



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Country report Slovenia

by Katarina Košmrlj

Cite this report as:

European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014).
*European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal
learning 2014: country report Slovenia.*
http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87076_SI.pdf.

In partnership with



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

A project carried out by



This country update has been produced by Katarina Košmrlj, as part of the 2014 Update to the European Inventory on Validation, a project managed by ICF International (lead consultants: Jo Hawley, Ilona Murphy and Manuel Souto-Otero). The report has benefitted from feedback from the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) Members for Slovenia as well as a quality assurance panel of experts and Cedefop (lead contact Ernesto Villalba-Garcia).

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, Cedefop, ICF International, the EQF AG Members or the members of the quality assurance panel. Neither the European Commission nor any person/organisation acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of any information contained in this publication.

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	National perspective on validation	3
2.1	National legal framework, system or policy on validation	3
2.2	Skills audits	4
2.3	Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation	5
2.4	National institutional framework	6
2.5	Governance and allocation of responsibilities.....	6
2.6	Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives	9
2.7	Inputs, outputs and outcomes	10
3	Information, advice and guidance	13
3.1	Awareness-raising and recruitment	13
3.2	Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions	14
3.3	Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners	14
4	Quality assurance and evaluation.....	14
4.1	Quality Assurance Framework.....	14
4.2	Quality assurance systems/procedures	14
4.3	Evaluation framework.....	15
5	Validation methods	15
5.1	Methods used and the validation process.....	15
6	Validation practitioners.....	16
6.1	Profile of validation practitioners	16
6.2	Provision of training and support to validation practitioners	16
6.3	Qualifications requirements.....	16
7	References	17
7.1	List of organisations consulted.....	17

1 Introduction

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been a constant and important issue in Slovenian education in the last decade, and since 2006 it covers all educational levels. It is commonly referred to as *validation of prior acquired knowledge* or *validation of prior knowledge*. This is an informal phrase, but clearly shows a significant shift in terms of the overall understanding of the issue, in that the focus is not on how knowledge is acquired but on the value of knowledge itself.

Since the 2010 update was undertaken, developments in validation can be observed, though mostly in relation to the higher education sector. This is primarily due to a change in legislation that obliges every higher education institution to validate non-formal and informal learning. This has allowed for the greater mobility of individuals between institutions nationally. Another important outcome is in relation to improved employability which allows individuals greater mobility in the labour market. This has been an important issue in the last few years given the problems associated with the economic crisis and rising unemployment.

The main development since 2010 is the development and establishment of the national qualifications framework – the Slovenian Qualification Framework (SQF). The SQF is a common framework comprised of all the previously established frameworks for single levels of education: compulsory, vocational and secondary level and higher education. This is a first step towards centralising the field. So far, different sectors and levels of education have run validation separately in a decentralised manner, even though cooperation between lower levels of education existed, as well as a connection with employers. Higher education institutions (universities) were less centralised and cooperative in this respect, but initiatives to improve cooperation with the economic sector have become more frequent in recent years.

Volunteering is also gaining momentum in Slovenia. In addition to a number of well-known projects ran by humanitarian organisations, new initiatives/developments have been relatively successful, such as the project SIMBIOZA. This project is based on the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills. In addition the Nefiks initiative aims to raise awareness of the importance of non-formal and informal learning and its validation.

2 National perspective on validation

Slovenia has a clear policy on lifelong learning which includes validation (Jelenc 2007). Several organisations and institutions at national and regional levels actively put lifelong learning policy into practice. Significantly, in the last few years validation has played an important role in this field. Awareness of validation has grown amongst the general population and is no longer considered a new/unheard of topic.

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

There is no single overarching legal framework for validation, however, the National programme for youth (2013-2022), accepted in October 2013 is defining a goal to prepare a systematic solution for keeping track and recognising non-formal education. It is expected that the system will also cover other age groups, in addition to young people. Validation is included in other sector acts and in subordinate regulations. The Ministry responsible for education (following various changes, it is now the Ministry for Education, Science and Sport) and Ministry responsible for labour (Ministry for labour, family and social affairs) cover issues regarding education, classification and validation of education for employment, and qualification frameworks. In order to better connect education and employment (mainly education-based salary classes in public sector employment, which is centralised in Slovenia), as well as to improve national and international comparability (and validation), the KLASIUS classification system was developed in 2006. KLASIS is now successfully implemented as "the key national standard to collect, process and analyse the statistical and analytical data that illustrate the developments of social, economic and demographical issues in Slovenia. It is based on eight competence levels which can be used to relate all qualifications to learning outcomes" (Tašner, 2011).

As stated in previous national reports (Tašner 2011), a legal framework on validation consists of several sectoral acts that regulate the possibility and right to validation of prior knowledge:

- Act on Higher Education (2012): changes since 2009 include the KLASIUS classification as part of compulsory evidence of higher education institutions, administers entrants and students the right of validation of prior knowledge, obligates institutions to prepare measures for validation and to form a commission for validation.
- Post-secondary Vocational Education Act (2004): the act does not address validation directly, but administers schools to prepare regulations and organise validation when necessary. A number of changes were proposed and a formal proposal of changes to the act was issued by the government at the end of 2012. The proposal includes some aspects of validation, especially during enrolment, but does not include detailed regulation. At the time of writing, the proposal is awaiting debate in Parliament.
- Vocational Education Act (2006): validation is not directly addressed by the act. But it enables the students to progress through school years also with the recognition of non-formal learning. Non-formal learning can also be used in the process of forming grades.
- National Professional Qualifications Act (2010) is a basis for a formalised system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs), where the knowledge and experience gained by candidates is compared to occupational standards defined at the national level. In the NVQ verification and validation procedure candidates demonstrate their skills and knowledge for the effective performance of specific occupational tasks. Through verification and validation of NVQs, the skills and knowledge of the candidate are ascertained with regard to a specific occupational standard and a catalogue of standards of vocational knowledge and skills.
- Slovenian Qualifications Framework (2010): a proposal of the framework and a covering act (National qualifications framework act) has been in preparation since 2010 and is being discussed amongst interested parties before it will be issued to the Government.

2.2 Skills audits

As stated in the text above, there is no national system for validation and thus skills audits are also matter of each institution or field. There are, however, some common aspects to highlight. Holding a personal lifelong learning portfolio is widely promoted in education and training at all levels. In lower levels of education, portfolios are prepared by teachers and facilitators, whilst in upper classes of primary education and on further levels, students are encouraged to keep a record of each course and achievement, thus preparing a personal portfolio. In most institutions, the personal lifelong learning portfolio is the basis for validation. In this respect, when people take part in non-formal education, they are awarded with a certificate that includes data about the context, competencies achieved, length, and ECTS points if the education practice is accredited.

The Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS) encourages job-seekers to continuously update their Europass CV and to be thorough when presenting and explaining individual competencies. However, the ESS places a considerable amount of effort in informing non-formal education providers on how to prepare certificates: often they include data on participants, name of the course and length, but lack a description of competencies achieved. These are the most important aspects when validating one's knowledge. The same applies to informal learning, where employers are instructed to be very specific in letters of recommendation and job descriptions.

Validation in relation to volunteering has lacked attention in the past. However as referred to above, with an increasing number of media-covered volunteering projects and initiatives, validation in relation to volunteering activities/experience is becoming important and more highly regarded. Typically, volunteering organisations only provide certificates of participation, so competencies achieved are reported individually.

Documentation is the basis for validation, but often candidates are required to attend an interview with the validation committee or present some explicit exhibit of their knowledge (for example, products, publications or a letter of recommendation). Depending on the presented portfolio and the subject of validation, the validator or the committee may assign

an extra task or test of skills or knowledge. Testing knowledge is more frequent in validation processes in formal education, while validation for vocational qualifications often includes a test of skills in the profession/craft.

2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

It is important to note that in Slovenia two kinds of qualifications exist in practice. It is proposed that a third one is included in the SQF:

- *Education level.* Publicly valid education level is obtained by successful graduation in an accredited formal educational programme.
- *National vocational qualification.* It is an employment-based vocational skills certification that is required to perform a profession at a specified level.
- *Additional qualification.* It is a complement to formal or vocational qualification of an individual and can be either field-based (e.g. banking) or transversal and applicable in different fields (e.g. handling with toxic materials, project management, etc.). As emphasised by Mikulec (2011), it improves employability and is a key subject in lifelong learning (an issue that is currently in discussion between ministries responsible for the SQF legislation).

Before the introduction of the SQF (still in implementation), a national vocational qualifications framework was established and widely used and essentially covered every profession and field. The SQF now includes databases on vocational standards, standards' catalogues on subjects of specialisation for assessment, and also provides procedures for the assessment of national vocational qualifications. After that, a national framework of higher education qualifications was developed, though it is not fully implemented.

It is noted that previous initiatives were taken into consideration in the development of the SQF. It consists of 10 levels and includes all of the above mentioned types of qualifications. Each level is defined with knowledge, skills and competences in general and additionally with four characteristics. These are: entrance conditions (regarding formal education); (minimal) duration of education to obtain the qualification; qualification title, and possibilities for further education and training. The SQF is available on-line for public use and reference in the form of a search engine (<http://www.nok.si/register-kvalifikacij.aspx>).

Credit systems

All formal education as well as non-formal education and training on post-secondary and tertiary level is assessed according to ECTS, as is most education at secondary level too. Depending on the type of education/training programme it can be unit/course-based, module-based or unified.

Formal educational programmes have to be accredited by the respective body (for example, the National Agency for Quality in Higher Education) or Ministry on the recommendation from the Council of Experts for VET Association (for vocational programmes and training). Relationships between education facilitators and employers are much stronger in vocational education, formal and non-formal learning, mainly because they cooperate with individual employers as well as with the national employers' chamber (National Economic Chamber, National Crafts Chamber, National Trade Chamber, etc.). Some non-formal vocational education is credited according to the field rather than other training, but overall the system is transparent, comparable and facilitates validation.

All vocational education programmes are accredited with credit points, where one credit point is a unit for measuring all types of learning and student's work. One credit point is worth 25 hours of different types and ways of learning.

Grading of education and training depends on the achieved skills and competencies, the content and the length and organisation of the course. Typically, shorter units are awarded 3-5 ECTS. Formal education course are typically awarded 6 ECTS and longer training programmes or language courses are awarded 20-40 ECTS.

Standards

An overarching standard for validation is not in use in Slovenia.

In higher and post-secondary education, ECTS measures are considered along with a comparison of the candidate's achieved competencies and competencies declared in the accredited syllabus of the course or in the study module/programme. However, specific standards are defined by each institution and schools members of universities are autonomous (under the Higher Education Act 2012, RS Official Gazette No 32/12) to prepare and use their own measures.

As an example, two schools in the same university have a different approach to validation. Both have a committee of three members (two faculty members and one administration worker). The first school's committee analyses the application, prepares a proposal for validation and recognition and consults a field expert (leading professor) before decision. The second school's committee analyses the application and selects a field expert for validation who prepares a proposal for the committee to decide upon (Košmrlj, Gomezelj Omerzel and Marčeta 2006, Trunk Širca and Gomezelj Omerzel 2006).

In VET there are two types of qualifications; one type of VET qualifications can be acquired following the school path (*VET system where the validation process is also used especially for shortening the time of education for adult experienced students*) and the other type can be acquired following the path of recognition of non-formal learning (NVQ system). The National Professional Qualifications Act connects both systems with the introduction of the occupational standards which represents a learning outcome standard for each VET qualification that can be acquired in Slovenia.

The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training develops and updates standard occupational standards and catalogues of standards of vocational knowledge and skills (NVQ system) and national curriculum for formal VET programmes. The National Examination Centre is responsible for developing methodologies and procedures for validation.

2.4 National institutional framework

There is no overarching national institution for validation. Different tasks and roles are spread across different institutions who work in lifelong learning policy or implementation.

There is however two expert and research public institutions to highlight that are considered to be important for validation. For instance, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education trains accredited assessors and vocational advisors for the validation of prior knowledge in relation to adult learning. The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training is the national reference point for national vocational qualifications and is responsible for the development and quality assurance of formal VET system as well as the NVQ system. The National Examination Centre (NEC) is responsible, amongst other things, for the development of methodologies and procedures of assessment and validation of professional knowledge and competences in relation to all types of qualifications. It is also the main body responsible for monitoring the work of the examination bodies for validation and assessment of national vocational qualifications. The Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS) is the main institution for job placements and employment counselling for the unemployed (Tanšek 2011).

2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

The Ministry for Education, Science and Sport holds the legislative and executive responsibility for the administration of education at the national level. The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs is responsible for NVQs, coordination between social partners and for continuing vocational education and training. The Ministry is responsible for the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning and publishes occupational standards, verifies educational and training institutions and finances the NEC for the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning. In 2007 an interdepartmental body for validation procedures, the National Council of Experts for Technical and Vocational Education was established to cover vocational education and adult education (Tanšek 2011).

2.5.1 Allocation of responsibilities (at national, regional, local, social partner, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The two ministries - Ministry for Education, Science and Sport and Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities are responsible for validation policy and implementation. However, implementation responsibility is spread among different institutions according to the different level of education, not necessarily a different aspect of validation. Figure 2.1 illustrates a simplified individual validation procedure. This is discussed in more detail under section 5.1.

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers:

Education and training providers are the 'first line' executors of validation. On the one hand, they provide documentation of education and training, and on the other, they actively participate in policy making and preparation of validation measures. In higher education, this role is more evident due to the autonomy of higher education institutions in relation to validation, but ultimately knowledge recognition depends on individual validators or committees in these institutions.

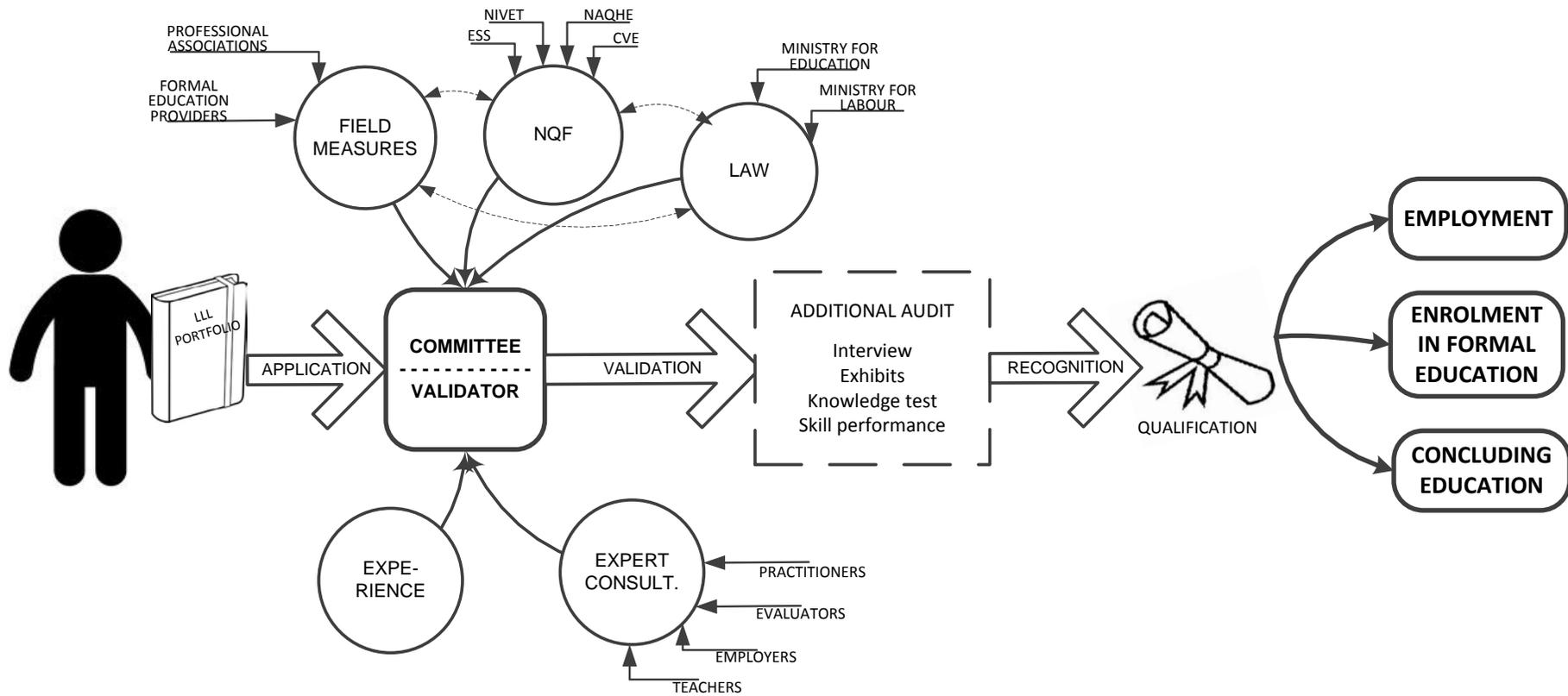
Private sector actors (including social partners):

Employment and improved employment competencies are the main aim of validation. Through validation, a formal confirmation of the acquired competences is obtained and it presents an opportunity for retaining a job position, being promoted or being (formally) able to change occupation. In the case of young people, validation provides opportunities for young people to secure good position when first entering the labour market. However, prior learning certificates are not widely accepted by companies. It is hoped that the establishment and ongoing promotion of the SQF will in time improve this.

Recently, mainly due to efforts of some youth non-governmental organisations, employers are taking into consideration informal work experience, which includes student work and volunteering.

Employers do, however participate as providers of informal learning by offering practice and internship positions to students and young graduates. The level of learning by such work is high and competencies achieved are undisputable. However it would seem that there is still a gap between the actual achieved competencies and their documentation. Since there are no common forms for reporting experiential learning, much depends on the awareness and competencies of human resource management departments, or the management within companies or employment organisations.

Figure 2.1 Diagram: Scheme of a typical validation process in Slovenia



Third sector organisations:

Since legislation is more rigid for employers in the public sector, these organisations tend to be slightly more inclined towards validation of prior learning. However, the state of play is not as well developed as desired.

Recently, several youth organisations have issued The Resolution on validation and recognition of youth non formal education (http://www.mss.si/datoteke/dokumenti/resolucija-Priznavanje_neformalnega_izobrazevanja_v_Sloveniji.pdf). The Resolution includes other groups and also gives recommendations for measures needed to implement system-wide regulatory framework for the recognition of all aspects of non formal education. The existing connection between education and the labour market is weak and young people do not always acquire the competencies required by employers in formal education, but may acquire them through non-formal learning and experience. The latter is the hardest to validate.

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

Validation processes in practice do not often include coordination and cooperation between stakeholders. Whilst consultation between education providers and validation experts are encouraged, lack to time and resources mean that coordination is not as strong as it could be. Much depends on the level of experience of the validator and the type of committee (ad-hoc or stationery).

Coordination and cooperation on post-secondary and higher education level is usually ad-hoc. Whilst this varies from one case to another, it is more intense on vocational level, where the Centre for vocational Education (CVE) has stronger relationships in place with employers and sector organisations.

In the field of adult education and focusing on acquiring professional qualifications the responsible ministries formed a coordinating group which consisted of representatives from all national institutes which cover different levels and fields of education, Employment Service, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Chambers and VET providers. In 2012 the group prepared an overview on the situation and practices in validation of non-formal learning in VET, an overview of practices used in other countries and a proposal on the systemic solutions.

2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

NEFIKS initiative

The NEFIKS initiative, known also as the 'informal index' was a project of a youth organisation in Slovenia. It is now an independent tool that supports the activities of developing, promoting and managing the index. Non-recognition of student work¹ was (and still is) a major problem for graduates in Slovenia. On the one hand, student work allows those in secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level of formal education to earn financial resources for study and living expenses. On the other hand it represents an opportunity to gain experience in their field of study, interest or a completely different sector. More than 70% of students engage in some form of student work during their formal education and when applying for their first employment, this experience is typically not taken into

¹ Slovenia has a specific approach for student work. It is legal for students enrolled in secondary, post-secondary and higher education to get a paid job, but the employment is based on a special three-party-contract between the employer, student and student-work organization. Payment is transferred to the student through the work organization. Students are paid by the hour and are not entitled to paid transport expenses, vacation or health leave, while all other rights and obligations are same as for regular employees. Recent changes in legislation introduced a taxation of student work and limitation of maximum extent. This is to be strictly differentiated from youth work, which is defined in an Act on the public interest in youth sector (http://www.ursm.gov.si/fileadmin/ursm.gov.si/pageuploads/pdf/ZJIMS/ZJIMS_ENG.pdf). Youth work is an organised and target-oriented form of youth action and is for the youth, within which the youth, based on their own efforts, contribute to their own inclusion in society, strengthen their competences and contribute to the development of the community. The implementation of various forms of youth work is based on the volunteer participation of the youth regardless of their interest, cultural, principle or political orientation.

consideration.

The NEFIKS initiative developed and now promotes a practical and efficient tool to record all experiential learning, as well as non-formal education in the form of learning outcomes and achieved competencies. The tool, called the 'informal index', allows for the transparency of individual experience and comparability. The initiative is co-funded by the Ministry for Education, Science and Sport, the European Commission, and private sector companies.

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

Policy-making and implementation at national level is funded by the government. The institutions stated above in section 2.4 are public institutions working for public interest and are publicly funded. Part of their funding, however, is obtained through European funded projects. The establishment of both the NVQF and SQF was funded and co-funded by European funds.

In institutions such as universities and schools, validation is funded by individual applicants. Individuals pay a validation fee that covers the cost of work undertaken by the committee/validator and for issuing a certificate.

The professional/craftsman associations are funded by its members and they also participate in tenders for national and EU projects. The Individual validation process is covered by the applicant or by their employer.

For groups at risk (long-term unemployed, marginalised groups, ethnical minorities, etc.), the ESS has a budget for their extra training and organises workshops for informing and instructing participants of learning opportunities on offer to them (including validation).

2.7.2 Distribution of costs

As stated in 2.7.1., costs are distributed between institutions performing the validation procedure and the individual applicant. If validation and recognition is performed as part of enrolment procedures, institutions will often include these costs in tuition fees (or lower the tuition fee respectively).

Typically, validation and recognition for an individual course in a higher education institution costs around 50 EUR for formal education validation and for recognition of professional practice, while validation of non-formal and informal learning costs around 200 EUR.

In the NVQ system the price for the assessment and recognition process is determined on the national level in the Rules on method and procedure for the assessment and award of national professional qualifications. For the candidate who acquires a Certificate of NVQ through a portfolio the price is 92 EUR and for those who also have to go through practical examination the highest price is 172 EUR.

2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries

Institutions collect data on the flow of beneficiaries for self-evaluation processes. They are autonomous on how and which data they collect. These data usually include the number of applicants, ECTS points accredited and the number of qualifications awarded. Though this data may be collected at institutional level, there is no national evidence or collection of such data.

The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training is responsible for managing the database for the NVQ system (National Reference Point) which is then used for preparing evaluation reports and statistical reports on different issues regarding the system. From year 2000 (when NVQ system was established) till the end of 2012, 67.941 NVQ certificates were granted.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia maintains records on formal education, but few on non-formal education and none on validation. Some data that may illustrate the extent of the continuing education field in the country is data on companies that offer

education programmes and training for adults. Available data, collected on national level by the SORS is shown in the tables below.

Table 2.1 Providers of continuing education, number of participations in verified, non-verified and language programmes, Slovenia, 2010-2011

Continuing education providers	Number of organisations	Number of participations	Participations in non-verified programmes	Participations in verified programmes	Participations in language programmes
Total	364	308889	249627	39184	20078
Folk high schools	31	29,082	20,049	3,680	5,353
Other special institutions	104	55,686	39,211	6,951	9,524
Parts of schools	30	13,875	10,774	1,349	1,752
Parts of enterprises	35	143,592	142,697	526	369
Educational centres at the Chambers of Commerce or Crafts	2	6,191	6,191	-	-
Vocational and professional associations	18	21,640	19,446	-	2,194
Driving schools	108	26,307	-	26,307	0
Other	36	12,516	11,259	371	886

- no occurrence of event

Source: SORS

Table 2.2 Types of non-verified programmes, the duration and participations in the programmes, Slovenia, 2010-2011

Types of programmes	Number of participations	Number of programmes	Number of realised hours
Total	249627	14910	412123
Preparation for obtaining national vocational qualification	2,278	125	9,087
Preparation for head clerk foreman or master craftsman exams	115	20	520
Preparation for exams for performing an activity	4,077	222	6,339
Preparation for individual matura subjects	575	230	10,424
Professional programs for the needs of performing an occupation	204,859	11,518	310,927
Programs for general needs and leisure time	37,723	2,795	74,826

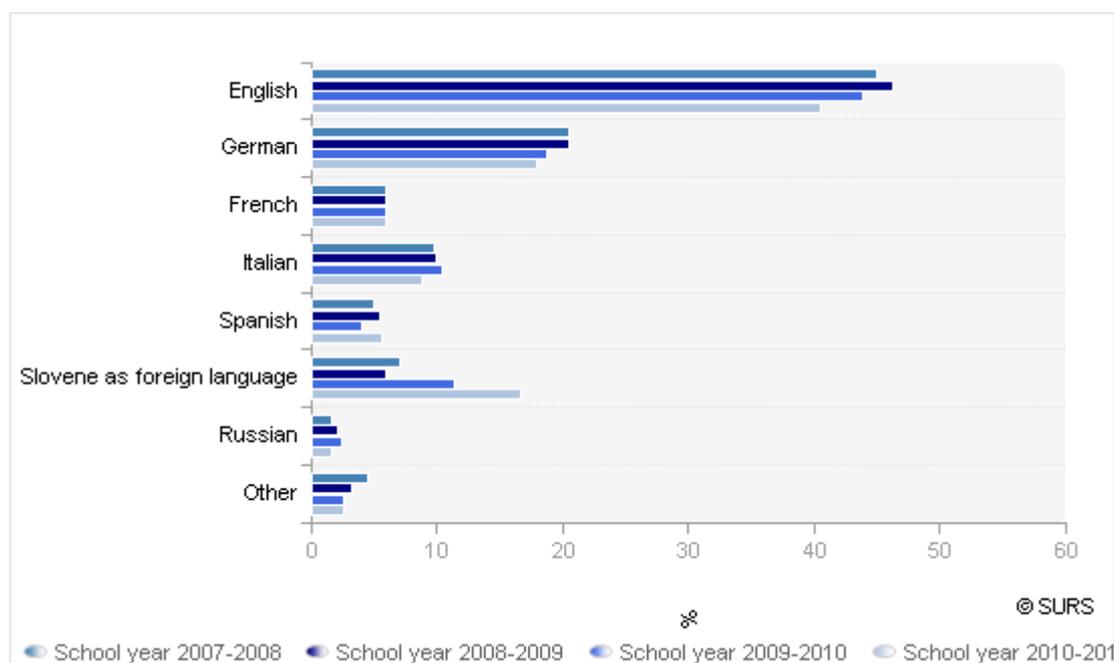
Source: SORS

Table 2.3 Types of verified programmes, duration and the participations of the programmes, Slovenia, 2010-2011

Types of programmes	Number of participations	Number of programmes	Number of realised hours
Total	39184	2585	135259
Qualification after basic education	5,449	407	14,446
Qualification after finishing technical education	179	12	3,282
Training programs for which no required prior education is determined	31,013	2,048	80,494
Training programs after short term vocational or vocational upper secondary educationI	367	20	5,892
Training programs after upper secondary general or technical education	1,026	34	6,678
Training programs after tertiary education	247	12	2,473
Specialisation programs for which no required prior education is determined	100	2	1,702
Specialisation programs after short term vocational or vocational upper secondary educationI	228	16	3,123
Specialisation programs after general or technical upper secondary educationI	85	4	400
Specialisation programs after tertiary educationI	94	2	800
Retraining programs at the same level of education	396	28	15,969

Source: SORS

Figure 2.2 Participations in the language programmes by languages, Slovenia



Source: SORS

2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

There is no national evidence of the benefit of validation to individuals. Benefits can be ascertained by analysing trends in terms of return to education, continuing education and behaviour in the labour market. Thorough research is necessary to properly validate the benefits of validation to individuals at a national level. Single examples of lifelong learning research can indirectly offer an insight in the topic (see ex. Širok, Košmrlj and Sedmak 2013, Širok and Košmrlj 2010, Trunk Širca and Gomezelj Omerzel 2006).

Indirectly, benefits could be supposed by the outcomes of the European Youth Forum on the influence of non-formal education in youth organisations on young people's employability. Research findings show that there are six core competencies employers seek. These include: communication skills, organisational skills and planning, decision making, team work, self-confidence and autonomy, arithmetic literacy. It can be argued that in most cases, the first five of these competencies are gained through non-formal education and informal learning in youth organisations better than in formal education. Respectively, validation of such experience can prove to be a competitive advantage in the labour market for both, job-seekers and employers (MSS 2013).

A recent evaluation of ESS employment mediation process has shown that candidates with inappropriate competencies are directed to a vacant job position, while others with appropriate competencies might not be taken in consideration, at all. The process of application for employment mediation includes a scan of the candidates' competencies acquired in formal and lifelong learning, but often people do not have or present either the documentation or forget to mention certain skills that are not directly linked to their existing or aspiring profession. It is up to the counsellor to thoroughly scan the profile, skills and competences of each candidate. However, people with validation certificates have both the documentation and the awareness of their competencies and their employment mediation process is more efficient and, usually, more effective (Širok, Košmrlj and Sedmak 2013).

The benefits of validation can also be highlighted in relation to research into the impact of the Lifelong learning programme for internationalisation in education in Slovenia (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, etc.). Part of the research considered the impact of internationalisation activities on competencies and employability. Results show that students, teachers and practitioners participating in internationalisation activities develop core competencies to a greater extent compared to peers who do not engage in such activities. Additionally, their employability improves on a self-declarative level as well in the actual labour market. All activities within the Lifelong learning programme are automatically subject to validation and recognition, so the declared benefits of the programme can be transferred to the benefits of validation to the individual too (Širok and Košmrlj 2011).

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

When typing the Slovenian phrase for validation of prior learning² in a web search engine (Google), approximately 130000 results were returned. The Internet is the main media source for raising awareness of different initiatives and possibilities for all stakeholders. In this respect, social networks could be exploited to a larger extent to raise awareness of validation.

From 2007 to 2012 the VET schools formed 5 consortia for the introduction of improvements into the curricula implementation. Projects were financed by the ESF and all included one work package for the introduction of validation of non-formal learning into formal education. The projects successfully initiated a dialogue between teachers, school counsellors, companies and national institutions. More importantly they developed solutions, procedures, practical tools and examples of good practice that can be used in schools for the further development of validation in formal VET education.

Another good means of awareness-raising and recruitment are seminars and workshops. These are more common in the vocational field and are organised by ESS for employment-seekers. Non-governmental organisations are also active but tend to focus on informing individuals about validation. Ministries and governmental agencies however, focus more on education providers and validation facilitators. Awareness in the private sector is relatively weak and could be improved. Interestingly, a tool has been developed by a private company

² The phrases used were: (1) priznavanje znanj in spretnosti – recognition of knowledge and skills, (2) priznavanje neformalnih znanj – recognition of non-formal knowledge, (3) priznavanje neformalnega izobraževanja – recognition of non-formal education. The total sum is an approximation and may include doubled results and is as such just of informative nature.

(student work provider) »Moje izkušnje« (My experience) which is a tool for validation and recognition of working experience, gained by student work. Students and secondary school pupils can obtain electronic or a paper certificate for their working experience. The service brings a quality and informative review/overlook of all working activities. Individuals can access the "Moje izkušnje" electronically (a digital portfolio) and can export the certificate to a PDF file or alternatively, print it out to show to their potential employer and enhance their chances of obtaining a job. It is a good tool used by over 130.000 young people (company's information). The tool has also been recognised as the example of best practice at the EU level.

3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

All stakeholders refer to EU guidance and recommendations in the field, regarding the organisation and delivery of lifelong learning, as well as developing, promoting and implementing validation. The Centre for vocational education is the point of reference for vocational education, the ministry responsible for education and the NAQHE National agency for quality in higher education) are the main points of reference for higher education, and the ESS is the point of reference as well as a connection point for the labour market.

3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

All stakeholders engage in different activities to raise awareness of validation. The general public is usually informed using internet media, newsletters and leaflets. Seminars, conferences and workshops are organised mainly for professionals and practitioners, even though an increasing number of events are open to the general public (with minimum or no participation from the general public).

The different policies and initiatives issued by the government in order to improve the economic situation in the country include improving employability. Lifelong learning is an important aspect in this regard, and validation and recognition is also one of the focuses.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

Each educational level has their own quality assurance framework for institutional and programme evaluation and accreditation. Validation and non-formal education recognition are part of these frameworks. Measures and regulations for validation are checked and so is the quality of the procedure of validation and recognition, maintaining evidence, and the body responsible for validation (type of committee, how members are chosen and appointed, how often they meet, how they work and cooperate, how are validation processes performed). During the evaluation visit, the evaluation committee typically checks the existing evidence, talks to the member of the institutional validation committee and, if available, also to students or other people that applied for validation.

There is no national overarching quality framework for validation.

4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

A system of quality assessment and assurance exists for each level of education. Quality assessment is performed by state-budgeted bodies (councils, agency) that are autonomous from the government. These bodies are responsible for training evaluators. Training opportunities are usually organised as one or two-day seminars and have an informative-theoretical rather than practical orientation. Participants are awarded a certificate of attendance and in order to get an evaluator certificate (licence) they have to prove the knowledge of the topic (quality assurance, legislation, tools).

Each institution has to undertake periodical self-evaluations. Reporting self-evaluation findings to the responsible ministry is compulsory by law. Since they are internal, each institution has their own regulations and methods and findings are not necessarily comparable between institutions. External evaluation, which is also compulsory by law over

a period of time, is more centrally regulated and findings are comparable within each level of education.

4.3 Evaluation framework

The bodies responsible for quality assessment and assurance in cooperation with stakeholders prepare measures for quality assurance for each educational level and developed tools for evaluation and accreditation. Quality assurance is regulated by the Act for the respective field of education and more specifically by national measures and regulations. These documents were based on international examples, EC guidance and international standards. Each institution has developed its own internal measures and regulations that include the specifics of these institutions and their educational programmes and processes.

Institutional self-evaluations are typically performed annually. External institutional evaluations are mandatory every seven years and are a condition to renew the accreditation of an institution or programme. Programmes are also evaluated before obtaining the accreditation and every change of the programmes has to be accredited. Evaluators are trained by the responsible bodies.

5 Validation methods

Even though there is a tendency towards establishing a common framework, each institution applies its own methods and processes of validation (in accordance with the respective legislation). However, there are some commonalities between institutions and across the different education (and qualification) levels (see chapter 2.5.1). These commonalities are taken into consideration in the following chapters.

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

There is no typical validation method in Slovenia, as institutions are quite autonomous in the process. However, the validation process would usually take around 30 days from completing the application to issuing a certificate. Depending on the individual case, the duration may be abbreviated or prolonged. The duration of single steps for the validator is administered in the internal regulation acts, while candidates have more freedom. However, the longer they take to supplement their application or documentation or to prepare for additional audits, the longer the process will take.

More often, validation is performed by a committee or a board of three or more validators. They analyse the application which consists of the lifelong learning portfolio of the candidate (certificates and other attestations of formal, non-formal and informal learning), a CV and an appeal for recognition (this can be a course, part of a course, a module or a full qualification). Validators usually analyse the application individually and then debate on a proposal of recognition or additional auditing. Often an expert in the field is consulted in the event of unclear identification or discrepancies in validation opinions. Candidates may be requested to issue additional attestations of competencies acquired, invited to an interview, subjected to additional knowledge testing or to additional skill performance.

When considering all documentation and evidence, validators prepare a proposal for recognition and pass it to an expert for approval. The final decision is issued as a formal resolution (as a recognised qualification or part of qualification) by a responsible body in the institution (for example, the Senate or Dean in higher education).

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate	✓		✓
Declarative methods	✓	✓	✓
Interview			✓

Observation			✓
Portfolio method	✓	✓	✓
Presentation			✓
Simulation and evidence extracted from work	✓		
Tests and examinations			✓
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify			

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Typically, validation practitioners are employees in the school or institution, or members of the association where the validation takes place. They are either professionally involved in lifelong learning or education as teachers or researchers or they are administration workers in the field. Often they are teachers or academics who do not research the topic but have a personal interest towards it.

In the system of National Professional Qualifications the assessors are professionals in the fields of qualifications for which they perform assessment. They usually work in companies as practitioners, if they are teachers they have professional background and practical experience in occupation and they can prove it.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

As stated in section 4.2, there are periodical seminars for existing and aspiring evaluators held by the responsible bodies and these include, in very small extent, information on validation of prior learning. Events described in section 3.3 and debates between practitioners contribute to improving the knowledge and skills of validators. The most important and informative aspect is experience-sharing.

In the system of National Professional Qualifications the assessors are obliged to prove they have competences required to work as assessors. If they want they can attend a four-day training where they learn how to assess a portfolio and how to prepare practical assessment to test skills performance.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

Being a validator is not a self-standing qualification or position in Slovenia, it is an additional task/assignment or function (depending on the organisation of validation) within an occupation (see chapter 6.1). Validators on all levels have to be acknowledged with the covering legislation and internal regulation, the respective qualification system and the field in question. Occasionally, seminars on the topic are organised, but there are no mandatory administrative requirements. Usually, validators are people professionally involved or interested in lifelong learning, teachers, trainers and facilitators. Awareness, experience and good will are, informally, the best recommendations for becoming a validator. Exception is a system on National Professional Qualifications where all assessors have formal requirements they have to fill. Some general requirements are defined in the Law and some specific ones for each Professional Qualification.

7 References

- Center za poklicno izobraževanje [Centre for Vocational Education]. <http://www.cpi.si/>.
Employment Service of Slovenia. <http://www.ess.gov.si>.
- Jelenc, Z. (2007). *Strategija veživljenjskosti učenja v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: MŠŠ.
http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/razvoj_solstva/IU2010/Strategija_VZU.pdf.
http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/razvoj_solstva/IU2010/Strategija_VZU.pdf.
- Klemenčič, S.; Možina, T. in Đorđević, N. (2012). *Priznavanje že pridobljenega znanja Svetovalni pripomoček za udeležence programov usposabljanja in spopolnjevanja ACS, ki bi želeli imeti priznано že pridobljeno znanje*. Ljubljana: Andragoški center Slovenije.
http://arhiv.acs.si/publikacije/Priznavanje_ze_pridobljenega_znanja.pdf.
- Košmrlj, K.; Gomezelj-Omerzel, D.; in Marčeta, Ž. (2006). *Možnosti razvoja in vpeljave nacionalnega sistema priznavanja znanj in spretnosti v visokem šolstvu*. Novičke ACS, nov 2006: 5-6.
- Mikulec, B. (ed.) (2011). *Slovensko ogrodje kvalifikacij: Predlog medresorske delovne skupine za pripravo nacionalnega ogrodja kvalifikacij*. Ljubljana: Center za poklicno izobraževanje. http://www.nok.si/files/nok/userfiles/datoteke/75_file_path.pdf.
- Ministrstvo za delo, družino in socialne zadeve (Ministry for Work, Family and Social Affairs) (2013). *Labour market and employment*.
http://www.mddsz.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/trg_dela_in_zaposlovanje/.
- Mladinski svet Slovenije (2013). *Resolucija: Priznavanje neformalnega izobraževanja v Sloveniji*. [Resolution: Recognition of non-formal education in Slovenia].
http://www.mss.si/datoteke/dokumenti/resolucija-Priznavanje_neformalnega_izobrazevanja_v_Sloveniji.pdf.
- Nacionalno informacijsko središče [National reference point].
<http://www.nrpslo.org/baze-podatkov.aspx>.
- Portal Vrednotenje in priznavanje znanja. <http://vpnz.acs.si/portal/>.
- Statistični urad RS [Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia].
http://www.stat.si/eng/tema_demografsko_izobrazevanje.asp.
- Slovensko ogrodje kvalifikacij [Slovenian qualification framework].
<http://www.nok.si/slovensko-ogrodje-kvalifikacij.aspx>.
- Širok, K.; Košmrlj, K.; in S. Sedmak (2013). *Evalvacija socialnega programa s pomočjo teorije programa: primer posredovanja dela*. Koper: Fakulteta za management (in print).
- Širok, K.; in Košmrlj, K. (2010). *LLP interim evaluation national report – Slovenia: an interim national report to the Directorate Generale for Education and Culture of the European Commission*. Koper: Fakulteta za management.
- Cedefop; ICF International; Tašner, V. (2011). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010*. Country report: Slovenia.
<http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77478.pdf>.
- Trunk Širca, N.; Gomezelj Omerzel, D. (2006). *Implementacija sistema priznavanja neformalnega in priložnostnega učenja v slovenski visokošolski prostor: predstavitev rezultatov projekta*. Koper: Fakulteta za management.

7.1 List of organisations consulted

- CPI - Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training
- CMEPIUS - Centre of the RS for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes
- ZRSZ - Employment Service of Slovenia.