European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Italy

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON VALIDATION

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

In Italy, although there is agreement on the importance of validation principles and aims there is a delay in the adoption of the provisions necessary for the development and institutionalisation of a national system of validation and certification of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The barriers to validation include:

- The formal and legal value of qualifications and diplomas obtained through formal education and training pathways;
- The traditional weakness of short-term and adult education and training, which in Italy is not widespread as in other European countries;
- The absence of an explicit and adequately regulated National System of Qualifications, even if there are Regional Qualification Systems;
- The diversity of institutions involved in this matter at national, regional and local level.

However national and regional institutions, for example the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, social partners and employers’ associations at national level and representatives of the Regions have tried to establish a set of professional standards of reference for the promotion of initiatives of validation of non formal and informal learning.

In addition, there have been initiatives to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning in the form of credits within University courses. For example, in 2007 a Working Group organised by the Ministry of Universities and Research was charged with preparing the Guidelines for the accreditation of prior learning.

Until now, the design, formalisation and implementation of institutional systems and devices aimed at validation of non-formal and informal learning has only been fully developed at a regional level. The regions have taken different approaches to the implementation of validation:

- In some cases, the validation process has been shaped within specific VET pathways (IFTS, EDA);
- In other cases, the regional administrations have designed and implemented validation systems for the recognition of credits or official titles (national civil service, specific industrial sectors); and
- In some cases validation devices were activated and made operational in all sectors of the regional vocational training system.

In terms of Higher Education, the Ministerial Decree No. 270/2004 affirmed the possibility for the Universities to recognise "the knowledge and professional skills certified according to the existing legislation as well as the other knowledge and skills gained in training courses at a post-secondary level in which the university contributed in design and delivery".

"The University for Lifelong Learning" guidelines developed by a working group, organised by the Ministry of Universities and Research in 2007¹ state that the university system must be an integrated and constantly monitored system in which the recognition of learning should be possible, regardless of how and where the learning took place. In the same

¹ http://www.programmallp.it/lkmw_file/LLP//erasmus/MIUR_Linee_Indirizzo.pdf
document Universities are invited to visit the Centres for Lifelong Learning (CAP) which are academic centres operating at regional and national level also in partnerships with enterprises and public administrations. One of the main purposes of CAP is to help individuals to validate non-formal learning (as credits toward the university programmes the individual is interested in), and to personalise training pathways according to the previous experience acquired in other contexts and to facilitate the access of adult learners and/or employees to validation.

Furthermore, numerous local “micro-experiences” have been implemented throughout Italy in different Regions and in a variety of sectors. These experiences were promoted and led by various stakeholders and aimed at several target groups.

During 2009 national policy and institutions further encouraged the recognition of learning acquired outside the formal education and training context (non-formal and informal learning). This was partly due to the economic crisis and to the necessity of improving and updating the competences of individuals who faced the uncertainty of the labour market. The economic crisis sharpened the disparity between skills demand and supply and made the issue of updating competences a priority for policy makers.

Below are some of the most recent Government initiatives towards the introduction of a validation system in Italy:


The White Paper assigned specific importance to the needs of individuals. In relation to validation, the Paper aimed at giving value to “workplace learning” and informal learning and is an important statement about the need to build and implement a national system of validation of competences.

2. The document “Italia 2020”, an action plan for the employability of young people through the integration of jobs and learning, signed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policies and the Minister of Education, Universities and Research

The document “Italia 2020 - Piano di azione per l’occupabilità dei giovani attraverso l’integrazione tra apprendimento e lavoro” (Italy 2020 - Action plan for the employability of young people through the integration of jobs and learning) was signed on 23 September 2009. The Action Plan identifies strategic policies for the coming years in the field of Vocational Education and Training and identifies an urgent need to develop suitable approaches and instruments to:

- Ensure a match between workers knowledge and labour market needs, with priority focusing on “assessment and validation” of learning and the updating of the training processes;
- Streamlining the governance of training systems, with specific regard to the involvement of social partners;
- Improving the quality of educational activities, by introducing new systems and approaches to assure quality of accreditation and certification procedures.


On 17 February 2010 an agreement between the Ministry of Labour, the Regions and Social Partners was signed, concerning training and general policies to be jointly implemented through the year. The agreement envisages the national qualifications system as the fundamental basis for efficiency and transferability of the outcomes of non-formal learning.
and informal learning. Validation is mentioned as an important aspect to develop in relation to competitiveness and lifelong learning.

More generally, decision makers’ commitment to strengthening tools for validating non-formal learning has been highlighted at the Central, Regional and Autonomous levels of government and within the Social Partners organisations. At national level, the importance of the “Citizen’s Training Portfolio” (Libretto Formativo del cittadino) has been underlined.

The Libretto Formativo del Cittadino is considered to be a strategic tool for the development of a national validation system, following the EU indications and policies for lifelong learning. In fact, the Libretto was defined in 2003 as a document for the individual "to register the competences acquired during apprenticeship training, training in contract placement, specialized training and continuing education taking place during the working life (…), as well as the competences acquired in a non-formal and informal way within the indications of the European Union about lifelong learning, as long as they are recognized and certified."³

In 2005 the Libretto was designed in a national format through a Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education Decree⁴ and then it was equipped with guidelines, a service process and web-based support centre⁵ for e-learning and e-tutoring, which also includes an online database system. The whole Libretto device (process and tools) was tested between 2006 and 2009 in 13 Regions, involving 250 operators and 600 beneficiaries (including young people, immigrants, the unemployed, apprenticeship trainees and workers) and it is still in operation in the Veneto Region for the unemployed and in the Lazio Region for a group of voluntary military workers who are leaving the army.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information

The lack of a National System of Standards breaks the development of a National Qualifications Framework. The highly fragmented approaches in the field of certification and acknowledgement of acquired skills adopted by the Regions are an obstacle to the creation of a unitary policy, which can meet the European principles of Lifelong Learning.

Since 2000, the need to develop and implement a National Qualifications and Certification System has been underlined in many agreements between State-Regions and Social partners. The agreements contain several strategic points, identifying the establishment of: “A qualification and certification system as a suitable instrument ensuring a unitary and visible pathway of lifelong learning to every single individual, allowing the recognition of training credits, and recording acquired competences”⁶.

In the period 2004-2005 many National Agreements were signed. These aimed at developing steps towards the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF):

- The definition of the national standard of competences (basic and transversal competences in initial vocational training);
- The definition of the national criteria for certification of competences and qualifications (for complete qualifications or specific units of competences);
- The adoption of a common format for national certificates in initial and continuing vocational training;
- The adoption of a common format for the Libretto Formativo.

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³ Decree (Decreto Legislativo) 10 September 2003 n. 276, art. 2, comma i.
⁵ On http://www.nrpitalia.it, Libretto Reserved Area.
⁶ Agreement between State and Regions of 17 February 2000.
In September 2006 the Ministry of Labour promoted a “National Table (Committee)” aimed at defining and implementing a “National Qualification Framework and System”. The committee was composed of representatives of the Ministries of Education, Universities and Research, the Regions and Social Partners. The National Framework would also be an important step in the development of the Italian system towards the definition of national criteria and a methodology able to give transparency and visibility of skills and competences of trainees and workers in any context (formal, non formal and informal), in coherence with the European policies on this subject (lifelong learning, EQF, ECVET).

Thanks to the participation and active involvement of all the key actors (Ministries, Regions, Social Partners) and the systematic approach to the integration of the education, training and employment systems, it has been possible to agree on the need to identify and select a national system for the definition and recognition of qualifications, the certification of competences and training credits, the transparency of competences, and the establishment of training and occupational standards.

During 2007 and 2008 Italy began to prepare a common methodology, which can be considered as the basis for building an integrated qualifications framework. In 2008 an inventory of regional standards of competences and qualifications was prepared and the methodology was successfully tested in the tourism and mechanical services sectors. In 2010 the methodology will be introduced in other sectors (e.g. chemical, food and agriculture and textiles areas). Since 2008 some regions, have adopted regional standards using the same methodology. Currently, the Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers (ISFOL) is supporting the Ministry of Labour in creating a national database of job descriptions which are clustered into 24 economic and professional areas.

Furthermore, in the last two years other important agreements have been signed at national level, such as:

- The agreement (mentioned above), signed on 17 February 2010, between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Regions and Social Partners, could give new focus to the aims of developing the Qualifications framework and supporting the validation and recognition of non formal and informal learning.

- The Agreement of State-Regions of 5th February 2009 regarding the Vocational training system led to the development of the first national repertory of professional profiles, establishing the minimum standards of technical competences. The Agreement has been acknowledged by the Decree of 29th May 2009, published in the Official Journal n. 140 of 19/6/2009. The repertory includes 19 professional profiles: 14 that were introduced with the previous Agreement of 5th October 2006 have been updated; five are new. Their usability is guaranteed at national level.

- The construction of occupational standards/repertories (set up by ISFOL on behalf of the Ministry of Labour) is embedded in the more general process of setting up a national system of professional standards, training standards and certification standards, as stated by ESF-PON, 2007-2013. It takes into account and enhances the available methodological and informative resources and involves social partners, with the technical and scientific support of ISFOL. Within the first semester of 2010 the completion of repertories for Chemical, Textiles and Food production areas will be achieved, intended as professional competence standards.

As agreed in many important documents since 2006, the NQF implementation process should facilitate the validation of knowledge and competences that were acquired in a non-formal and informal manner. In this context, the approach defined to build the National Occupational Standards System regards the definition of:

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More information is available on [http://www.nrpitalia.it/isfol/nup/admin/aep_rep.php](http://www.nrpitalia.it/isfol/nup/admin/aep_rep.php)
A repertory of ‘broad vocational profiles’ able to represent a large number of profiles coherent to one another

A set of Units of Competences (UC) linked to the profiles and to the EQF levels.

1.3 National institutional framework

As already underlined, there is no national institutional framework on validation but general principles have been stated and several local initiatives have begun.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The national government has a central role in designing a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Italian government aims at fixing common national criteria and procedures that will be available to citizens, companies, VET agencies and education providers.

The Regions are in charge of the implementation of the system and seek to make the mechanisms easy to put into practice and not to impact too strongly on their own existing VET and certification system.

The Social Partners are involved in almost all processes of the Italian validation system, in order to ensure it functions well.

More concretely, the responsibilities of validation can be described as follows:

The National Government:

- Regulates essential functions such as the definition of L.E.P.s (Essential Service Level Agreements) in several contexts (such as education, teaching, training and employment).
- Creates, in agreement with the principal stakeholders, the infrastructure necessary for the recognition of competences as credits: a national system of vocational standards, a system of training standards and a system of validation.

The Regional and Provincial Authorities:

- The Italian legislation entrusts the Regional and Provincial Authorities with the definition of vocational, training and certification standards, the effective organisation of related management devices and the regulation of vocational education and training supply and related providers (through an autonomously-defined accreditation device). (Reform of the Title V of the Italian Constitution)
- Italian legislation (Legislative Decree 469/1997) also entrusts the Regional and Provincial Authorities with the programming, organisation and implementation of a wide range of “employment services” (including reconstruction and recognition of competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning and skill-matching in the labour market).

The Social Partners: (Enterprises’ and workers’ representatives):

- Italian labour legislation measures give enterprises the authority to ‘recognise’ individual qualifications whether acquired in a training setting or in non-formal or informal contexts. In such cases, the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning is connected with the role of private Institutions (Fondi paritetici interprofessionali) for developing continuous training.
- Workers’ representatives bear a common responsibility with enterprises (within the bounds of contract activities) on important issues of work organisation. While
collaborating with employers’ representatives, workers’ representatives promote and defend the interests of workers on these themes.

Organisations:

- Are places where ‘typical’ informal learning takes place: specifically volunteer associations, non-profit third sector organisations (such as NGOs, the Italian Red Cross, the Catholic Scouts Associations etc.), as well as larger organisations such as the Armed Forces, the Police and Carabinieri academies and forces, local health agencies, etc.

School, VET and University Systems:

These systems (and related providers) ‘receive’ students who apply for the recognition of (training) credits based on the value given to previously acquired competences. The practice of credit recognition requires a clear outline of the criteria, tools and methods that are necessary to carry out this process.

Intermediary Bodies:

- Public or private bodies charged with the development and/or support and/or implementation of assessment and validation of learning completed in non-formal, informal and any other context: for example, public bodies (such as public employment centres) and private bodies (staff leasing companies).

Professional Associations and Registers:

These are organisations that preside over critical professional issues such as educational qualifications and professional requirements for access to recognised professions and related procedures.

- The participation of these bodies is particularly relevant in internships and professional work experience, as well as for the determination of professional recognition for current and prospective members of professional associations and registers.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

In recent years, some Italian regions have introduced tools for the validation of informal and non-formal learning, adopting at least three different approaches. In the first case, the regions have assumed that their regional qualifications system must include the opportunity to see learning validated and recognised if competences were acquired non-formally or informally and have stated that as an individual right (e.g. Emilia Romagna and Toscana).

In the second case, the process of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning has been seen as linked to the recognition of credits for the access to formal training or education (Valle D’Aosta, Lombardy, Marche, Umbria).

In the third case the process of validation is seen as instrumental in promoting and enhancing the professionalism of individuals facing integration and re-entry into employment (Veneto and Lombardy).

As an example of a regional approach to validation, the Emilia Romagna Certification System is described in more detail in the box below.
The Emilia Romagna Certification System

The Qualification and Certification System of Emilia Romagna\(^8\), is based on the principle that "everyone is entitled to obtain formal recognition and certification, however the skills were acquired." Certification can be awarded to qualifications and competences acquired by people both in formal contexts (education and vocational training) and non-formal/informal contexts (workplace, social and private life).

The system involves validation and certification of informal and non-formally gained skills. Thus, from the Regional point of view, the certification system becomes a powerful tool to integrate education, vocational training and the labour market.

The certification and validation process is technically based on the presence of "professional standards of reference" (adopted in the Regional Qualification System) organised into Qualification profiles and Units of Competence.

At the end of the validation process the candidate can achieve:

- A Certificate of Qualification (when all Competence Units that make up the Qualification are awarded)
- A Certificate of Competence (refers to one or more Competence Units included in a Qualification but not all of them)
- A "Card of knowledge and capacity" (when just one part of a Competence Unit has been completed).

The first two certificates can be acquired only after a formal assessment session. The "Card of knowledge and capacity" can be issued after the collection and analysis of evidence of skills.

The Certification System of Emilia Romagna is currently in a phase of implementation. Whilst developing the validation system tests were carried out on a group of Socio-welfare Operators (OAS) with excellent results. More information can be found at the following website:


On an experimental basis, in 2010 an accreditation system will be introduced at regional level, according to the national standards of the “assessors/certifiers”, who are capable of acknowledging, assessing and certifying workers’ real competences. A range of EU funded projects are described below in this report, in particular in section 3.4.

1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

As we have already seen in the Emilia Romagna case, if the validation and certification system is linked to an appropriate unit-based repertory of standards, the recognition of credits is also facilitated. One of the most widely used validation practices is the recognition of credits. In this case the process of validation of skills acquired outside the formal context is functional to both recognition and accreditation of competences within specific education and vocational training programmes.

In resolution No. 6274 of 21/12/2007, the region of Lombardia formalised the process of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning as credits to access vocational education and training programmes.

In particular, vocational education providers are required to recognise credits on submission of evidence and documents produced by individuals such as:

- Qualifications (diplomas and vocational qualification)

\(^8\) Delibera della Giunta Regionale del 12/09/2005 n° 1434 (MS-Word, 122 KB)
Orientamenti, metodologia e struttura per la definizione del sistema regionale di formalizzazione e certificazione delle competenze,
Delibera della Giunta Regionale del 19/04/2006 n° 530 (MS-Word, 803 KB)
IL SISTEMA REGIONALE DI FORMALIZZAZIONE E CERTIFICAZIONE DELLE COMPETENZE
• School reports
• Interim certificates of competence issued by educational institutions and training agencies
• Practical learning and work experience in Italy or abroad
• Positive evaluation of extracurricular activities
• Certification of foreign languages study
• Cultural activities or work experiences in the voluntary sector.

If the evidence produced is considered insufficient or incomplete, the individual may be required to undergo specific assessment tests.

Education and vocational training institutions are responsible for the analysis of evidence and carrying out the assessment tests that determine the weight and value of credits which can be recognised up to a maximum of 50% of the total training programme.

Another example of the institutionalisation of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to the recognition of credits is the system of the Marche Region, as stated in resolution No. 966 of 12/07/08. This resolution has formalised the possibility for all citizens to request the validation of learning acquired within work experience, as well as in social and private activities and towards the recognition of segments of training or vocational education programmes.

Furthermore in Umbria through D.G.R. 1429 of 03/09/2007, the recognition of credits related to skills acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning has been formalised. The recognition process has been performed by the Regional Administration, implemented by the Province Administrations and managed directly by the accredited training providers. The recognition process takes place at the request of the citizen and subsequently the analysis and evaluation of experiences and competences is carried out.

1.7 Funding framework

Funding for validation programmes is almost entirely derived from public resources and mostly from the European Social Fund (ESF) or the EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Some significant experiences of validation of non formal and informal learning can be found within programmes and initiatives financed by public resources. These are single experiences that represent an important process of improvement and enhancing of the issue in Italy.

In particular, it is possible to underline some Interregional Projects based on the active involvement of most Italian Regions in achieving a common objective and obtaining concrete results shared and validated by several institutional actors and different territorial origin. The Project “Description and certification of competences and professional systems” (“Descrizione e certificazione per competenze e famiglie professionali”) involved the greater part of Italian Regions and was aimed at ensuring students and workers the right of recognition of skills and knowledge acquired in non formal and informal learning contexts.

Moreover, significant projects aimed at defining and designing models and tools for validating informal and non formal learning have been implemented within the EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme (Equal and Leonardo da Vinci). The project ‘Investing in People’ (described in more detail below) was aimed at improving skills and knowledge for workers aged over 45 and people with disabilities through validation of non formal and informal learning. The project “FAIR” is a project for a new recognition of skills informally and non formally developed in the fair trade sector which involved social partners and public
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institutions, the Project ‘VAI’ is aimed at developing methods and tools for recognising and validating competences in SME and involved association of employers and training providers, the project ‘MAIEUTA’ is based on the application of VPL methods on the population over 40 with low level of professionalism in the sector of tourism and hospitality and involved employers, trade unions and training providers.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

As noted above, in relation to validation education and vocational training institutions are responsible for the analysis of evidence and carrying out the assessment tests that determine the weight and value of credits which can be recognised.

In the Higher Education sector, some universities, such as the University of Rome III, the University of Naples (East), the University of Siena and the University of Catania have already introduced Centres for Lifelong Learning and have started the validation of non formal and informal learning for adult workers or students. In the case of the University of Roma Tre, a research programme was initiated called “The validation of professional and experiential competences in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective”. This project is described in the box below.

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The validation of professional and experiential competences in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective, Roma Tre University

The project “Validation of professional and experiential competences in adults willing to be (re)integrated in university, in a lifelong learning perspective” was developed by Roma Tre University, Italy. The aim of this two-year project was to develop a system of validation of experiential learning.

The development of the project was broken down into three different stages:

- The analysis of fundamental themes of the process of validation of experiences and professional competences
- The design and development of procedures to establish an appropriate process of validation of experiences and professional competences of adults willing to be (re)integrated at university
- Implementation of the chosen procedure of validation.

The expected outcomes were a deeper understanding of validation; the definition, development and practice of all the methodologies and tools involved in the validation of ‘experience and professional competences’ in adults enrolled in university; and the diffusion and formalisation of results.

Further information can be found at the following link:
http://www.ricercaitaliana.it/prin/dettaglio_completo_prin_en-20078NRFTE.htm

2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

In Italy there are many information and advice networks, especially those aimed at young people and managed by local administrations. Nevertheless the services they offer are not compatible with the validation procedure because they are in charge of providing information about territory and job opportunities. They are not usually focused on “service to the individual” but are engaged in gathering information and making it available. Furthermore advice and guidance in Italy are not formally seen as an autonomous function (there is not a national law which defines and regulates them) but are always linked to education and training or to job services (where they are not very well disseminated).
2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

The situation of validation practices in the private sector is difficult to assess and describe. There are several enterprises that started initiatives or programmes of recognition of competences for specific purposes as documented by Perulli in 2006. Nevertheless these experiences are scarcely comparable because they are mostly based on organisational models and methodologies and, above all, they never lead to formal certification or validation from an institutional point of view. Social partner representatives were involved in the working group which developed the Libretto Formativo.

The range of companies which have introduced validation or recognition programmes varies, as does the geographical location. An example is provided in the box below.

Validation at a leather fashion company based in Florence

A leather fashion company, based in Florence, uses validation to support its broader policies of management and human resource development. The basic idea is that a success factor for the company is the workers’ contribution to its output and that this must be recognised and developed. This rationale led the company to sign, in 1994, an agreement with the Trade Unions stating its intention to develop projects for the recognition of skills and competences of its workers. Competences were defined as technical and organisational performance, which could allow the achievement of the expected results.

All roles within the organisation have been mapped and described in terms of competences with the help of a ‘dictionary’ consisting of about 20 technical skills. Competences are defined and graded - each level is described in performance-behavioural terms.

The range of actors involved in the project (the company, Trade Unions Joint Committee, Technical Group, workers, business leaders) is given legitimacy by the agreements between the different parties.

The objectives of the current arrangements are:
- to recognise and value the competences identified;
- to create a clear pathway for each role in terms of organisational and professional development opportunities, enabling the worker to think in terms of an individual career plan;
- to ensure equity and transparency through a shared process and standard criteria for the classification of the different roles and for the evaluation of individuals within each role.

This project applies to all employees of the Italian division of the company, under a contract of indefinite duration (with the exception of managers and executives).

The process of evaluation and certification is explicitly articulated as follows:

1) The business managers assess their employees (through interviews), using scales in which each indicator has been defined in terms of behavioural performance, then each indicator has been declined on several levels with increasing intensity. The scale is not unique but depending on the complexity of the competence and level of behavioural performance is expressed in terms of increasing intensity.

2) After the interview the manager compiles a ‘card to assess the level of individual competence’, which consists of several sections: registry, profile of the role of competence in relation to which the employee is evaluated, the result of the evaluation, development proposals and comments.

3) A certificate is awarded which records at an analytical level the competences possessed in relation to a role and the overall level of competence that allows the person to be classified...
Validation at a leather fashion company based in Florence

with respect to the role.

The levels are: basic, adequate, development, and excellent.

The project described in the box below was funded by the EU’s Leonardo da Vinci programme. The aim of the Italian (lead) partner, was to implement a validation tool for companies to use in the selection of new personnel.

The ‘Bus Transfer’ project

The Bus Transfer project was funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme and brought together partners from Italy (lead partner), Belgium and Portugal. The aim of the project was to build up a model of validation of non formal and informal competences for young people leaving secondary school. The model developed was based on a framework of competences and led to the award of a certificate of competences.

In Italy, the aim of the project was to implement the tool for companies to use in their selection of new personnel. In this way, the tool was intended to facilitate, especially for young people, the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences as a way to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the Labour Market.

The target group for the project is young people (aged up to 25) and the qualification gained on successful completion of the project is the equivalent to a secondary education qualification (medium-level skills). Project participants undergo a validation process as part of their career orientation and development, or for progression within the organisation. Furthermore participants become more aware of their knowledge, skills and competences.

As a result of the validation process participants are able to begin a new career in a new position or sector. Furthermore they develop new skills such as increased confidence.

Participants are offered one-to-one or group support from a mentor or peer support throughout the validation process. The assessment in the validation process is carried out by a specialist assessor and the methods used include oral assessment, for example a debate, interview or presentation, an observation of the individual at work and simulation, where the individual is placed in a situation similar to a real life scenario.

To ensure quality of the process, the process managers are given training, there is periodic self-assessment and also external observers check the validation procedure. In addition, an external evaluation has been carried out.

In the last twelve months the project has seen over 300 participants.

Further information can be found at: www.progettobustransfer.org
2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

The non profit, private social and voluntary sector represents a learning environment that is an ideal field of application for validation procedures. Like in the private sector, in this sector there are widespread micro-initiatives, which are not easy to verify and compare because they are not linked to a common national framework.

In addition to the experiences already mentioned in the previous Inventory report for Italy (National Civil Service by Decree n. 72/2002 and Agesci Scout Association by Memorandum of Understanding with Universities of 25 November 1999), we can mention an interesting experience carried out by a Leonardo da Vinci Project entitled “CIVIL SERVICE APPRENTICESHIP - Non-formal learning within voluntary and/or substituting civil service: development of a prototype to promote employability and integration into the labour market.” The project goal was to valorise and recognise the non-formal and informal learning acquired by young people through European experiences of voluntary civil service, in order to increase their employability and support their integration into the labour market. With this aim, the initiative has foreseen the implementation of an inventory of best practices in the field, a map of competences that can be acquired through voluntary and/or substituting civil service, a prototype of a learning pathway, a system for monitoring and assessment of non-formally and informally acquired skills12.

Another example of a project relating to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the third sector is the SKILLS project, described in the box below.

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<th>SKILLS project</th>
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<td>The SKILLS project aims to develop a validation system of non formal and informal learning for people working within the cooperative sector. People working in co-operatives tend not to have a detailed understanding of social enterprises or specific skills in accounting, administration and law. The SKILLS project proposes a model of intervention to respond to their training needs and to validate their non formal and informal learning. The system provides a model for the validation of the existing skills gained in a non formal and informal learning manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SKILLS project tests, reviews and improves the system of validation. The cooperative managers, members and employees, the unemployed and university students were actively involved in the development of the validation process by testing the different versions of the system. The results so far include the development of a methodology for validating existing non-formal and informal learning within the cooperative culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5 Costs to organisations

There is no official information about the costs of validation procedures. However some information is available for example in relation to the aforementioned Libretto Formativo. In tests, it has been found that 8 - 12 hours of staff time are required to complete the competence analysis of an individual, excluding the eventual assessment sessions and the formal certification (see the process described in 5.1). Form this data it can be estimated that the validation procedure will cost EUR 500/1000 of staff costs per individual.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

There is no national data on how individuals are engaged in the validation practices. The final reports of some of the different initiatives give some useful information. For instance the Libretto Formativo inter-regional testing final report states that individuals are not usually aware of the opportunities offered by the validation of non formal and informal

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12 Further information can be found on the project website: www.info-civilservice.net
learning. However if they go through the process in order to solve an occupational or recognition problem, they show interest and satisfaction in the programme.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

The awareness of validation programmes is low, thus within every validation experience, the counselling/guidance phase of the process has been particularly careful and strategic. Best practices show that the more the individual is motivated and actively cooperating, the more likely the results will be useful for him/her.

For instance the Libretto Formativo Service process, as it is outlined in the guidelines, is based on the whole of steps 1 and 2 (of a total of four steps) devoted to the guidance and individual motivation support. This four-step process is described in the diagram below.

3.3 Costs to individuals

There are no validation programmes in Italy in which a direct cost for the individual (fee charge) is envisaged.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Several co-financed innovative projects in recent years addressed the issue of validation for specific target groups. For example:

- Impact, Integration Fund Community Action 2007, Euroqualità Torino. The project was aimed at validation of the experiences and competences of immigrants. Further information can be found on the project website: http://www.euroqualita.it/sviluppo.html

- Talenti di cura (Care Talents), Leonardo Programme, Consorzio Anziani e Non Solo società cooperative. This project focuses on the recognition and validation of non
formal and informal learning of caregivers. Further information can be found on the project website: http://www.caretalents.it/homepage

- Maieuta, Leonardo Programme, UPTER UNIEDA. This project aims to promote validation practices for beneficiaries aged over 40 in order to facilitate access to training and lifelong learning opportunities. Further information can be found on the project website: http://www.progettomaieuta.it/en.com

- Investing in People, Equal Project, Province of Macerata. This project, which was identified in the previous European Inventory update for Italy, worked on a model of validation for the over 40s and disabled employees. It is described in more detail in the box below.

**Investing in People**

The 'Investing in People' project was funded by the EU’s EQUAL programme. It was established in response to a problem of unemployment in the Italian province of Macerata, as a result of the restructuring of private companies, particularly in the shoemaking industry.

The main aim of the project was to pilot and transfer the Dutch model of validation (Erkenning Verwoven Competenties, EVC) in companies and organisations in Macerata. The project plan was to use the workplace as a 'laboratory' where workers could highlight and validate the competences they had acquired through informal and non-formal learning.

The main activity of the project was to try out the EVC methodology in the project’s three partner companies. Beneficiaries were chosen within each company from the specific target groups (workers over 45, or disabled) and underwent the three initial stages of the validation procedure: assessment, portfolio completion and drafting of a Personal Development Plan (PDP). Following this, the beneficiaries were given tailor-made training, based on the PDP and finally, their competences were validated by the company.

The project results have been so positive that it has led to developments both at local and at regional level:

- A few months after its conclusion (June 2008) the Province promoted and signed an agreement (October 2008) with 14 local actors (social partners, companies, universities, the third sector) to sustain the start-up of the local system of validation on the basis of the VPL model. Thereby, a technical-scientific committee was set up in December 2008 which is tasked with moving on in the different directions of system development (validation procedure, professional standards, etc.), paying attention to the aspects of sustainability.

- At the same time the Marche Region decided to transfer the procedure at regional level

In 2009:

- the provincial Committee worked on the simplification of the Portfolio, which has been sent to the Region with a covering note, on the recognition of procedures and criteria in use in the provincial Job Centres to recognise learning (qualifications) gained outside the VET system;

- the Region designed a work plan to extend the validation model to the regional territory with support of Formez (a training, research and assistance centre of the Italian Government, which provides support for the modernisation of the public administration);

In 2010:

- In the province a project is currently being concluded to define professional profiles in companies of strategic sectors of the territory on the basis of the validation procedure;

- The Province of Macerata is taking forward its actions to the regional plans.

More information can be found about this project on the website: [http://web.equalmacerata.it/index.aspx?area=menu&id=0](http://web.equalmacerata.it/index.aspx?area=menu&id=0)
3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is no reliable data available to evaluate the benefits or results of the practices mentioned in this report. However, it is possible to suggest that individuals might benefit in the following ways from the validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- Shortened learning pathways to achieving/completing formal certificates;
- Greater opportunities for the recognition and certification of experience;
- Economic benefits in the form of increased wages;
- Increased motivation / self-esteem / confidence;
- Opportunities for individualised training / career planning;
- Increased transferability of competences;
- A better understanding of one’s strengths and weaknesses, to inform career development;
- A means of better presenting oneself to employers.

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

The validation processes available are carried out in different contexts. Thus there is no national quality assurance framework. However the quality principles set out by the Commission through the Common Principles document of 2004 are well known and used. In addition, the approval of the European Recommendation for the introduction of EQARF (European Framework of Reference for Quality Assurance in VET) and the institution (2006), made by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in agreement with the Ministry of Education, University and Research, of a National EQARF Reference Point has already produced positive outcomes on the legislative process in the country. In particular, the draft Regulations for the new system of technical and vocational education, approved by the Council of Ministers on February 4, 2010, promote the establishment of a system of “indicators for the assessment and self-evaluation of technical and vocational schools... also with reference to the European framework for quality assurance in education and training systems”. This will create a system of indicators for technical and vocational education that will also serve as a reference for external assessment activities and to standardise the self-evaluation procedures.

As for regional vocational training, concern for the quality of a very diverse and changing VET offer, lead to the introduction of a policy of accreditation of training centres since the national regulatory framework established by Decree 166/2001. This was an important innovation, though difficulties and limitations were found in the way the regions implemented it. In order to answer to the Decree’s provisions, many training centres began to give some kind of quality assurance through individual certification; in 2006 about 60% of Italian training centres had, in fact, some form of quality certification, mainly ISO 9000. And, in this context, many pilot initiatives were taken, by adopting a number of tools and methods, such as self-assessment, peer review for training centres, objective assessment of learning outcomes, system of indicators to assess the quality of local training supply (regional systems), impact-assessment of training activities on employment (placement surveys).

However, no proper and specific quality procedures were applied to the practices gathered and observed and there is no evaluation framework for the validation practices mentioned above.
5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used
In spite of the amount of different validation practices, there is a substantial and widespread agreement on the procedures and methodologies to be used in order to validate non formal and informal learning, in Italy. This model comes from the most significant practice of validation envisaged at national, regional and project level. It is planned in three sequential steps:

1. Analysis of the experience and competences of the individual, the collection and organisation of information about the knowledge and skills acquired in a non-formal or informal manner.

2. Evidence collection and assessment. This step aims at collecting evidence in a systematic way and to ensure the possession of specific competences. It includes: the drawing up of a dossier of all the evidence available (certifications, self-declarations, documented information about training, work or other experiences) and a test of specific skills where evidence has not been sufficiently provided.

3. Certification/recognition, this stage awards qualifications where appropriate. This step is usually managed by a Commission in which all the education and training institutions involved are represented. After the evaluation of the dossier, the Commission formulates the decision in order to recognise the ‘credit’.

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used
In Italy, self-assessment and evidence collection methods are preferred instead of external testing and assessment methods. However, sometimes these processes may suffer from a lack of validity and reliability, due to the lack of external objective assessment. Throughout the expert and practitioners community there is a debate around the use of external objective assessment methods and tools within the validation process. The most common trend is to apply these methods in specific circumstances because it may overload the process it is difficult for the individual and more expensive for the system.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners
Validation practitioners are often education/training or vocational guidance professionals who are used to managing competence curricula and training programmes and are also skilled in delivering services to individuals. Within the testing phase of Libretto Formativo del Cittadino (held in 13 Regions and involving 250 practitioners) it was discovered that the vocational training operators working in training courses were on average very well equipped and skilled in order to carry out a successful process of learning and competence analysis and validation.

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners
Both within the Regional experiences and the Libretto Formativo testing phase there was training for the validation operators that consisted of 2-5 days intensive classroom training and further e-learning and distance supervision and tutorship.

The training was mostly on the validation framework, the correct use of the procedure and tools and some practical examples. All the operators involved were already education/training or vocational guidance professionals skilled in dealing with individual lifelong learning or guidance services.
6.3 Qualifications requirements

There are no standard qualifications for validation related jobs. Usually the practitioners are trainers, tutors, training programme designers or coordinators, vocational guidance and counselling professionals. They are often graduates in education, psychological or pedagogical University degrees.
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**Stakeholders contacted:**

Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

ISFOL

Lifelong Learning Programme - Leonardo da Vinci Sectoral Programme Agency

Emilia Romagna region

Universities: Roma Tre, Milano Cattolica, Univerisity of Ferrara, University Agency Cimea

Social Partners: CGIL (General Confederation of Italian Workers).

Investing in People Equal Project, Province of Macerata

Impact Integration Fund Community Action 2007, Euroqualità Torino

Talenti di cura (Care Talents), Leonardo da Vinci Programme Consorzio Anziani e Non Solo società cooperativa

Maieuta Leonardo da Vinci Programme, UPTER UNIEDA