European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Thematic Report – Validation for Specific Target Groups

By Claire Duchemin and Jo Hawley

A project of the European Commission, DG Education and Culture in co-operation with The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop).

Project management by GHK Consulting (Manuel Souto Otero and Jo Hawley).
1 INTRODUCTION

This thematic report forms part of the 2010 update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (the European Inventory). The updated European Inventory is made up of the following outputs, which together form a ‘snapshot’ of the state of play in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning (validation) in Europe:

- Country updates covering 32 European countries1;
- 10 case studies providing examples of validation ‘in practice’;
- Four thematic reports (of which this report is one);
- A catalogue of validation projects; and
- A final synthesis report identifying overall findings from the project.

The thematic reports are intended to provide more detail in relation to a number of subjects of central interest to policy makers and practitioners. Using the 2010 country updates and case studies, as well as the results of an online survey carried out between April and September 2010 and other literature relating to the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning, these reports aim to identify and analyse key issues and trends, as well as examples of good practice and lessons learned in relation to a specific aspect of validation. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation (in particular, practitioners), who will find the reports have an eminently practical focus.

The focus of this thematic report is on validation for specific target groups. Validation can be used as a tool to empower a range of target groups and bring both social and economic benefits. The 2010 Inventory country updates have identified a wide range of validation projects and initiatives aimed at specific target groups, including young people, older workers, the low skilled, the unemployed and migrants, among others. This thematic report identifies examples of practice from across Europe, as well as lessons learned in relation to working with specific target groups.

The thematic report is structured according to the following headings:

- Rationale for targeting validation towards specific groups,
- Common target groups,
- Success Factors and Lessons Learned,
- Conclusions.

2 RATIONALE FOR TARGETING VALIDATION TOWARDS SPECIFIC GROUPS

Across Europe, a small number of countries (e.g. France and Norway) have made validation of non-formal and informal learning a universal right, or explicitly aim at making it available for all individuals (e.g. Luxembourg).

However, for the majority of countries, evidence collected for the 2010 European Inventory country updates seems to show that in practice, there is a tendency to target initiatives or resources for validation of non-formal and informal learning towards population groups facing a disadvantaged situation on the labour market, or other specific disadvantages or

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1 There are 34 country updates in total, as two reports have been prepared for Belgium and the UK, in order to take account of the devolved responsibility for education and training policy in these countries.
difficulties. In many countries, validation of non-formal and informal learning is used to enhance the educational and professional opportunities of specific groups and is an integral part of broader strategies to improve social cohesion, including through the promotion of employment and equal opportunities.

Examples identified in the country updates show that validation is a powerful tool to facilitate access to qualifications for those ‘most in need’, for example because they have low or no qualifications and/or face barriers to accessing conventional formal education. Validation of non-formal and informal learning represents a useful alternative or supplement for various targets groups of gaining new opportunities (a ‘second chance’) to (re) enter the labour market or engage in further education and training. This is backed up by the findings from other international studies\(^2\). The OECD for instance notes that “recognition provides a way to improve equity and strengthen access to further education and to the labour market for disadvantaged minority groups, disaffected youth and older workers who did not have many opportunities for formal learning when they were younger”\(^3\).

Validation practices in use across Europe are diverse in order to meet the needs of different groups of learners, and the outcomes may not always consist of a formal certificate of competences. Depending on the target group, the process of identifying and recognising knowledge, skills and competences, can serve different purposes, both economic and social. Again the OECD found that “if carried out effectively, recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes becomes a real mechanism for social and professional integration, especially if the recognition procedure can be completed in a relatively short space of time”.

Validation can be a decisive step to help certain groups to (re)enter the labour market, find a new job, progress in their career, etc., especially when it leads to the acquisition of a recognised qualification. Indeed, validation beneficiaries may find it easier to apply for a job as they gain in professional credibility, know better how to present themselves to employers, adopt more creative approaches to problems using more actively their knowledge and competences. It can also help the individual to make decisions about his/her future career. For example, an evaluation of a validation tool piloted in Scotland\(^4\) found that RPL can be useful in a careers guidance process for a wide range of target groups, in order to support the learner to identify his/her skills, to make decisions regarding career choices, to identify possible progression routes and to build self-confidence/raise aspirations.

Validation can also be used as a tool to facilitate a return to formal education especially for harder-to-reach groups, who need to acquire a ‘taste for learning’ and build up the self-confidence to undertake further learning. Validation can increase the self-esteem and motivation of specific vulnerable groups and opens up opportunities for individualised training plans. In this case, validation is not seen as an end in itself, but more as a starting point towards the completion of an educational pathway.

In addition to initiatives targeting specific groups, some of the ‘generic’ tools for validation have been designed to be flexible enough to be adapted for use for the benefit of specific target groups. For example, in Germany the ProfilPASS-system, which had been developed as a non-target-group specific approach (to avoid discrimination), has been tailored for use among young people\(^5\). Other countries have targeted their awareness-raising activities towards specific target groups, such as France, where VAE (validation of knowledge gained

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through experience) has been promoted among jobseekers by the public employment service (Pôle Emploi).

In certain countries, the national reports show that the focus on one or several target groups is closely linked to the national policy framework or context and priorities in the field of employment, education and training. Some examples are listed below:

- **To raise the educational attainment level of the population:** In Portugal, the system for validation of prior learning focuses on low-skilled adults, as it is one of the measures put in place to raise the low educational attainment of adults in the country, which constitutes one of the main obstacles for their successful integration on the labour market. Similarly in Iceland, concerns about the high shares of low-qualified workers have prompted the development of a validation system fitting the needs of those with little formal education (i.e. individuals who have not completed upper secondary education).

- **To create opportunities for those excluded from the labour market:** In Bulgaria, the validation system aims to allow more people to participate in the labour market by obtaining the necessary qualifications and is considered a particularly relevant option for disadvantaged groups. In Flanders, the development of the certificate of vocational experience is seen as a way to open up the labour market to groups further away from the labour market including the low-skilled, older workers, people with disabilities and immigrants. In 2009, almost 95% of the people who applied for a certificate in Flanders belonged to a disadvantaged group (including for example people over 50 years of age, people with disabilities, immigrants, or the low-skilled). In Wallonia, job seekers represented 74.9% of the applicants to the validation of professional competences initiative between 2005 and 2008.

- **To anticipate / mitigate the negative effects of the present economic downturn:** In the Netherlands, a preventive approach has been used in the context of the economic crisis to target efforts both towards those at risk of losing their jobs and the unemployed - especially the young unemployed without a qualification of value on the labour market - to avoid long-term exclusion from employment. The use of validation for workers was strengthened through so-called mobility centres, where local authorities, social partners, job agencies and relevant education institutions all work together to prevent unemployment. In Croatia, one of the specific aims of the national qualifications framework (CROQF) is to set up a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning, justified primarily by new demands and the volatility of the labour market.

As well as the very clear rationale for validation for certain groups in given national contexts, which has prompted the development of specific projects, it is also important to recognise that validation of non-formal and informal learning is still a relatively new concept in certain countries. At this stage, pilot initiatives which typically are limited in resources also tend to prioritise specific target groups.

Furthermore, in some cases, the focus of validation on specific target groups is also linked to the availability of funding, as it might be ‘tied’ to certain target groups (for example, ESF and the former EQUAL programme are linked to supporting access to employment for all age groups, while the Grundtvig programme supports projects in the field of adult learning and the Youth in Action programme focuses on young people).

3 **COMMON TARGET GROUPS**

Within this section, some examples from the 2010 Inventory country updates have been used to illustrate the types of initiatives in place for different target groups. Where available, evidence on the benefits for participants is highlighted. In the main, the benefits of
validation for specific groups do not significantly differ from the benefits associated with validation of non-formal and informal learning in general but for some individuals, validation has special relevance because it can facilitate their access to a qualification (including by shortening their learning pathways to achieving formal certificates) or encourage them to engage in a learning or career development pathway.

Within specific validation initiatives, most of the participants are selected depending on their level of qualifications, employment status, age, citizenship etc. or because they come from specific sectors or vulnerable groups. In practice, these different target groups can overlap (e.g. the unemployed and low skilled, older unemployed workers etc).

Across the EU, common target groups for validation include for instance:

- Young people, including those leaving the educational system without a formal qualification;
- Workers with experience but no associated formal qualifications (often in specific sectors where formal qualifications are required according to legislation);
- Experienced and older workers;
- The unemployed and those at risk of losing their jobs (for which the acquisition of a qualification can reduce the time taken to make a job-to-job transition);
- Migrants whose skills are not always fully recognised, regardless of the way they were acquired.

Other initiatives identified relate to the validation of competences acquired through voluntary work (a topic covered in detail by the third sector compendium prepared for the 2007 update to the European Inventory), as well as initiatives focusing on specific vulnerable groups, such as Roma and the disabled.

As part of the 2010 European Inventory update, GHK carried out an online survey between April and September 2010. This survey was sent to over 200 stakeholders – mainly practitioners and project managers – identified at national and European level. A total of 60 responses were received. Although the responses cannot be considered as a representative sample of validation practitioners, the results of the survey do provide some interesting information on the kinds of validation initiatives which are currently being or have recently been run across Europe, and their target groups.

Table 1 below shows the target groups of the 60 validation initiatives identified through the survey. It shows that overall young people were the most common target group among the projects which responded to the survey, followed by the low-qualified and the unemployed.

**Table 1: Survey responses to question ‘Who are the target groups of your project / practice?’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people (aged up to 25)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The low-qualified</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unemployed</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older workers (aged over 50)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please describe)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following sections describe how validation is being used to support a number of key target groups across Europe. These are: young people, the low-qualified; job-seekers; experienced and older workers; workers in specific professions and sectors; volunteers; migrants and refugees; and other specific vulnerable groups.

For each group, the validation methods most commonly employed, as well as identified benefits for target groups and quantitative information available regarding the outputs, outcomes and impacts of validation practices are presented.

### 3.1 Young people

Young people who are still engaged in education and training can be a target for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, as they pick up skills in a wide variety of activities that take place outside the classroom (e.g. voluntary activities or summer jobs). A better recognition of their skills can also help them to access employment/ further education opportunities, as they lack professional experience or other credentials. The portfolio method is commonly used for young people. This method involves using a mix of methods and instruments in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways – it is therefore a method used primarily to document evidence.

Some examples of projects targeting young people are identified below:

In Germany, the aforementioned ProfilPASS for young people helps users to increase their awareness of their own abilities and competences, and therefore to develop a growing motivation for further learning activities and the chance to respond better to vocational challenges. The ProfilPASS is based on user self-assessment supported by professional guidance. The assumption is that many individuals can only be guided towards knowledge of their competences and the value of them through critical reflection on their own lives. The guidance provided to ProfilPaSS users is thus seen as an important part of the ProfilPASS system – without support from experts it can be very difficult for individuals to accurately identify their competences and abilities. Experts can help individuals to distinguish skills, which they might not otherwise have noticed. Guidance is therefore provided either on a one-to-one basis, or in groups, to enable users to complete the steps required to prepare their ProfilPASS folder.

- In France, in 2009 the pilot project on the competences portfolio (*Livret de compétences*) was launched following the adoption of a law on lifelong learning and guidance. The project has been trialled in 2010 in a limited number of schools at primary and secondary level and will now be implemented in the rest of the education sector. The competences portfolio is completed by the young person to highlight the competences he/she has acquired outside of school, such as through voluntary

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activities. The purpose of this new tool is to encourage independence in young people, to help them find a career direction and to develop a spirit of self-assessment.

- In Bulgaria, the 2008 ARWEN project (co-financed by EU funds) developed instruments for the recognition of young people’s competences acquired in the course of their work experience (e.g. short-term contracts, summer internships/apprenticeships etc.). A methodological and operational guide for applying the instrument was also developed as part of the project.

- The Youthpass tool, which is the subject of one of the 2010 Inventory case studies, offers young people who take part in Youth in Action projects a chance to ‘visualise and validate’ the learning outcomes they have gained.

- Another example of a long-standing project to support young people is the Nefiks personal portfolio, which is available to young people in Slovenia. It is described in more detail in the box below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nefiks personal portfolio, Slovenia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The original aim of Nefiks was to establish recognition of non-formal education in Slovenia, which will contribute to the further appreciation of non-formal education and increase the employability of young people. The main tool is a book in which users describe how they have acquired knowledge, experiences and skills though work (summer and student jobs for at least 60 days), active citizenship and responsible work, organised forms of education, camps and voluntary work, experience abroad and other experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news/news1015_en.htm">web portal</a> hosts the electronic version of the portfolio. The aim of this web portal is to become a meeting point for young people and all stakeholders including employers, policy makers and experts who can help to raise the employment chances of young people. It helps young people to create their own Europass CV and helps them to self-assess their competences through the system of the eight key competences. Portal users are also informed about non-formal education possibilities which are in the range of their interest. The portal is promoted among employers (in profit and non profit sectors) and NGOs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-up has been considerable and to date, more than 3,000 young people have used the booklet version and 5,000 have signed up for the electronic version of the personal portfolio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The benefits of Nefiks are identified as follows:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Young people can collect all their non-formal learning systematically, in one portfolio, which forms a strong motivation for further learning and boosts their self-esteem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- It helps young people to create a Europass CV and to assess themselves through eight key competences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It helps young people applying for a job as it adds value to the curriculum vitae, and is considered a useful tool by most employers as a good supplement to official certificates.</td>
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When validation initiatives target young people, specific guidance may be required. For example, in Scotland, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership have developed tools for guidance practitioners in schools (careers advisers), so they can support young people in their reflective process, to identify the level to which their skills relate and next steps.

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Other validation initiatives identified in the 2010 Inventory country updates target young people at risk of leaving school without any type of qualification. For example, in Estonia, ESF-funded initiatives support young people who have dropped out of higher education (TURE) or vocational education (KUTSE) without achieving a qualification but who have achieved at least 50% of the programme. In total 800 and 400 students respectively are expected to return to education through these initiatives.

3.2 The low-qualified

Across the EU, the low-qualified are clearly the main target group of validation projects: validation is seen as an alternative method of gaining access to a formal qualification, even for those with very low educational attainment levels who may not, for various reasons, wish to engage in education and training in formal settings. For the low-qualified, the benefits of validation emerge both from its summative approach (aiming at the formal certification of learning outcomes of participants via a qualification), and also from its formative process which helps participants to gain confidence and orientate their future educational and professional choices.

Across countries, the low-qualified, or early school leavers, are generally defined as those who have achieved at most lower secondary level education, which encompasses in practice many sub groups:

- **Adults with a low level of qualification** are the main target of the national validation system (RVCC) in Portugal. In Denmark, validation bodies such as Adult and Continuing Training Centres focus on the low qualified. In Slovakia, the introduction of recognition of non-formal and informal learning aims to support adult learners to achieve additional qualifications.

- **The low qualified unemployed** are also a key target group for validation initiatives. In Norway for example, validation projects aim in particular at job-seekers who have not achieved an upper secondary level qualification (see also section 3.3).

- **Low-qualified workers** can benefit from validation as they might have accumulated skills in non-formal and informal contexts even if they have not achieved any formal qualification. In the Netherlands, the Vocational Qualification Programme developed at Philips Electronics (which is the subject of one of the 2010 Inventory case studies) focused on workers without a basic qualification (who made up 90.7% of the participants in the programme).

- **Young people who have dropped out of higher/vocational education** before completing their course are supported to apply to validation in Estonia (see also section 3.1).

- **People with learning disabilities or from sectors of society where educational achievement is low** are for example the target group of the Leonardo da Vinci-funded project ‘NOF Inclusive’, which aims to develop a model for accreditation and certification of basic vocational training courses undertaken in Austria, Belgium, Malta, Sweden and Slovenia.

The focus on the low-qualified is often combined with a focus on vocational qualifications, allowing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning acquired through professional experience.

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10 Within this report, the term low-qualified is used instead of low-skilled, as skills are a necessary prerequisite for validation (including forms of validation that do not lead to a formal certificate).

11 For a definition of the formative and summative roles of validation, see the European Guidelines on Validation: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4054_en.pdf

Regarding validation methodologies, the portfolio method again appears to be more commonly used. However, it is suggested that it might be quite difficult, especially in written form, for people with learning difficulties due to the high requirement for the user to have the necessary abilities to analyse and reflect.

The benefits for the low-qualified of participating in validation include both the opportunity to increase their level of educational attainment, and also to increase self-esteem and self-motivation. In Iceland, evidence has been identified to back this up. In “To take the step – back to school after validation” (2010) Auður Sigurðardóttir describes the findings of qualitative research into validation in Iceland. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with participants in the process where it became evident that having their competencies validated towards a shortening of a study path, receiving intensive career guidance through the process, and being able to study with other adults, were factors that motivated them to complete their studies. Some quotes from the thesis are provided below:

"The decision to drop-out of studies was difficult for my interviewees and the thought to finish their studies has never left their minds".

"She (the career counsellor) was wonderful … very special …she motivated with pep-talk and had very good influence… we were led through this"

### 3.3 Jobseekers

With a dramatic rise in unemployment across Europe since the second half of 2008, helping jobseekers to re-enter the labour market - including through qualification and training initiatives - has become a priority in many countries. For example, in Scotland, workers affected by redundancies are one of the potential target groups for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and in the Netherlands a preventive approach has also been used in the context of the crisis with a strengthened use of validation (EVC) for workers in danger of losing their job.

For jobseekers, validation of non-formal and informal learning can offer a basis to make future educational/professional choices and to undertake personal development, by providing to each jobseeker a clearer picture of their strengths and weaknesses.

For example, in Austria two projects have been introduced to help women to access the labour market using validation as a tool. The first project, entitled ‘Knowing what I am capable of’, which targets unemployed women, was developed at the Adult Education Centre Burgenland13. The project offered workshops to enable the participants to identify their competences based on the Swiss Qualifications Handbook CH-Q System of Managing Competencies14 model. The second initiative - ‘Family Competences – the key to more success on the job’ (‘Familienkompetenzen - Schlüssel für mehr Erfolg im Beruf’) has been taken to support those returning to the labour market (mainly women) after a career break, through the delivery of a certificate recognising the key competences they have gained through their family responsibilities15.

In addition to the formative role of validation projects supporting jobseekers, summative approaches (aiming at formal certification of learning outcomes via a qualification) are also successfully applied in several countries. For example, in Norway, validation is one of the

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13 Wissen, was ich kann’, Volkshochschule Burgenland http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/ind_kompetenz.html
14 The CH-Q was presented in 2001 in Switzerland with the aim of making it possible for young people and adults to record and document formal, informal and previously acquired skills in a process oriented way and to apply for the validation of these skills. It is conceived as a portfolio and contains comprehensive instructions on how to use the instrument, a folder with a wide variety of forms, enabling a clear, systematic and chronological sorting and filing of evidence, references and individual remarks and notes. It contains comprehensive instructions, intended to encourage and support the process of self-reflection.
15 ‘Family Competences – the key to more success on the job’ (‘Familienkompetenzen - Schlüssel für mehr Erfolg im Beruf’) - www.familie-und-beruf.at/Familienkompetenzen/Familienkompetenzen.htm
tools available for the low qualified unemployed to gain a qualification at upper secondary level and ultimately enhance their chances to find a job.\textsuperscript{16}

Public Employment Services can play an important role as an intermediary for jobseekers to access validation and provide the necessary guidance and support. For example, in France, as mentioned above, the public employment service Pôle Emploi encourages the take-up of the VAE by the unemployed by covering costs associated with the preparation of a portfolio/dossier, travel and subsistence expenses, etc (up to EUR 640). It also provides guidance to individuals wishing to take up VAE. The Croatian Employment Service, in its activities to profile the unemployed, has moved from registering only formal qualifications and now registers other relevant skills (such as IT skills and language skills) as well as any prior work experience that lasted for longer than six months. This type of activity represents a type of portfolio method through which the individual is encouraged to create a record of all previous work experience for the purposes of new employment. In Sweden too, the Public Employment Service has, during 2009 and 2010, undertaken initiatives to increase the use of validation as a tool to enhance individuals’ employability.

Initiatives targeting migrant jobseekers are also described in section 3.7.

### 3.4 Experienced and older workers

Experienced workers and older people are particularly suited to the validation of non-formal and informal learning as they have often acquired experience and skills throughout their careers and other activities in a non-formal or informal manner. A number of initiatives have been identified in the Inventory country updates which focus on this target group.

- For example, in Iceland, a pilot within the ‘Value of Work’ pan-European project focused on validating the competences acquired by experienced female workers in the banking sector throughout their careers. Participants received a competence portfolio recognised by their employer, the trade union, the Lifelong Learning Centre (Mímir) and the Educational and Training Service Centre to support their future competence development.

- In France, the Guidance and Training Passport (Passeport orientation formation) is a particularly useful tool for workers aged over 45. It documents learning outcomes acquired through formal education as well as working life-related information, which is collected through the professional assessment ‘Bilan d’étape professionnel’.

The rationale for using validation for experienced/older workers is clear. In the context of increasing economic uncertainty and gradual replacement of the concept of a ‘job for life’ by more flexible, heterogeneous careers, it is increasingly important for experienced workers to gain recognition for their skills. In the Netherlands for example, a small-scale project of validation (EVC) for older workers was developed in the Dutch Fire Department to help departing employees to make the transition to a different job (as by law fire-fighters have to leave the fire service after 20 years of work). The project, which is described in the below, includes a strong guidance component to support individuals to undertake a national vocational qualification.

Another project in the Netherlands (already mentioned above) which aims at increasing experienced employees’ deployability and overall opportunities on the labour market is the Philips Electronics Nederland Vocational Qualifications Programme (covered in more detail in the 2010 Inventory case study on this project), which was introduced at the time when the company was transforming its business model in the country from mass manufacturing to smaller competency centres and moving much of its manufacturing work to lower-wage countries. Through the project, nationally recognised certificates were awarded to experienced employees who were skilled in their trade but had never followed or completed any diploma.

Other initiatives have aimed to encourage experienced workers back into learning through validation. For example, in Italy, the Leonardo–funded Maieuta project[^17] aims to promote validation practices for individuals aged over 40 in order to facilitate access to training and lifelong learning opportunities. The Investing in People project, also developed in Italy, worked on a model of validation for older and disabled employees, based on the Dutch system of Erkenning Verwoven Competenties (EVC). 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. After the project was concluded in the three partner companies, it led to an agreement among 14 regional stakeholders to maintain a local system of validation on the basis of the model developed.

There is little formal evidence (i.e. resulting from evaluations and research) cited in the country updates regarding the impact of initiatives targeting adult workers. Some studies are cited in the country update for Austria regarding the activities of Volkshochschule (Adult education centres), which give an idea of the kinds of impact these projects can have.

For example, in the province of Burgenland, the evaluation of a Volkshochschule programme to develop personal portfolios for women who want to return to the labour market showed that participants had learned to recognise and describe their competences acquired non-formally or informally and that this had been of great help when applying for a job. Two thirds of the 116 participants had been able to find a job after participating in the programme.

An evaluation of the competence profile KOMPAZ, which is delivered by the centre for the recognition of competences at the Volkshochschule of Linz showed that 63% of people who were unemployed before participating in the measure were successful in finding a job after completion. They were more self-confident, developed their learning strategies and could also actively use their informally acquired knowledge and competences for improved profiling within the working context.

3.5 Workers in specific professions and sectors

Some projects have been identified which focus on validating the skills of workers in a given profession/sector, or on recognising certain types of skills specific to a target group. These often emerge in response to legislation setting out a requirement for individuals to have a qualification before they can take up work in the sector in question. Common sectors include health and social care, education and training, and the construction sector.

- Projects relating to social services and care work can recognise care in both its paid and unpaid forms.

For example, in Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council ran a pilot project focusing on workers in the social services sector, as part of the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. A validation procedure was designed to support these workers (especially those lacking in confidence as learners and/or those who are reluctant to undertake formal learning) to gain credits towards a recognised qualification. Mentors provide support and guidance to the participants. The evaluation of the project found that the learners involved had increased their confidence and motivation. This can help to reduce any negative perceptions of participating in formal education and training opportunities as well as giving the participants greater confidence in the workplace (see the 2010 Inventory case study on this project for further details).

In Italy the project ‘Talenti di cura - CareTalents’18 (funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme) focuses on the recognition and validation of non formal and informal learning of caregivers.

In the UK, an APEL qualification has been developed for workers in the childcare sector, in response to the new Day Care standards in the UK, which meant that people working with children increasingly require a qualification in order to meet the requirements set out in the standards. The APEL qualification is intended to recognise the working practice and experience of early years and play workers who have already been working in the sector but do not have current formal qualifications.

- Adult education: In Austria, the certification process developed by the Academy of Continuing Education (WBA) enables adult educators with professional experience to receive European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits for competences acquired through working in the field as well as for other forms of prior learning. One of the objectives is to create pathways to tertiary education for participants. Motivations of participants to date relate to the acquisition of a certificate or diploma awarded by a relevant authority, further development of qualifications and gaining advantages when applying for a job. See the Inventory 2010 case study on this project for further information.

- A pan-European project aiming to create a validation tool to certify adult educator competence has also been implemented by seven partner organisations from across Europe (Germany, Estonia, Spain, Italy, Romania, UK and Switzerland). The project, entitled ‘Flexi-Path’ is funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The aim is to facilitate the transparency and recognition of adult educator qualifications across

18 http://www.caretalents.it/homepage
Europe, making them comparable by having a common reference (the EQF) and a common adult educator profile which promotes the idea of mobility through standardised educational programmes and qualification levels. More information can be found on the project website 19.

- **Construction**: In Poland, two projects targeting workers in the construction sector have been identified. The first, ‘APL-Bud’ is described in more detail in the Inventory 2010 case study on this project. It focused on construction workers working in Poland, as well as Polish construction workers working abroad. The second, ‘Let’s build it together’ 20, is described in detail in the Poland country update and is summarised in the box below. It was developed for local workers in the construction sector (as well as jobseekers with an experience in this sector).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Let’s Build it Together” Project (2006-2008), Poland21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Let’s Build it Together” was established within the framework of the EQUAL Community Initiative. The target group of the project was mainly people engaged in the building sector, often from rural areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The general aim of the partnership was to increase the competitiveness of the building sector companies in Warmia and Mazury region by implementing innovations. Accordingly, one of the sub-objectives of the project was to: 1) design a methodology; 2) test a professional qualifications validation model (based on a French example); and 3) adapt and implement new methods of vocational training for workers in the construction sector. The purpose of the validation of informal competences was to improve the skills of construction personnel in the region, to increase the role of economic self-government, to facilitate access to the labour market, the dissemination of new technologies, and to increase the quality of service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main result of the project was a set of tools for assessing the competences of unemployed people and workers (gained also through informal learning) within a single construction specialisation and then testing these tools in practice. The validation system allowed the unemployed people and workers to obtain a certificate confirming their skills, without a need to participate in a full training cycle, which in turn increased their chances for keeping, changing or obtaining employment. There were 283 candidates of different ages and with different levels of education who expressed their interest in taking part in the project, which exceeded the organisers’ expectations. Ultimately, 186 people received a formal confirmation of their qualifications as installation and sanitation fitters and 87 people as gas installation fitters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6 Volunteers

Another group that is also suited to validation practices is volunteers, as it is commonly agreed that skills and competences acquired through volunteering are valuable and deserve recognition 22. The validation of skills obtained in this way can lead to volunteers to acquire qualifications and improve their social situation or to access formal employment. It can also be of benefit to voluntary organisations, by helping them to evidence the outcomes of their work.

For example, in Austria, the platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations has developed a competence portfolio for volunteers 23, supported from ESF funding and by the Leonardo and Grundtvig programmes. The competence portfolio aims to systematically document skills and competences acquired by volunteers, and volunteers can also prepare with the portfolio facilitator a competence certificate for job applications.

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22 See also the ‘Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning in the Third Sector- A compendium), ECOTEC, 2007, which includes more examples of validation of skills acquired by volunteers.
23 [Kompetenzportfolio für Freiwillige des Rings Österreichischer Bildungswerke - www.kompetenz-portfolio.at](http://www.kompetenz-portfolio.at)
In the UK, the **SOUL Record** is a project targeted at volunteers and others involved in the voluntary and community sector. It is described in more detail in the box below.

### Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) Record, UK

The Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) Record is used to evidence learning in the voluntary and community sector. It was initially developed in 2003 by a partnership of voluntary organisations in Norfolk, with support from the Big Lottery Fund. Voluntary Norfolk led the project and worked together with the Research Centre at City College Norwich to undertake a research project to develop a system to monitor and measure progression in ‘soft’ outcomes. The resulting tool not only supports learners but also supports third sector organisations to evidence the outcomes of their work.

The SOUL Record can be used to measure progression in soft outcomes and informal learning, such as increases in confidence, self-esteem and motivation. It is made up of sections which are relevant for adults, children and young people.

The toolkit is available online and is supported by the provision of user training and also training for trainers – all staff wanting to use the record must take an initial training course which costs around EUR 6,500.

Since its launch in 2006, over 600 users from across the UK have been trained. The toolkit can also be used for RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-accredited Learning – see the UK, England Wales and Northern Ireland country update for more details of this initiative). The toolkit has also been translated into Polish and Portuguese.

### 3.7 Migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees are a relevant target group for validation, as they may have acquired skills and competences in their home country which are not sufficiently acknowledged in the receiving country, which hampers their integration to the labour market. In addition, migrants also face difficulties to have their formal qualifications fully recognised in the host country.

A number of examples of practices identified for the 2010 European Inventory Update highlight how a validation process can be successfully applied to this target group to facilitate their access to education, employment or training at a level commensurate with their skills and/or qualifications.

The evidence available seems to suggest that many initiatives for migrants focus on the formative dimension of validation (providing guidance and personalised assessment to facilitate the transition to the labour market). In Germany for example, a competence portfolio for migrants (‘Competence panorama for migrants’) has been developed to improve their process of integration. In Austria, the EQUAL project ‘Qualification Empowers’ supported migrants through two sub-projects. First, the ‘language and qualification portfolio’ was used to collect all knowledge and competences (including the experience acquired through migration, e.g. developing skills to manage new situations) of the beneficiary. Based on the portfolio, each project beneficiary sought to define their occupational objectives and to develop a plan for entry to the labour market. Secondly the ‘Nosqua’ project focused on the recognition and qualification of skills and competences to make immigrants’ potential visible. The programme aimed to elaborate problem-solving strategies and build the participants’ capacity in everyday tasks (e.g. preparing applications).

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24 [http://soulrecord.org/home](http://soulrecord.org/home)
Some of the projects identified focused on young migrants. For example, in Austria, the initiative ‘Join in a Job’\(^{28}\) supported by EQUAL and Leonardo funding focused on 15 - 25 year-old migrants without a completed (vocational) education, or unemployed. The method combined social work (case management), career-planning advice and vocational counselling. One aim was to visualise already acquired competences using the portfolio method.

Other initiatives also aim at developing a formal recognition of the skills, knowledge and competences migrants have acquired in informal and non-formal contexts. In England for example, the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) at London Metropolitan University offers individual preparation for the Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning process as part of its services to support the integration of refugees, as described in the box below.

### Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU), London Metropolitan University\(^{29}\)

The Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU), which is part of the Department of Applied Social Sciences at London Metropolitan University, provides a number of services to support refugees with high level education or professional qualifications into employment and education. This includes specialised one-to-one guidance and support for job search, professional re-qualification and entry/re-entry into education and training.

Specialist advisers at the centre provide, among other services, support in identifying transferable skills, knowledge and experience, and understanding and preparing for the APEL (Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning) process.

Specific institutions supporting validation for migrants have been put in place in some countries, while in other countries this is under the responsibility of the Public Employment Services:

- The ‘Migrare - Centre for Migrants’ in Upper Austria, which works on behalf of the Public Employment Service of Upper Austria, offers competence profiling of migrants, using the Swiss CH-Q method\(^{30}\).

- In Sweden, the national Public Employment Service has been given a mandate by the government to make validation a central part of the initial integration activities for newly arrived immigrants (in cooperation with the national Agency for Higher Vocational Education).

- Between 2004 and 2008 the Danish government established five regional knowledge centres for the documentation and recognition of prior learning of refugees and immigrants. These centres collected and documented experiences and concrete methodologies, and developed a tool for clarification and documentation of competences which is still in use in Danish job centres.

- In Hungary, foreign language proficiency examinations have traditionally always been open for learners coming from any learning environment. This means that the applicants can acquire a certification (of the level according to the level of their actual language proficiency) without participating in any language training course (that is they can learn on their own in an informal way). These language examinations can be organised by accredited language centres and if candidates are successful, they can acquire an accredited language certificate.

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\(^{28}\) [http://join-in-a-job.eu](http://join-in-a-job.eu)
\(^{29}\) [http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/ragu-home-page.cfm](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/ragu-home-page.cfm)
3.8 Other specific vulnerable groups

Across the EU, several validation projects and initiatives have also been developed with a view to improve the prospects of various groups among the population that are identified as being at a special risk of exclusion. Most of these projects aim to expand the offer of existing validation services to disadvantaged groups (who often have a low level of access to formal education, but also to the ‘standard’ validation procedures when they exist).

Activities targeting specifically the disabled have been developed for instance in Italy, Croatia and Portugal. In Italy, the validation process developed by the Investing in People Equal Project targeted in part disabled employees (see the description in section 3.4).

In Portugal, a specific validation procedure for the disabled has been developed at the basic level (9th year of schooling) by the ‘Inclusive New Opportunities’ centres, based on a methodology adapted to the specific situation of the disabled. In Norway, it has also been noted that an adaptation of validation methodologies is necessary for disabled people with reduced verbal skills.

In Norway, another group that has been identified as a particularly relevant target group for validation is composed of prisoners with a low level of educational attainment (an important proportion of prisoners). Validation is being developed in the context of prison education (starting with a pilot project, which is the subject of one of the Inventory 2010 case studies) to equip prisoners with a (vocational) qualification through the recognition of their professional experience or shorten the duration of their studies, improve their educational opportunities and ultimately facilitate their future reinsertion. The practical dimension of validation makes it an achievable goal for prisoners, who are not always motivated to undertake education and training in formal learning contexts. Prisoners are also identified as a specific target group for validation in France.

Other projects use validation as a tool for capacity building at the local level, with a view to improve the situation of a specific group. In Romania, the ‘L@EGAL2 – European investment in the future of Roma’ project (co-financed by the ESF) aims at professionalising and qualifying Roma ethnics who are currently employed by local public authorities to deal with Roma affairs, through training or validation of their competences gained in non-formal and informal learning contexts. This project is hence not targeting all Roma, but is expected to bring beneficial effects for the whole Roma community (see the Inventory 2010 case study on this project for further details).

Finally, the REVEAL project has shown that one standard validation methodology can be applied to a range of different target groups, as described in the box below.

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**REVEAL - a methodology for validating informal learning, transnational**

**REVEAL** is a transnational group of European experts and practitioners collaborating on the topic of evaluation of informal and non-formal learning. Between 2005 and 2010 the REVEAL community developed the ‘LEVEL5’ validation methodology, which has now been piloted and applied in more than 40 informal and non-formal learning ‘micro-projects’.

LEVEL5 is a complete evaluation procedure which can be applied to any project that enables its beneficiaries to learn and gain competences through their participation. It presents project coordinators with a standardised procedure, which can however be tailored to the individual project, target group or learning context. The system allows users to evidence the learning outcomes of their learners according to a standardised procedure while, at the same time,
REVEAL - a methodology for validating informal learning, transnational

keeping up their individuality in their specific contexts. As such, it has been developed with ‘grass-roots’ projects in mind who deliver non-formal or informal learning in the real life contexts.

LEVEL5 is based on a few basic assumptions. The methodology assumes that learning outcomes can be displayed with the help of three components or dimensions:

- The knowledge component
- The activity component
- The affective component

This third dimension is often neglected in evaluation of learning outcomes. However, in many informal learning projects, this “affective dimension” is of major importance.

For the informal learning evaluation process the competence levels of an individual are set at 5 levels for each dimension of learning (knowledge, activity and affective) thus giving rise to the name: LEVEL5.

The LEVEL5 evaluation procedure has been tested across Europe in over 40 so-called informal ‘micro-learning projects’, working with a range of target groups, including hard-to-reach groups such as long-term unemployed adults and young people from disadvantaged areas, as well as other groups such as volunteers, youngsters or seniors in internships and mobility activities as well as training professionals.

The approach was scientifically evaluated in the framework of two PhD theses.

From the extensive use of LEVEL5 to evaluate more than 40 micro learning projects (learning activities) it has become apparent that a multitude of benefits can be gained from this informal learning evaluation process. The process is not merely a documentation exercise but rather a dual process that benefits both the learner and the educator.

Firstly, the learners’ skill and competency levels can be accurately defined and measured before and after a learning experience. The impact of the learning becomes clearly evident through the evaluation of specific parameters which enable the individual’s progress to be charted and monitored, thus enabling the learner to recognise the learning outcomes at a cognitive, active and affective level.

Secondly, the practitioners (or educators) can monitor the effectiveness of the learning activity through highlighting specific areas for development or improvement and thus maximising the impact of their work.

4 SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED

As outlined in this report, evidence collected for the European Inventory 2010 shows that validation of informal and non-formal learning can bring various benefits to people with very different needs such as young people, migrant jobseekers and workers who have experience but no qualifications and/or negative perceptions of formal education and training. Generally, one of the main positive outcomes for all specific target groups is the motivation of participants to access validation opportunities, which can represent a route into a lifelong learning pathway, into employment, or simply a means of acquiring ‘softer’ outcomes such as increased self-awareness and self-esteem.

Evidence gathered for the 2010 European Inventory Update shows that there is a heterogeneity of methodological validation practices, both among countries and across initiatives relating to specific target groups. All initiatives do not systematically aim at a formal recognition of learning outcomes recognised by a certificate. Some instead aim to engage participants in the process of lifelong learning, or simply to give them the confidence to take forward a professional or personal plan.
Evidence suggests that one of the most commonly used approaches for specific (disadvantaged) groups is the portfolio method. One reason for this could be that it is very flexible and allows target groups who are not acquainted with formal education and training procedures, to demonstrate competencies acquired in non-school contexts. While this is also the case for methods such as observation, others such as interviews, or tests and examinations might ‘put off’ learners who are less confident in their own abilities, or have negative experiences of formal education and training.

In practice, it is not yet possible to identify which methodology works best for which target group. There is a diversity of approaches (including methodologies) which reflects the diversity of needs among the different target groups. Thus it seems there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach which suits all target groups or even one specific target group.

As many validation practices aim at increasing the applicants’ chances of getting a job, it could be worth considering introducing more testing of work competences in validation methods for specific groups. Furthermore, as mentioned above the portfolio method is considered to be quite difficult, especially in written form, for people with learning difficulties due to the high requirements towards analytical abilities. An alternative option is to use new media such as photography and video to enable learners to present their learning outcomes, rather than in writing.

It seems that in countries where there is a clear stable framework for validation established at national level, the development of validation for specific groups is made easier. This is demonstrated by the fact that a number of the examples identified for this report come from countries with established systems of validation, such as France, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal. Thus, validation for specific groups is sometimes an extension of the national procedures (e.g. validation for prisoners in Norway, use of VAE for the unemployed in France, use of VAE for migrants in various countries, adaptation of the ProfilPASS in Germany for use among young people as well as adults).

Nevertheless, it is also clear that many small-scale and pilot projects have emerged in response to an identified need within a specific sector or among a specific target group. The provision of national and EU funding to support innovative projects is therefore important, since these pilot projects provide evidence for the implementation of validation initiatives on a wider scale.

In relation to the role of EU funding, two different roles can be envisaged in relation to the promotion of validation for specific target groups. On the one hand, EU funding can contribute to financing small-scale exploratory projects in the Member States, as mentioned above. On the other hand, EU funding can be used to disseminate successful national/regional projects for specific target groups and stimulate the exchange of good practice including at transnational level.

The role of certain stakeholders is instrumental in enabling initiatives focusing on specific target groups to reach out to their intended beneficiaries and achieve useful outcomes. For instance, the public employment services play a key role in a number of validation initiatives to support the unemployed, e.g. in France, Sweden and Croatia. Employers can also take action to support their (current and future) workers. Other countries have introduced specialist bodies to focus on specific target groups, such as the New Opportunities centres which work specifically for the disabled in Portugal.

Guidance is another important success factor for validation targeting specific groups. The European Guidelines on Validation recommend that that guidance is a key component of any validation process. It is particularly important for specific (disadvantaged) groups, who may need additional support to undergo the process, or even to be convinced of the value of the process.

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It is clear that motivating and providing appropriate information to potential beneficiaries is crucial. Typically, some of the participants excluded from the labour market and with little access to education and training responsibilities, are not aware of the potential and benefits of validation for their personal and professional development. As highlighted by the OECD "careful targeting to groups most likely to benefit from recognition processes would help to contain the costs of communication".

Guidance is also needed when carrying out the validation test; to get the best out of disadvantaged learners who are not used to testing/learning situations. In the case of the unemployed, guidance related to validation process is essentially provided by Public Employment Services (e.g. Pôle Emploi in France, see 3.3) while for young people, careers advisers are the main interlocutors (e.g. Scotland, see 3.1)

It is also important to tailor the assessment method to the specific situation of the target group. It is therefore important to establish the right information and communication channels (e.g. web tools used for developing competence portfolios for young people).

5 CONCLUSIONS

This report, together with the more detailed information provided in the 2010 Inventory country updates and case studies, shows that validation can be used to support a range of specific target groups to access a formal qualification or employment, or simply to develop a ‘taste’ for learning and the motivation to take forward a personal development plan or pathway.

In a context of an economic downturn, where unemployment and the pressures on public sector budgets are increasing, there is a clear rationale for targeting validation initiatives to the groups of society who are ‘most in need’. For these participants, the interest of validation lies both in its summative approach (aiming at the formal certification of learning outcomes of participants via the delivery of a qualification), and as a formative process which helps participants to gain confidence and better know themselves and orientate their future educational and professional choices.

Across the EU, the low-qualified are clearly the main target group of validation projects: validation is seen as an alternative route to formal certification even for those with a very low educational attainment. Young people also represent a common target group, since validation offers them a chance to evidence the learning they acquire outside of formal education. Again, in the context of an economic crisis, where young people find it particularly difficult to access the labour market, validation can help them to prove, or improve their employability.

The benefits of validation for specific groups do not significantly differ from the benefits associated with validation of non-formal and informal learning in general. It is commonly reported that validation for target groups increases self-esteem, motivation and confidence; participants find it easier to apply for a job as they gain in professional credibility and know better how to present themselves to employers, they develop more creative approaches to problems and tend to use more actively their informally acquired knowledge and competences for improved profiling within the working context. Yet for some individuals, validation has special relevance because it can facilitate access to a qualification which otherwise might seem unattainable, or simply a ‘taste’ for, or the confidence to take up, further learning as a result of a process of recognising the skills one already has.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the European Inventory 2010 outputs, the following sources have been used to inform this report:


