrainian refugees. They can benefit from free counselling, one free of charge training and one free of charge validation service, in the same conditions as any Romanian citizen.

¹ On the 23rd of May the legislative package was voted in the Romanian Parliament and thus it is sent to be signed-off by the President of Romania.

² In this context, the author, refers to the non-profit, non-governmental sector as ‘the third sector’ (the context in which volunteer experience can also provide an environment favourable to personal and professional development);

³ Validation users are referred to as ‘graduates’ in the register that is still un-populated by data (the headline of the register is available here <http://www.anc.edu.ro/registrul-national-al-absolventilor/>);

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

This section looks at the general approach to validation in your country. Subsequent sections look at validation, specifically, in education and training, validation in the labour market and validation in the third sector⁴.

The overarching national approach to validation is represented by the national legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, adopted in 2004 and complemented by the following strategies/legal documents.

The National Strategy for the Employment of the Working Force 2021-2027⁵ draws connections between validation policies and other policy initiatives and practices, including employment, entrepreneurship, digitalisation, developing work opportunities for the green transition etc. Though this is not a strategy specific to validation, it includes objectives and action lines referring to consolidating the legal framework for validation of nonformal and informal learning, and links this to the opportunity to support the national strategy's objectives – which include, among others, digitalisation and the green transition.

Before this national strategy, skills, qualifications and recognition of prior learning were mentioned or referred to in several national legislation pieces or strategies – e.g. National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2015 – 2020 and the National Law of Education no. 1/2011 (referred to as `LEN`). The latter explicitly promoted the importance of lifelong learning and provided a focus on the validation of both formal and nonformal or informal learning, as well as career counselling at all levels of education. LEN is to undergo a process of revision in 2022-2023. Moreover, at the time of writing this report, the Ministry of Labour is also implementing a Erasmus+ project with the objective of developing a National Strategy for Adult Training for the next period⁶.

At present, validation is done according to the legal framework from 2004 – Ministerial Order no. 4543/468 from 23.08.2004, which was completed and modified by Orders no. 3329/81/2005 and no. 4478/1783/2012. These define validation as the process of assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning, which is based on learning outcomes (expressed until recently in knowledge, skills and competences). The document does not explicitly mention the four stages of validation as per 2012 Council Recommendation, thus the validation process includes in practice four steps, but without a formal or legal delimitation between them: career counselling by the validation practitioner, followed by document submission by the validation user proving his/her the learning experiences, if any, assessment of skills and competences, delivery of the certificate.

According to this legal framework, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is the national coordinator for the evaluation and certification of professional competences gained outside the formal educational system, thus is referring to validation of nonformal and informal learning. In 2014 – the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 49/26.06.2014 established the National Centre for Accreditation (NCA) as a substructure of the NQA to deal with validation and certification of competences. This

⁴ In the current report, the author refers to the non-profit, non-governmental sector as the `third sector`.

⁵ Original title `Strategia națională pentru ocuparea forței de muncă 2021-2027` (document available online, in Romanian, here: http://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/MMPS/SNOFM_2021-2027.pdf)

⁶ The Ministry of Labour has been granted European-funds from the Erasmus+ programme for the project started in January 2022: `Erasmus+ Adult National Training Strategy` (more details on the project, are available, in Romanian, here: <http://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/anunturi/6511-erasmus-adult-national-training-strategy>);

structure is now under the authority and responsibility of the President of the NQA (Decision no. 1044/18.08.2022) – thus proving the importance it has within the NQA.

The NQA – through NCA – is the structure that grants authorizations to the centres responsible for evaluating and certifying the professional competencies gained in nonformal and informal learning (referred to as `assessment centres`). The authorization is done according to Order 4543/468 from 23.08.2004 and the subsequent Decision of the NQA president no. 1247/12.09.2017 and can be requested and received for one, two or three years, depending on the performance level of the centre and for each occupation/qualification separately. Thus, an assessment centre can have one or several authorizations, one for each occupation/qualification for which they can offer validation services. Data about the authorized centres are recorded in the National Register of evaluation and certification centres (also referred to as `assessment centres`) - which is publicly available on the NQA`s website.

Another public institution involved in validation of non-formal and informal learning is the National Agency for Employment (NAE). NAE offers, through its regional branches a one-time free-of-charge validation service for the unemployed persons registered with NAE, that are seeking a job.

In conclusion, assessment centres are created either by the private sector (e.g. private education providers that also offer training) or by the public sector through the National Agency for Employment and its regional branches/centres.

The NQA also evaluates and certifies the assessors of the authorized centres, for which `evaluators of assessors` are involved, in accordance with art. 342 of the National Law of Education no. 1/2011, as well as the Order no. 3888/2021⁷, which include details about the professional qualification and training of these assessors (validation practitioners) and the evaluators of assessors and external evaluators.

Validation is a voluntary process whereby the competences acquired non-formally or informally are assessed against given occupational/professional training standards. The assessment methods used for each validation case is set by the authorized centre, for the beneficiary to demonstrate competence. The assessment methods must include a written test and a practical demonstration of the skills (as "direct observation" or "simulation/structured demonstration") and can additionally include: self-evaluation, oral test, project, reports for third parties, folder of paper/works created before the assessment.

The validation process can take up to 30 days. If successful, the candidate receives a validation certificate that covers only those competences that he/she demonstrated, in direct link with the specific standard that describes the entire block of competences associated to an occupation or a qualification.

Validation is available for all qualifications of levels 1-3 according to the National Qualifications Framework, for which there is an occupational standard defined and an authorized and active assessment centre. The qualifications that can be obtained through validation, can be searched out by checking the National Register for authorized assessment centres available on the NQA website (<http://www.anc.edu.ro/registru-centre-cna/>).

The certificates for successful validation users are issued by the NQA, and assessment centres pay for them. The issuing of certificates can take 30 days and is monitored in three ways: through the National Registry of beneficiaries of the validation process, the Registry of certificates and the Registry of nominal issuing of certificates. Certificates look differently than those issued at the end of a training

⁷ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/244085>

session and are identified under the specific title "certificate of professional competences".

Both the NQA and the NAE are collecting data about the number of validation users receiving a certificate, but without any detailed description of their profile, the qualifications for which they requested validation or their progress after submitting their request or any other data about the number of persons who initiated the validation processes but have not successfully finished them.

The steps of the Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms are:

1. authorizing assessment centres,
2. certifying assessors,
3. registering authorized centres,
4. registering certified assessors,
5. periodical evaluation of certified assessors.

While the legislation also covers the monitoring of the activities of the assessment centres, such monitoring is not taking place in practice. Lack of resources might explain this current situation. In the future, accreditation will be available if the legislative proposals currently under debate will be adopted, as well as a platform to monitor the evaluation activity⁸.

Romania has not changed its approach to validation significantly since 2004 and most of the national policies on validation have been put in place. There has been little change to the legal framework since 2018, but there are several legislative initiatives in the consultation process to align the national framework to the international evolutions since 2018.

There are no Individual Learning Accounts or individual skill audits in Romania. However, national skill audits have been organised and used to fundament National Strategies or the priorities for developing the human resources/capital included in some National Programmes (e.g. the Operational Programme Human Capital – funded through European Structural Funds). Moreover, the Ministry of Labour intends to pilot the Individual Learning Accounts in the field of constructions starting with 2024⁹.

Other relevant legal documents are:

- Government Decision no. 918/2013 for the adoption of the National Qualifications Framework with the changes brought by the Governance Ordinances no. 567/15.07.2015 and no. 132/2018 – all creating a good basis for validation policies.
- Joint Order no. 5039/2126 of September 2018 regarding the correspondence between the Romania Qualifications Framework levels, the study documents/certificates issued, the type of education and training programme in Romania leading to acquisition of a qualification level, the EQF reference levels as well as the access terms for each qualification level.
- Order no. 5671/2017 regarding the nomination of the NQA as the Europass National Centre in Romania;

⁸ Legislative proposal for implementing a new methodology covering authorization and accreditation is currently under review. Should it be adopted, the new rules will make a clear distinction between authorization (defined there as a first step of the QA process) and accreditation (as the next step of the QA process) followed by periodical monitoring (continuous, long-term, QA). Accredited centres, compared to those only authorized, will benefit from more rights: the right to issue "qualification certificates", which cover by assessment all the professional competences described by a reference standard, unlike professional competence certificates which can cover one or more competences, but not all.

⁹ Mentions of this initiative are made in the National Resilience and Recovery Plan and the Education and Occupation Programme, financed from European structural funds (<https://www.fonduri-structurale.ro/stiri/27656/a-fost-publicata-o-noua-versiune-a-programului-operational-educatie-si-ocupare-2021-2027>);

- Government Decision no. 598/2017 for the approval of the Methodology of accreditation, periodic evaluation, organising and functioning of the Community Centres for continuous learning. Their activity includes facilitating the integration or reintegration of low-skilled members of the community on the labour market and creating the premises for lifelong learning through validating non-formal and informal learning experiences. According to the decision, these centres are also responsible for informing and counselling potential beneficiaries regarding the processes and mechanisms for the validation of the non-formal and informal learning. The centres can also issue the certification documents, if they were authorised for this purpose. The disadvantage of this decision is that – at art. 25 – it makes a distinction between certifying the learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning and certifying learning outcomes that occurred in nonformal and informal contexts.
- Government Decision 92/2018 determined changes in the Romanian Occupational Classification (COR) – with a focus on the major occupation group 9 (unqualified workers) changing the name of the group from “Unqualified workers” to “Basic occupations”. For 30 of the occupations in this major group 9 were established, by order of the Minister of Labour no. 2495/2018 regarding the approval of the List of elementary occupations for which level 1 qualification programs can be organized, as for their practice you need to have a NQF/EQF level 1 qualification.
- Order no. 4492/29 July 2021 regarding the approval of the Methodology for the recognition of professional qualifications obtained in the formal system of education, non-formal and informal learning contexts [i.e. outside of the national system of education] from authorized providers of professional training or authorized centres for competence evaluation and/or other competent authorities of the EU member states, states within the SEE, the Swiss confederation, UK, SUA and Republic of Moldova. The methodology sets the framework for the recognition of qualifications that correspond to levels 1 – 8 of professional qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework of Romania and to the COR.

3.2 Validation in education and training

Since 2018, no specific changes have been implemented in the validation system in initial education and training. There are no mechanisms in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to obtaining the same type of certification as for general education, upper secondary level (baccalaureate), IVET or university (HE) education. Though this is desirable in the future legislation, the progress is only at the early stages of the discussion – a common ground in the field is yet to be reached.

Starting with 2011, schools are allowed to use specific assessment and validation methodology only in the case of the Second Chance programme, in order to provide flexible access to this educational pathway. The `Second Chance` programme under the Ministry of Education also targets low-qualified adults, along with young people, of any age, that did not go to school or did not successfully graduate from primary or secondary education. Therefore, the programme offers them a chance to obtain qualifications at the compulsory level of education without forcing them to withdraw from any professional or personal activity.

There is no specific policy or legislation on the validation of learning undertaken by means of open educational resources (OER) in Romania.

Moreover, there are some professional associations – e.g., the Romanian College of Pharmacists – which recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning as part of their continuous training process, through their own recognition procedure, though no nationally recognised certificates are issued at the end of the process. The same is the case for the Pedagogical Departments (original title, in Romanian, `Casa

Corpului Didactic) which recognise non-formal and informal learning as part of the continuous training of teachers.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

As mentioned in section 3.1 of this report, validation of non-formal and informal learning is only done for access to the labour market, as the resulted certification does not grant the right to access further education in the formal system. The national arrangements in place for the validation for the labour market are those already described in section 3.1 of this report.

Though the current legislation describes the validation as a four-stage process as per the 2012 Council Recommendation, the practices have not been updated and still follow the legal framework from 2004. The latter did not explicitly delimit the four stages, but included the following steps:

- The validation practitioner is assigned as a career guidance counsellor to each beneficiary and is responsible for informing the beneficiary about the possibility of validating their competences acquired non-formally or informally based on their previous experience.
- The beneficiary is required to submit evidence documenting their previous learning experiences in non-formal or informal contexts.
- Then, the assessment of skills and competences takes place using a set of assessment methods established by the authorized centre, for the beneficiary to demonstrate the level of competence. The evaluation methods must include a written test and a practical demonstration of the competence (direct observation or simulation / structured demonstration) and can additionally include: self-evaluation, oral test, project, reports from third parties, folder of papers/works created before the evaluation. If successful, the candidate receives a certificate for each demonstrated competence or for the entire block of competences specific to an occupation or a qualification.

Since 2018, there has been no progress registered regarding skills audits or the improvement of the link between guidance and validation. However, a first step has been taken towards the design and implementation of an Individual Learning Account, as per the 2022 Council Recommendation regarding ILAs. This step is represented by the intention of the Ministry of Labour to pilot an ILA scheme for the employees in the construction sector, starting with 2024. The initiative was included in the planning documents of the country and linked to available structural funds¹⁰.

3.4 Validation and the third sector

Since 2018, no specific progress has been made in this area. Though both the youth sector and some NGOs have advocated the development and improvement of validation policies in education or on the labour market, there is no specific policies in place for the third sector. However, the current legislative framework for validation does not preclude beneficiaries from undergoing validation if their documentary evidence of learning acquired non-formally or informally originates from the third sector. Therefore, it is possible to gain a validation certificate for proved competences or qualifications following the validation of volunteering experiences.

Moreover, the Law No. 78/2014 on volunteering activities provides a specific system for validation of the learning and skills acquired by volunteers that are officially recognised based on a volunteering contract and a volunteering certification.

¹⁰ As mentioned before, the initiative to pilot the Individual Learning Accounts is included in the Education and Employment Operational Programme.

According to the law, the volunteering certificate is not linked to any qualification, but may be an advantage for volunteers in the labour market, such as in companies' selection and recruitment policies and processes.

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

In December 2013, Romania adopted the National Qualifications Framework through the adoption of the Government's Decision (GD) no. 918/2013. It was then modified through GD no. 567/2015 and GD no. 132/2018. The first revision made validation of non-formal and informal learning possible only for levels 1- 3 of qualifications. The second revision reiterated the link between the NQF with the European Qualifications Framework and redefined the learning outcomes corresponding to the 8 levels of qualifications in terms of knowledge, skills, responsibility, and autonomy. The GD no. 132/2018 offered a new definition for the validation of non-formal and informal learning as the four-stages process of `identification, through dialogue, of the specific individual experiences, documenting for making visible those individual experiences, a formal evaluation of those experiences and a certification of the learning outcomes which can lead to a partial or full qualification`. Certificates of validation are registered in a national registry by the NCA, and they look different from any other certificates issued in the sector, thus they can be differentiated from them.

In September 2018, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice issued the Joint Order no. 5039/2126 regarding the correspondence between the NQF levels, the study documents/ certificates issued, the type of education and training programme in Romania leading to acquisition of a qualification level, the EQF reference levels as well as the access terms for each qualification level. This Order also includes the documents which are issued for validation of competence through the assessment centres, thus updating the legal framework to allow the issuing and correspondence of documents at European level.

As stated in the 2018 report, validation is still linked with occupational standards and is not yet operational with regards to formal education. Validation can lead to a partial or a full qualification depending on the number of competences that the validation user can demonstrate. At the present time, credentials obtained through validation cannot be otherwise combined to obtain a qualification, though there is a legislative proposal for this to be made possible via the NQA. Moreover, one cannot obtain micro-credentials through validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, one must mention that by the GD no. 772/2022, all types of certificates obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning will include references to the number of transferable credits, in correspondence with the occupational standard that is the basis of the validation process.

Since 2018, there have been talks about modularisation, especially in the VET sector, however there is no legal framework linking partial qualifications and modularisation or micro-credentials. There are steps taken in that direction through the legal initiatives currently in debate, but new occupational standards need to be designed before this could be possible.

According to Order no. 3712/1721/2018 regarding the approval of the Methodology for the development, validation, approval and management of occupational standards and the occupational standard model, with subsequent modifications and additions, the SO model integrates 2 Annexes - Plan and training program - developed by modules.

5 Standards

Just like in 2018, according to the current legislation, occupational standards and vocational training standards are used for the validation procedure in the case of CVET. The occupational standards are not the same as the vocational training standards that are used for certification in the formal education and training system. However, it is expected that the occupational and vocational training standards have the same value on the labour market, although the situation may vary from one sector to another. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity issued the Joint Order no. 6250/2156 from 16th December 2022 regarding the approval of the Methodology for elaboration, validation, approval and management of occupational standards, and the occupational standards template. The template for the occupational standards includes a section on the requirements for vocational education and training. Development of occupational standards involve stakeholders such as: employers and employer organisations (known as 'representatives of the labour market' in Romanian), the chambers of commerce, the sectorial committees and the professional associations. Their proposals are approved by the NQA.

More recently, according to the order no. 5686/2017 regarding the modification and completion of the Methodology for registration of higher education qualifications in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS), approved by the Order of the Minister of Education no. 3475/2017, there is a compulsory procedure for universities to align their educational offer with the NQF and occupational standards and to develop and validate specific qualifications provided by the higher education institutions.

In conclusion, since 2018, validation legislation and procedures registered only small changes. At present, there are several legislative initiatives that also refer to validation. The changes they propose refer to integrating in practice the new definition of learning outcomes (as defined by the Government's Decision no. 132/2018), continue the development of the quality assurance processes – e.g. the development of the accreditation process etc.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

There is no change regarding the responsible organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and coordination, in Romania, since 2018.

In Romania, the National Centre for Accreditation (NCA) is the established structure for the coordination of the validation system. It functions under the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) - institution with legal responsibility in validation, including the coordination of the national system of validation. The NCA's responsibilities include:

- granting authorizations to assessment centres and practitioners in the validation of non-formal and informal learning of adults. All steps of the validation process take place in an authorised assessment centre.
- coordination of the assessment centres' authorisation process.
- training and certifying validation practitioners (referred in the text as 'assessors'), evaluators of assessors and external evaluators.
- quality assurance: monitoring the performance of validation centres and of the individual external evaluators through certified internal and external quality checkers.

The NQA is also responsible for organizing/monitoring the organization of `sectoral committees`, i.e., social dialogue structures comprising of employees and employer representatives. These committees contribute to the development of the legal framework regarding training, assessment, and certification of competences at sectoral level; they promote the competence-based system of training and evaluation; they contribute to the development and validation of occupational standards and vocational training standards. Sectoral committees are involved in assessors' certification commissions, in COR mapping at ESCO, in the analysis and updating COR and NQA periodically requires sectoral committees to issue points of view regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is relevant regarding the involvement of **private sector actors (including social partners) in the validation processes.**

Since 2011, The National Education Law no. 1/2011 also designates the Community Centres for continuous learning as responsible for offering programmes for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and as well as information, orientation and counselling services linked to them (art. 344). As shown, in the previous sections of this report (e.g. section 3.1), in 2017 the legislation for the creation of these centres was adopted (Government Decision no. 598/2017). However, they are still not functional yet.

The assessment centres are responsible for providing all the steps of the validation services which include a career counselling phase, an assessment phase and a certification step. Validation is done voluntarily based on the individual request of validation users. The centres can be organised by a private body (e.g., a private provider of education or a sectoral committee) or a public institution (e.g. the local branch of the NAE) and need to be authorised by the NQA before having the right to carry out validation assessments and issue validation certifications. NQA is the structure to authorize the centres that will assess and certify the professional competences acquired non-formal and informal learning. Authorization can be requested for one, two or three years, depending on the performance level of the centre and for each occupation/qualification separately. The costs of authorizing assessment centres depend on the number of years of authorization that the centre requires, and thus varies between 600 for one year and 1800 euros if the authorization is for three years. For the centres coordinated by the NAE that request authorization to assessment centre, the costs of authorization are covered by the unemployment insurance budget.

The authorization process includes a self-evaluation phase (done by the centre itself) and an external evaluation done by the NQA. It also includes a phase of evaluation of the assessors by internal evaluators of assessors of NQA (in accordance with the National Education Law no. 1/2011, art. 342). Disseminating information about the validation process as well as collecting data about the assessment processes are amongst the criteria for granting authorization. According to the providers' representatives interviewed, the authorization process is bureaucratic and thus might discourage potential providers from offering validation services. Data about the authorized centres are recorded in the National Register of evaluation and certification centres (*which is publicly available on the NQA's website*).

At the present moment, no specific validation responsibilities are in place for **third sector organisations**. There is no assessment centre operated by a third sector organisation and no validation services are currently provided by third sector organisations. Although third sector organisations are the main providers of informal and non-formal learning, they are not perceived as providing necessarily qualification related skills. However, some of the certificates provided by well-known third sector organisations may have a value among other organisations, although those certificates do not necessarily lead to a full qualification and are not nationally formally recognised.

There is no coordination with other national policies in place, nor a coordination mechanism for the efforts to raise awareness about the validation opportunities. For example, considering strengthening the links between assessment centres and employment services and the formal education system, might contribute to the increase in popularity of the validation services.

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

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

Little progress has been made since 2018 regarding active awareness-raising campaigns on validation. Outreach and awareness-raising activities are still lacking the volume, support and resources needed to reach all potential beneficiaries. The main tool used for raising awareness about validation remains the NQA website (along with/during the promotion of the projects that the NQA is implementing). Relevant information is presented on the website of the NAE – e.g. the campaign for informing Ukrainian refugees about the free-of-charge services offered by NAE including validation services. Last, but not least, information about the validation opportunities and their costs are also promoted by authorized assessment centres in the attempt to attract potential beneficiaries.

It is however worth mentioning the guide developed at the initiative of the Romanian Presidential Administration with the help of NQA and NAE regarding validation opportunities for Romanians living abroad¹¹. This was meant to help them understand the steps for validating, in Romania, and obtaining a certificate for their professional qualification or competences gained, for example, while working abroad. The guide is available on the websites of all three institutions and was disseminated among the Romanians living abroad online.

There are no instruments to measure the success of these promotional activities – neither among the general public, nor amongst specific potential target groups.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

The responsibilities for offering information and counselling services are divided between several institutions, in Romania, i.e.:

- the Ministry of Education - responsible for counselling services in schools and universities;
- the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice through its Employment Agencies, - responsible for counselling services for unemployed persons,
- the NQA - responsible for the authorizing of the assessment centres,
- and the assessment centres.

In practice, most of the counselling regarding the validation opportunities and connected career counselling is done at the level of the assessment centres and the local branches of the National Employment Agency. The legislation indicates that before an assessment process starts, beneficiaries should be familiarised with the relevant occupational/vocational training standards and assessment methods, by an evaluator assigned to them. Feedback is given at the end of the assessment process in written and oral format. In some cases, beneficiaries might receive a comprehensive feedback report and are given the opportunity to provide feedback on

¹¹ The Guide for recognising the professional experience and the qualifications gained abroad, can be read, in Romanian, here: <https://cnerd.edu.ro/ro/Ghid-recunoastere-experienta-profesionala-si-calificari-dobandite-in-strainatate>;

the assessment process and outcomes. Beneficiaries have the right to challenge the result of the assessment.

The main information source regarding the validation processes is the NQA website – this source is free of charge. Moreover, as it was the case in 2018, there is still some pre-service guidance offered by the assessors of the assessment centres once the beneficiary submits a validation request to an assessment centre. Though there is no specific cost or tax for this counselling phase, it is connected /linked to the validation service which is a paying service.

However, the validation practitioner is required, by law, to also offer some career counselling to the validation users in the initial phase of the validation process. For these validation practitioners, the selection methodology (order no. 3629/2018) mentions that counselling and guidance are compulsory modules in their training as validation staff. The training is done by the Ministry of Labour, while the certification of evaluators as validation practitioners is done by the NQA.

There is no mentoring services nor guidance offered to beneficiaries after the evaluation of their previous experience nor after guidance interventions to assess if further guidance is needed.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

According to 'Decision no. 210/26.06.2018 for the approval of the procedure for evaluation and certification of the assessment and certification experts and their registration in the evaluation and certification experts register', any validation staff should be trained as evaluation experts – undergoing training opportunities approved by the Ministry of Labour and then pass an evaluation process conducted by the NQA. Their training should include modules referring to counselling and guidance. Only after successfully passing the NQA certification process, can competence assessors, evaluators of assessors and external evaluators be mentioned in the Register of Experts in Assessment and Certification (REAC). According to the procedure, the validation centres cannot use other experts outside the REAC, and the authorization of the centre depends on this aspect.

The profile of the validation practitioners – also known as the competence assessors – is defined by Order no. 3888/2021. The evaluation experts who want to become validation practitioners have to prove they are specialists in the field they want to become competence assessors, that they have graduated a training for evaluators of professional competences, that they have at least 2 years' experience, in the last 5 years, in the field, that they have participated in lifelong learning opportunities in the field in the last 4 years.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Initial training for validation practitioners is offered by authorised training providers. the Ministry of Labour coordinates the training providers authorisation process. It is mandatory that the initial training includes modules referring to counselling and guidance. There is not enough information about any continuing training program for the further development of the professional competence assessors, despite the

numerous initial training options¹². As described in section 7.1, persons interested in becoming validation practitioners must undergo a certification process by the NQA every four years.

8.3 Qualifications and experience

According to the methodology for establishing criteria and procedures for assessment and certification of competence assessors, evaluators of assessors and external evaluators (Order no. 3888/2021), the following roles and minimum criteria are stated for those interested to apply for registration in REAC:

Assessor of professional competences (also known as “validation practitioners” or “competence assessors”, (according to Order no. 3888/2021, art. 6)) must prove that he/she:

- is a graduate of higher education proven by a university degree,
- holds a certificate for professional competence assessor, obtained by graduating from a continuous professional training programme under the law;
- has professional (work) experience in the occupation/qualification for which he/she apply for registration in REAC using the following correspondence:
 - at least 2 years out of the last 3 years, for occupations associate level 1 CNC
 - at least 3 years out of the last 5 years, for occupations associate level 2 CNC
 - at least 5 years out of the last 7 years, for occupations associate level 3 CNC
- has been involved in the last 3 years in continuing professional training programs in the field of occupation(s) for which he/she wants to be a professional competences assessor (minimum 40 hours).

Evaluator of the assessors (according to Order no. 3888/2021, art. 7)

- is a graduate of university studies, proven by bachelor's degree or equivalent;
- is a professional competence assessor registered in the REAC;
- has professional (work) experience of at least 8 years in the field of education and professional training;
- proves experience of at least 3 years as assessor of professional competences;
- holds the certificate of evaluator of assessors, obtained by completing a continuing professional training program authorized under the law;
- has participated, in the last 4 years, in training programs continuing professional improvement/specialization in the field of vocational education and training and/or evaluation of competences acquired non-formally/informally.

External evaluator (according Order no. 3888/2021, art. 8)

- is a graduate of university studies, proven by bachelor's degree or equivalent;
- holds the certificate of external evaluator, obtained by graduation from a continuing professional training program authorized under the law;
- proves professional experience in specific activities of quality assurance in the field of education and professional training.

In Romania, the role of the guidance practitioners is covered by the validation practitioners. The latter are obliged to graduate a training that includes modules

¹² there are many adult professional training programs for the occupation “professional competence assessors”, currently active at the national level - see the Register of adult professional training providers, from the level of each county, respectively Bucharest, e.g. <https://bucuresti.mmanpis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/RNFFPA-Bucuresti-2021.xls> - please search for “evaluator de competente profesionale”.

dedicated to guidance and counselling. Thus, one could conclude that such training specifics are mandatory for the guidance practitioners.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

There are no specific funding mechanisms in place at national level for validation and the situation has not improved compared to the last Inventory update of 2018. The validation process is a paying service and most of the validation users will have to pay for the validation of their skills and competences gained from non-formal or informal learning.

However, the National Agency for Employment (NAE) provides validation services for jobseekers free of charge for one time per period of unemployment – according to Law no. 76/2002, from the unemployment insurance fund. According to the current legislation (Art. 70[^]1 of the Law no. 76/2002), any registered jobseeker is entitled to benefit, free of charge, from information and counselling that are offered by the National Agency for Employment (NAE) at the county level and validation services provided by an authorized assessment centre, from the NAE's network of centres or selected by NAE under public procurement legislation.

Moreover, the centres under the National Agency for Employment network are also financially supported for the procedures relating to the granting of authorizations, under the unemployment benefits budget.

The main change since 2018 is the national policy of ensuring free-of-charge validation of the competences gained in non-formal and informal learning contexts by Ukrainian refugees that do not have a professional certificate. However, until the moment of writing this report, there were no Ukrainian beneficiaries of this service most probably due to the language barrier.

Last, but not least, assessment centres apply for EU funding opportunities (e.g. structural funds) to cover the taxes for validation so that validation users are exempted from paying them.

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

The official website of NQA provides the list of all authorized centres and the Registers of qualifications for higher education and professional qualifications in Education. According to the NQA publicly available database, there are approximately 25 active assessment centres (entries in the national register of assessment centres), covering a number of approximately 85 unique occupations/qualifications, mainly in the sectors of services, construction and social protection.

The data provided by the NQA and NAE only refers to the number of validation users – there is no breakdown of this number, nor any indication of how many applications have been received. The number of beneficiaries reported by NCA in 2021 is similar to that in 2018. Over the 2018-2021 period, the number of people undergoing validation dropped significantly in 2020, probably due to Covid-19, but recovered to the level of 2018 by 2021 (approximately 8,760 beneficiaries).

The discussions with both the NQA representatives and the representative of the assessment centre indicated that the main beneficiaries of validation are low-educated persons that seek validation of their competences which they gained through undeclared work either in Romania or abroad. This might need further analysis to determine whether the fact that the legislation imposes a written test for

the validation process, limits the access to validation to potential beneficiaries who cannot read or write though they are very talented and experienced workers – e.g. ironware, basket weaving, woodwork etc.

9.2.2 Validation users

There is insufficient data collected at this moment to provide a detailed profile of validation users. The only information available from the observation of the assessment centre representative is that they mostly have low levels of education and work experience in different crafts or low-qualified persons who gained practical experience abroad (e.g., in constructions or patient care).

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The general policy framework on lifelong learning and continuing training is addressing the need for access to validation among the most disadvantaged groups. However, since 2018, there are no major programmes or projects put in place for this specific target group. Moreover, the current available data remains too limited to provide an estimation of the share of disadvantaged groups accessing validation services.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

Article 3 (h) from annex 1 of Order No. 4543/468/2004 stipulates that the methods used in the evaluation of professional competences include “self-evaluation, direct observation, oral test, written test, project-based evaluation, simulation or structured observation, reporting or evaluation by others”. The legal framework makes it mandatory for the evaluation methods to include a written test. The rest of the evaluation methods are chosen by the assessment centre in accordance with the specifics of the occupation/qualification corresponding to the experience of the beneficiary.

The assessment tools should be developed in accordance with three main principles:

- validity (the instrument actually measures what it aims at measuring).
- accuracy (the instrument provides consistent results used in different contexts and by different assessors).
- fairness (the instrument does not favour any socio-economic group to the detriment of other groups).

| | Identification | Documentation | Assessment |
|---|----------------|---------------|------------|
| Debate | | | |
| Declarative methods | X | | |
| Interview | X | | X |
| Observation | | | X |
| Portfolio method | | X | |
| Presentation | X | | X |
| Simulation and evidence extracted from work | | | X |

| | Identification | Documentation | Assessment |
|---|----------------|---------------|------------|
| Tests and examinations | X | X | X |
| Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify | | | |

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

No ICT-based assessment methods are yet in use for validation, but the new legislative framework, expected to enter into force in April 2024, introduces the obligation to use the electronic platform of NQA in all validation processes of non-formal and informal previous learning¹³.

However, it is worth mentioning that NQA is involved – as leader or partner – in several EU-funded projects that aim to develop ICT-based tools for the validation process - e.g. a platform for collecting video recordings of the evaluations done by the assessment centres - or to develop curriculums that include ICT-related subjects¹⁴.

For example, the NQA implemented until 2023 the EU-funded project “Raising the administrative capacity of the NQA and the Ministry of Labour through systemizing and simplifying the legislation in the field of qualifications” (2020-2022)¹⁵. It should have included the development of a tool for standardizing the validation process for nonformal and informal learning. NQA developed guidelines for the development of evaluation instruments for 18 occupations/qualifications and is in the process of developing such instruments for other 12 occupations/qualifications as well.

Moreover, NQA engages in projects to develop /contribute to European platforms like the National Assistance Service EPAL for Romania` and `National Europass Centre + EQF NCP` (2018-2020).

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

The legal framework that defines the responsibilities of the NQA and its NCA department in regard with the quality assurance of the validation processes is represented by the following documents:

- **Authorizing and monitoring the assessment centres** based on the Order no. 4543/468 of 2004. The authorization of this centres is the main quality assurance process, but since 2017 during the monitoring of the centres` activity, the NCA can also withdraw their authorization if any irregularities are observed by the control commission. The centres are also subject to regular

¹³ The proposed methodology referring to this is in the debate process and available here http://www.anc.edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/OME_OMSS-Metodologia-de-evalua-re_%C3%8En-dezbatere-1.pdf;

¹⁴ The project MACHINA – Machine Learning skills for ICT professionals (details in the annual report of NQA for 2022, available in Romanian, on the project webpage <http://www.anc.edu.ro/machina/> (accessed in March 2023). The project aims to increase the relevance of initial and continuous VET offer in the ICT sector;

¹⁵ The project `Raising the administrative capacity of the NQA and the Ministry of Labour through systemizing and simplifying the legislation in the field of qualifications` was funded through structural EU-funds, through the POCA national program (Project ID 129872, during the period January 2020 – December 2022). More details are available, in Romanian, on the project website <http://poca.anc.edu.ro/> (accessed in March 2023).

self-evaluation. In addition, at the end of the assessment process, the internal quality verifiers verify the documents resulting from the validation process.

- **Competence assessors, evaluators of assessors and external evaluators.** The performance of individual assessors is evaluated and monitored by evaluators of assessors also certified by NQA. The legislation sets out clear competence requirements for internal observers. The assessment procedure is followed by a process of internal verification, and there is an opportunity for the applicant to appeal against the decision. However, the situation described in 2018 as `institutional accountability is still a challenge given that all the quality assurance reports are rather internal bureaucratic documents and none of them are made public for a broader audience` seems to not have changed.
- **Conducting control and monitoring site visits to the assessment centres.** The monitoring procedures include the obligation of the assessment centre to submit to NQA a trimestral report, containing information about the occupations/qualifications for which they assess corresponding competences, number of assessments, number of issued certificates, candidates' appeals and ways in which they were addressed.
- **Managing the national registers of authorized assessment centres and certified assessors.**

The legislative initiatives under debate now also introduce the process of accreditation as part of the QA procedures.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

According to the chapter III of the Order no. 4543/468/2004, the NQA is responsible for monitoring the activity of the assessment centres. This is also mentioned in the LEN 1/2011 and the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 49/2014.

The annual reports of NQA include sections on the activity of the NCA which refer to the number of authorized assessment centres, of validation beneficiaries and of certified assessors. However, more could be done regarding the monitoring of the validation practices to determine the impact of validation practices on users. As mentioned in section 3.7 there are some monitoring procedures in place that require the assessment centre to submit trimestral activity reports to NQA. Moreover, given limited capacity and availability of resources, NQA monitors the assessment centres through external evaluators. If an assessment centre fails to meet any of the performance criteria set out in the legal framework, it receives a notification from the president of NQA regarding the respective issues. The centre has 60 days to address the identified shortcomings. If the centre does not succeed to address them, the NQA withdraws the authorisation for the assessment centre (e.g. the authorization for a specific occupation or all the authorizations of a centre).

The NQA website lists the register of authorized assessment centres (there are 25 unique centres in this registry), as well as a report of certified assessors¹⁶.

¹⁶ The national register of assessors included at the moment of writing this report 56 entries, but the number of assessors is not final as the NQA reported that the register is currently being updated, considering that we are in the process of re-certifying all evaluators whose 4-year certification, obtained in 2018, has expired.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

There is no other relevant information collected and reported regarding the level of trust in validation practices by stakeholders or society. Therefore, it is the opinion of the author that since 2018, not much has changed regarding the visibility of validation in the society. As mentioned in the 2018 report, validation is mostly known at the levels of policy makers and stakeholders.

13 References

13.1 References

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Governments` Ordinance no. 129/2000 regarding the professional training of adults;

Government Decision no. 918/2013 for the adoption of the National Qualifications Framework;

Government Emergency Ordinance No. 49/26.06.2014 regarding some measures in the field of education, scientific research and for changing some legislative documents;

Government Decision no. 418/2015 for approving The National Strategy on Lifelong Learning 2015 – 2020, Available from: <http://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/sedinte-guvern/strategia-nationala-de-invatare-pe-tot-parcursul-vietii>;

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Governments` Decision no. 132/2018 for modifying and completing the Government`s Decision no. 918/2013;

Government`s Decision no. 92/2018 for modifying the Government`s Decision no. 1352/2010 for approving the structure of the Romanian Classification of occupations (known as `COR`) – level base group, according to the International Standard Classification of occupations ISCO 8;

Law no.76/2002 regarding unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation;

Law of National Education no. 1/2011;

Law No. 78/2014 regarding the volunteering activity in Romania;

Ministry of National Education (31.08.2011) Methodology for Second Chance programme in lower secondary education;

National Strategy for the Employment of the Working Force 2021-2027;

Order no. 4543/468 from 23.08.2004 for the approval of The Evaluation and Certification Procedure for the professional competences gained in other contexts than the formal educational system;

Order no. 3329/81/2005 for modifying and completing the The Evaluation and Certification Procedure for the professional competences gained in other contexts than the formal educational system;

Order no. 4478/1783/2012 for modifying and completing the The Evaluation and Certification Procedure for the professional competences gained in other contexts than the formal educational system initially adopted through Order no. 4543/468/2004;

Order no. 5671/2017 regarding the nomination of the NQA as the Europass National Centre in Romania;

Order no. 5686/2017 regarding the modification and completion of the Methodology for registration of higher education qualifications in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS), approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education no. 3475/2017;

Order no. 3629/02.05.2018 on the approval of the Methodology for establishing the criteria and procedures for evaluation and certification of professional competence assessors, evaluators of evaluators and external evaluators;

Order no. 5039/2126/2018 regarding the correspondence between the NQF levels;

Order no. 3888/2021 approving the Metodology, the criteria and the evaluation procedures for certifying the validation practisioners (asesors of competencies), evaluators of evaluators and external evaluators;

Order no. 4492/29 July 2021 regarding the approval of the Methodology for the recognition of professional qualifications obtained in the formal system of education, non formal and informal learning contexts from authorized providers of professional training or authorized centres for competence evaluation and/or other competent authorities of the EU member states, states within the SEE, the Swiss confederation, UK, SUA and Republic of Moldova;

Joint Order no. 6250/2156 from 16th December 2022 regarding the approval of the Methodology for elaboration, validation, approval and management of occupational standards, and the occupational standards template.

13.2 Sources

- National Qualifications Authority
- Institute of Educational Sciences
- National Agency for Employment

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 stakeholders 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.

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