



Country report

Romania

2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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1 Introduction and evaluation

1.1 Abstract

In 2011, the legal framework for the national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning based on learning outcomes expressed in knowledge, skills and competence was created. The general approach, methodology and tools as well as the validation practices remain unchanged since 2004. The quality assurance system and data collection mechanisms are still at an early stage of development. More is planned to be done in the area of professional development of validation practitioners. The number of assessment centres¹ and beneficiaries receiving certificates at the end of the validation process decreased significantly in 2014-2015 compared to the period of 2010-2013. Moreover, the national coverage of assessment centres remains a challenge.

However, in the last two years (2014-2015), several recent policies presented opportunities for the development of the approach to validation and widening accessibility for potential beneficiaries. The *National Framework for Increasing Participation in Lifelong Learning in Romania*², adopted by the Government in 2015, provides a good foundation for strengthening the role of validation in lifelong learning. It also provides a framework for addressing financial incentives, information and counselling for specific disadvantaged groups in Romania.

The National Authority for Qualification was re-organised by establishing a specific structure responsible for validation; this is considered a policy commitment for further development of validation services in Romania. The current efforts in the area of National Qualification Register are also favourable for supporting the validation services in the future. Over the next years, the main challenges will be to create sound mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of the Lifelong Learning Strategy, where validation plays an important role in increasing participation in lifelong learning in Romania. Another challenge will be to address the needs for information, counselling and access to validation for specific disadvantaged target groups by developing concrete strategic interventions.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

Since 2014, the general approach and definition of the validation system in Romania has not been changed. According to the first legislation in 2004, the validation is defined as *the process of assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning*. The same definition is also used in the National Law of Education No. 1/2011, which reaffirms the role of validation of LLL policies.

In terms of a policy framework for validation, the focus is on competences identified, as is the case, in Occupational Standards or Professional Standards linked to a specific professional qualification. Little progress has been made within the formal pre-university (general and VET) and higher education sectors. Although the new law of education³ has some specific references to the student's lifelong learning portfolios as a means for the validation of skills acquired outside the formal educational system, there are not yet specific procedures in place to implement this measure. Moreover, validation in the formal system is also challenged by the partial permeability between the IVET, CVET and HE systems.

¹ Centre for assessment and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts

² Strategia Națională de Învățare pe Tot Parcursul Vieții 2015-2020 aprobată prin HG nr. 418/2015

³ National Law of Education no. 1/2011. Art. 73 - Chapter on Lifelong Learning.

The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is coordinating the validation activities at national level. The local assessment centres have been given the role to apply the policies and methodologies that are defined at the national level by the NQA.

The centres for assessment are local private and public bodies that are authorized to conduct the validation procedures, according to the national legislation. According to the Order no. 4543/468 from 23 August 20014, the authorisation procedure is based on a self-assessment report conducted by the assessment centre and in the second stage, the NQA is responsible for the external assessment and authorisation. NQA uses a top-down approach in monitoring and coordinating the activities of the assessment centres, which have to regularly report their activities to the NQA and to apply periodically for authorisation for the specific qualification they need to assess.

Sectoral Committees participate in the development of the framework regarding training, assessment and certification of competences and they validate the qualifications and associated standards, except the ones from HE.

.However, some sectors seem to be more active in validation than others, based on their better sectoral organization and representation. The authorisation process is open to any private or public organisation that expresses an interest in assessing and certifying a certain qualification. The authorisation for a certain qualification is available for three years from the moment of finalising the authorisation procedure and can be renewed at the request of the organisation. Therefore, the assessment centres are authorised based on a specific qualification request and cannot apply any validation procedures for other types of qualification where they do not have the authorisation.

Therefore, according to the national register of the assessment centres, the sectors of services, construction and social protection have a higher representation among the assessment centres. This situation is not the result of a specific sector priority policy, but is rather the result of the sector's interest and specific agenda around validation. However, all the sectors are following the same validation approach, methodology and tools that are used at national level.

According to the new Law of National Education, the former National Council for Adult Training (CNFPA), in charge of coordinating the validation of professional/vocational skills acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts, was reorganised in 2011 under the new National Qualifications Authority (NQA). The National Qualifications Authority took over the responsibilities for coordinating the validation of adult's professional skills acquired in non-formal learning contexts, thus being the body authorising the assessment centres. It was also appointed as National Reference Point for implementing the National Qualification Framework. This institutional change provided some benefits in terms of a more coherent approach between the validation system and the National Qualification Framework, but at the same time, it weakened the focus for a more systematic coordination of the validation system. In general, the National Qualifications Authority splits its responsibilities between many other issues, such as the adult training authorisation process, the involvement of sector committees in drafting new qualifications, quality assurance in continuous training, etc. More recently, the National Centre for Accreditation (NCA) was established in the framework of the NAQ by the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 49/26.06.2014. The NCA is an institutional structure with no legal status, under the NQA, that has the following tasks:

- Authorising and monitoring the assessment centres;
- Revising the professional competences assessment methodology for learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts;
- Managing the register of certificates issued by the local assessment centres;
- Managing the register of authorised assessment centres.

The need to establish the NCA structure was determined by the fact that the NQA is undergoing institutional restructuring due to the expansion of its complex responsibilities. The setting up of the NCA may be a good step towards an enhanced policy focus on validation in future years.

The NQA has limited experience so far in promoting good practices of validation across the education sectors. However, the newly established National Centre for Accreditation (NCA) has a more active role to play in promoting good practices in the near future.

It is difficult to estimate the real outcomes and impact of validation in the absence of systematic data, research or evaluation of the existing validation arrangements. More should be done in the future on data collection and analyses of the validation outcomes in Romania.

Romania has a national and rather centralised approach to validation in terms of definition, policy framework and mechanisms. The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) is coordinating the validation activities at national level. The local assessment centres have the role to apply the policies and methodologies that are defined at the national level by the NQA. The advantage of having a national centralised approach to the policy on validation, with only one authority responsible for the accreditation of assessment centres across sectors, lies in the coherence ensured in terms of inter-sectoral recognition of the validation processes and outcomes. Moreover, the fact the NQA is also responsible for qualifications can be seen as an opportunity for linkages between formal qualifications and validation procedures. However, the main disadvantages are linked to the fact that the NQA's institutional capacity is rather limited in covering all aspects of validation in all sectors.

Therefore, despite the progress achieved in the last two years (2014-2015), there are specific challenges remaining, such as: the selection and development of validation practitioners, improving funding arrangements, setting up monitoring practices, targeting priority groups and improving the methods used.

Romania has no specific policies or initiatives directed towards the validation of skills for immigrants/refugees. However, the new LLL strategy set a specific priority measure for the validation of skills acquired by individuals with work experience from abroad. Those individuals have the right to enter the labour market in the same conditions of the law as Romanian citizens, including all the rights regarding training". The LLL Strategy is still at an early stage of implementation and thus concrete steps to implement this priority measure are not yet planned.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

Although Romania did not change significantly its approach to validation⁴ since 2004, many relevant policy interventions and legislation were adopted in recent years. These added new clarifications or some improvements to the system. These policies were mentioned in the 2014 report:

- The new Law of National Education no.1/2011 explicitly promoted the importance of lifelong learning and provides a focus on the validation of formal and non-formal learning and lifelong learning counselling at all levels of education. Although very supportive to the validation approach, many of the regulations provided in the Law of National Education no.1/2011 faced important challenges in the operational and implementation stage, such as: delays in drafting specific methodologies and procedural legislation,

⁴ Common Order No. 4543/468 from 23 August 2004 for approving the procedure on assessment and certification of competences acquired in a non-formal and informal context, based on the OG 129/2000, with further modification and completions.

weak coordination between the main stakeholders, limited institutional capacity in implementing the legislation, lack of financial mechanisms in place etc.

- In 2011, according to the new Law of National Education, the former National Council for Adult Training (CNFPA) – a tripartite body in charge of coordinating the validation of professional/vocational skills acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts, was reorganised under the new National Authority for Qualifications (NQA) under the Ministry of National Education. This new body was given clear responsibilities for coordinating the validation of adult's professional skills acquired in non-formal learning contexts, thus being the body accrediting the assessment centres. This institutional change provided some benefits in terms of a more coherent approach between the validation system and the National Qualification Framework, but at the same time, it weakened the focus for a more systematic coordination of the validation system. In general, the NQA splits its responsibilities between many other issues, such as the adult training authorisation process, the involvement of sector committees in drafting new qualifications, quality assurance in continuous training, etc.
- In December 2013, Romania also adopted the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the Government Decision no. 918/2013, as a good basis for validation policy and system development. Moreover, the Government Ordinance *No. 567 from 15 July 2015 provided some new updates and modifications to the previous ordinance no. 918/2013.*

Since January 2014, important policy and institutional changes to VET have been put in place at national level in Romania. The recent developments at policy level are related not only to the strategic and legal framework on validation, but also to stakeholder involvement. The main recent national policies and strategies related to validation issues are the following:

- Stating the recognition and validation of prior learning among the priority measures of the *Strategic Framework for increasing participation in lifelong learning in Romania*, adopted by the Romanian Government in June 2015 (Government Decision No.418/03.06.2015). The LLL Strategy was drafted by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research and a large consultation process was also carried out during its elaboration. The strategy was drafted with the support of the World Bank and is an ex-ante conditionality for Romania in order to access the ESF Funds for 2016-2020. The strategy on LLL focuses on three major pillars of interventions:
 - **Pillar 1. Access and incentives for participation:** concrete measures were proposed to better connect and value learning acquired in different tracks (e.g. VET and HE) and in different learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal). Measures to integrate different LLL services are also foreseen, especially by supporting the institutional development of LLL Community Centres, as multifunctional LLL providers and validation centres at the community level as well as by supporting regulations in order to diversify the training provision in different institutional settings.
 - **Pillar 2. Quality and relevance**
 - **Pillar 3. Partnership for better information:** specific measures are foreseen to address the need for a strengthened partnership, including better coordination, information campaigns and counselling services,
 - Under its 3 main pillars, the strategy⁵ clearly states that specific priority will be given to measures for increasing recognition of prior learning, including financial incentives for potential beneficiaries, information and counselling on validation and also coordination between stakeholders and capacity building of the assessment centres.

⁶ According to the *Concept note on common coordination of the implementation, monitoring-evaluation of the sectoral strategies in education and training*, Ministry of Education and Research, no. 2152/12.11.2015

The strategy also mentions priority target groups: unemployed or inactive individuals, people that had work experience abroad, staff working in public administration and disadvantaged groups (adults with low levels of qualifications, people living in rural areas etc.). The NQA was appointed⁶ to coordinate the LLL Strategy at national level. The LLL Strategy is currently at an early stage of implementation and thus no measure of the LLL Strategy has yet been put in place.

- Establishing the NCA by the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 49/26.06.2014. The NCA is an institutional structure under the NQA and is responsible for the authorization of assessment centres and practitioners in validation of non-formal and informal learning of adults. The NCA is also managing the National Register of the authorized centres. According to the interviews conducted with the NQA representative, the need to establish the NCA structure was determined by the fact that the NQA is undergoing institutional restructuring. This is due to the expansion of its complex responsibilities as being the National Reference Point of NQF, the national body for the accreditation of adult training providers and also the national body responsible for the validation system in Romania.
- A policy of progressively changing the subordination of the NQA from the Ministry of National Education to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly was adopted.
- According to the Strategic Plan⁷ of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly for 2016, two important measures related to assessment and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal context are mentioned: taking over the coordination of the NQA under the Ministry of Labour and supporting the development of the assessment centres, especially in highly competitive sectors, in order to facilitate the increase of the employment rate. The recent policy change of progressively taking over the coordination of the NQA by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly may be an important step towards a better linking of the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning system to the labour market and also a sign that the validation system will be developed more closely to the labour market demands. However, according to the management staff of the NQA, the NQA should obtain a status of institutional autonomy, based on close cooperation with both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly. The autonomy status is still a part of the NQA vision for the future and is not yet regulated by any official document.
- Currently, the NQA is preparing the National Register for Qualifications – that will bring into one place the descriptions of all qualifications obtained by all means – formal initial education, tertiary education and continuous training. The National Register for Qualifications represents a good foundation for the validation process, in terms of using the qualifications' descriptions as the starting point of the validation procedure.

2.2 Validation in education and training

Since 2014, no specific changes have been implemented in the validation system in initial education and training. There are no mechanisms in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning in relation to obtaining the same type of certification for general education, upper secondary level (baccalaureate), IVET or university (HE) education.

⁶ According to the *Concept note on common coordination of the implementation, monitoring-evaluation of the sectoral strategies in education and training*, Ministry of Education and Research, no. 2152/12.11.2015

⁷ <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/strategii-politici-programe/4233-prioritati-strategie-planuri-actiuni-sectoriale-anul-2016>

Starting with 2011⁸, schools are allowed to use specific assessment and validation methodology only in the case of the Second Chance programme, in order to provide flexible access to this educational pathway.

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

2.3 Validation and the labour market

There are no specific policies or regulations on validation at national or regional level aiming to help people to access the labour market or to support their career development. National Agency for Employment provides validation services for jobseekers free of charge. Sectoral Committees may develop their own assessment centres, as any other training provider in Romania, but, in doing so, they should follow the same legal framework. However, there are some labour market measures targeted towards unemployed individuals that might lead to a validation process such as information and counselling services at the level of the county employment agencies or at the level of other accredited providers. Moreover, job seekers are also entitled to receive specific recommendations for a further training programme or for a competences assessments centre, based on counselling services provided. Job seekers that are applying for a competences assessment can benefit free of charge for these services in an authorized centre of the employment agency or in another private centre, selected through public procurement.

2.3.1 Skills audits

Since the 2014 report, no specific progress has been identified in Romania in the area of skills audits. The LLL Strategy (adopted in 2015) however specifies some measures on information provision regarding the validation system and on specific counselling that should be implemented by 2020. So far, no specific progress in strategy implementation has been undertaken on the skills audit measure.

As already mentioned in the 2014 report, the law of education no.1/2011 defines a set of related concepts about the validation of non-formal and informal learning, such as: learning outcomes, identification of learning outcomes, validation of learning outcomes, recognition of learning outcomes and certification of learning outcomes. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is seen as a lifelong learning service offered to individuals in order for them to become aware of their own skills and competences and to receive a certification linked to a specific qualification. Although the section of the law devoted to lifelong learning makes specific references to counselling and guidance, there is no direct link between validation and counselling.

The law on national education is also providing some regulation on using the lifelong learning portfolio for all students in pre-university education. The lifelong learning portfolio contains evidence of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. This evidence helps to facilitate the individual school pathway of all students and creates better prospects for entering the labour market. Since 2011, some schools have taken into account the lifelong learning portfolio of students as an additional evaluation tool in order to take decisions when the school is experiencing more enrolment applications than available places. However, using the lifelong learning portfolio is not yet a common practice in most of the schools in Romania and is not yet embedded in schools as a tool for learning assessment.

⁸Ministry of National Education (31.08.2011) Methodology for *Second Chance* programme in lower secondary education

2.4 Validation and the third sector

Since the 2014 report, no specific progress has been made in the area of validation in the third sector. However, the Law No. 78/2014⁹ on volunteering activities provides a specific system for validation of the learning and skills acquired by volunteers that are officially recognised based on a volunteering contract and a volunteering certification. According to the law, the volunteering certificate is not linked to any qualification, but may be an advantage for volunteers in the labour market, such as in companies' selection and recruitment policies and processes.

3 Links to national qualification systems

In December 2013, Romania adopted the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) with Government Decision no. 918/2013. The NQF has 8 levels of qualifications that can be acquired through the formal education and training system in Romania and by recognition of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The GD no. 918/2013 was further modified in 2015, by the GD 567/2015. According to the last revision in 2015, validation is allowed currently only for level 3 or lower to obtain a qualification through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is still linked with occupational standards and is not yet operational with regards to formal education. There are links between NQF and the qualifications acquired in continuous training. Therefore, at the moment the access to formal education by learning acquired through non-formal/informal learning can be given until level 3 NQF.

More recent legislation was adopted in Romania with the aim of better linking the national qualification system with the education and training system, as follows:

- Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research Order No. 5204/2014¹⁰ on approving the methodology for registering the higher education qualifications in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (NRQHE).
- Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research Order No. 5613/2015¹¹ on approving the graduation certificate obtained at the end of lifelong learning programmes at post-university level.

At the moment, the above mentioned legislation is the subject of public debate. The debate is questioning the consultation process that took place before the legislation was introduced and calls for more specific methodologies to make the legislation a reality in terms of qualifications equivalence between different training pathways. The legislation seems to rather support a stronger formal status of the education and training diploma on the labour market (especially in the case of higher education). The legislation is not supported by specific procedures in order to ensure that the equivalence between the education diploma and qualifications required on the labour market is based on the same type of standards and assessment procedures.

⁹ Law no. 78/2014 on regulations for volunteering activities in Romania, <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gm4tsojsji/legea-nr-78-2014-privind-reglementarea-activitatii-de-voluntariat-in-romania>

¹⁰ Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research Order No. 5204/2014, on approving the Methodology of registration of higher education qualifications in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS).

¹¹ Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research Order No. 5613/2015 on the model for graduation certificate used at the end on lifelong learning programs at post-university level.

4 Standards

According to the current legislation, occupational standards and training standards are used for the validation procedure in the case of continuous training of adults. The occupational standards are not the same as the training standards that are used for certification in the formal education and training system. However, it is expected that the occupational and training standards have the same value on the labour market, although the situation may vary from one sector to another.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The recently established National Centre for Accreditation¹²(NCA) as dedicated structure for the validation system under the National Qualifications Authority - is an important step that may improve the coordination of the validation system in Romania. The NCA is responsible for:

- accreditation of assessment centers and practitioners in the validation of non-formal and informal learning of adults;
- coordination of the assessment centres' authorisation process;
- training and certifying validation practitioners, including assessors and external and internal observers;
- quality assurance: monitoring the performance of validation centres and of the individual assessors through certified internal and external quality checkers.

As stated in the 2014 Report, there are no specific regional structures for validation in Romania. According to the newly proposed (but not yet in place)" Methodology on the criteria and procedures for evaluation/certification of assessors, for assessors of the assessors and external evaluators and authorisation/accreditation of the Assessment Centres for professional skills in non-formal and informal contexts (2011)", there is a measure to decentralise the validation system by establishing regional bodies. These bodies would be accredited by the NQA to carry out assessment and certification processes for the assessor skills and would provide quality assurance for the assessment centres in the region. As stated earlier, this proposal is not yet in place.

At economic sector level, the "sectoral committees"which are social dialogue structures comprising employee and employer representatives (set up under the tutelage of the NQA) are involved in this area. Sectoral committees participate through three main activities: contribution to the development of a legal framework regarding training, evaluation and certification of competences at sectoral level; promotion of a competence-based system of training and evaluation; contribution to the development and validation of vocational training standards¹³. However, it is the opinion of the author of this report that the role of sectoral committees in the validation of non-formal and informal learning as such is still minimal, especially because of their unclear legal status and the lack of supporting measures for their institutional development.

The law of education no.1/2011 proposes also the establishment of a new local institution called a Community Lifelong Learning Centre, as a community centre that might also provide validation and counselling services according to specific local needs. However, the methodology for establishing the Community Lifelong Learning Centre is not yet in place

¹²Government Emergency Ordinance No. 49/26.06.2014

¹³CNFPA (2005). "Tripartite agreement on National Qualifications Framework." Approved on 23.11.2005.

although many stakeholders see the proposal as helping to increase access to validation services of specific disadvantaged groups, especially rural and isolated communities.

The Assessment Centres are responsible for providing validation services based on the individual request of beneficiaries. An assessment commission is responsible for applying the validation methodology and for sending the requirements for certificates to the NQA..

There have been no major changes concerning the role of different stakeholders in the validation process, since the 2014 country report. According to the common Order No. 4543/468 of 23 August 2004 regarding the assessment and certification of informal and non-formal learning, any legal entity in Romania could apply to become a validation centre, based on a request to the NQA (formerly to CNFPA). In order to become a validation centre, the legal entity should provide evidence for assessment procedures, tools and appropriate expertise in the specific qualification or competence to which they are applying. The validation centre is accredited by NQA based on a self-assessment and also based on a clear authorisation procedure carried out by special commissions appointed by NQA.

Education and training providers:

As we already mentioned in the 2014 Report, no specific responsibilities are in place for education and training providers, but they also may apply for authorization to become assessment centres for specific qualifications. As stated in the 2014 Report, there are only a few singular examples of schools or universities applying to NQA to become assessment centres for certain specific qualifications. Starting with 2011¹⁴, schools are allowed to use specific assessment and validation methodology only in the case of the Second Chance programme, in order to provide flexible access to this educational pathway.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

As already mentioned in the 2014 Report, no specific responsibilities are in place for sector actors. Only sectoral committees might have a role in designing and making recommendations for specific sector related assessment criteria.

Third sector organisations

As cited in the 2014 Report, no specific responsibilities are in place for third sector organisations. Although they are the main providers of informal and non-formal learning, they are not perceived as providing necessarily qualification related skills. However, some of the certificates provided by well-known third sector organizations may have a value among other organizations, although those certificates do not necessarily lead to a full qualification.

There is no coordination mechanism in place and this is one of the main causes for the small number of people benefiting from validation services. Much more remains to be done in future years in order to improve the links between assessment centres and employment services and the formal education system.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Active promotion and dissemination of information regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning is still a concern and not much progress has been made since 2014.

The low access of beneficiaries to validation services, especially among disadvantaged groups is an indicator showing that much more should be done in terms of information campaigns. Recruitment and promotion are generally carried out by validation centres

¹⁴Ministry of National Education (31.08.2011) Methodology for *Second Chance* programme in lower secondary education,

themselves through various means (leaflets, brochures, etc.). The National Qualification Authority has also been involved in raising awareness about validation and its benefits through its website and published brochures.

However, the recently approved LLL strategy clearly stated as a priority measure the information campaign in order to increase awareness of the benefits of validation among potential beneficiaries. It is expected that as soon as the strategy will be put in place, a national information campaign will be launched, with a specific focus on the targeted beneficiaries mentioned in the strategy, such as unemployed or inactive individuals, people with prior work experience abroad, staff working in public administration and other disadvantaged groups (adults with low levels of qualifications, people isolated in rural areas etc.).

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

There is a lack of integrated approaches between the main institutions and networks responsible for counselling and guidance on the one hand and equivalent agencies responsible for validation, on the other hand. This was also the situation mentioned in the 2014 Report.

There is no significant progress on this matter. However, the LLL strategy highlights the role of counselling in lifelong learning programmes; all three pillars of the LLL strategy stress the need for improving the counselling services for adults in terms of access and coordination as well as financial support and quality.

As was the case in 2014, the Ministry of Education is responsible for counselling services in schools and universities; the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly through its Employment Agencies, is responsible for counselling services for unemployed people. This counselling is followed in many cases by a training course or validation service through one of the centres from their own network or through another authorized provider. The validation centres are functioning under the supervision of the National Qualifications Authority. There is little coordination between those parallel services and it is very rarely that an individual could have access to integrated services, according to their specific needs. Only in the case of services to unemployed people is there integration between services – counselling and then training or validation..

Similar to 2014, pre-service guidance tends to be provided by evaluators who work for validation centres. Before an assessment process starts, beneficiaries are familiarised with the relevant occupational/training standards and assessment methods. Feedback is given at the end of the assessment process in written and oral format. In some cases, beneficiaries might receive a comprehensive feedback report and are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the assessment process and outcomes. Beneficiaries have the right to challenge the result of the assessment.

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

Since the 2014 report, no specific measures have been implemented at national level in order to enhance awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The profile of the validation practitioners is still a current issue in terms of minimum standards of professional experience. According to the legislation in place, the assessor of

professional competences must be a specialist with up-to-date experience of work and/or coordination in the professional area which the centres have assigned him/her to assess. The legislation does not specify the number of years of experience the expert needs to have before applying for certification but in practice he/she is expected to have at least one or two years' of experience, based on their professional activity in the field.

7.2 Qualification requirements

No changes have been introduced since 2014 regarding the required qualifications for validation practitioners. The qualification of an evaluator is level 6 in the NQF and 6 in the EQF, but it is understood that the level of education can vary depending upon the occupation in which the evaluator specialises. A university degree is not a compulsory requirement but for some occupations the evaluator could be expected to have a degree.

The certification is carried out by NQA, the national competent authority in this field. The certification is carried out according to the requirements of the occupational standard of "evaluator of professional competences".

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Since the report in 2014, the National Qualifications Authority provided some training courses for validation practitioners in the framework of several ESF-funded projects. However, the training is not compulsory and therefore is contextualised and less consistent.

8 Quality assurance

There are no major changes in the quality assurance system and procedures in Romania, compared to those presented in the 2014 report.

The quality assurance procedures in place in 2014 and currently relate to the authorization of assessment centres and relevance of procedures for qualification standards. The National Authority for Qualification is the main body responsible for the quality assurance processes in this field. More specifically, the National Authority for Qualification is responsible for the following:

- Authorisation and monitoring of the assessment centres;
- Certification of the assessors as well as the internal and external quality checkers or observers.
- Managing the National Register of assessment centres and of the assessors.

8.1 Quality assurance systems / procedures

The quality assurance system is still focused on input indicators related to the institutional settings and capacity, and to the profile of assessors that is required to meet the standards described in the national occupation's classification. However, according to the law, the authorised assessment centres are evaluated and monitored regularly by external observers certified by NQA. The centres are also subject to regular self-evaluation. In addition, at the end of the assessment process, the internal quality checkers verify the documents resulting from the validation process.

The performance of individual assessors is evaluated and monitored by internal observers also certified by NQA. The legislation sets out clear competence requirements for internal observers. The actual assessment procedure is followed by a process of internal verification, and there is an opportunity for the applicant to appeal against the decision. However, institutional accountability is still a challenge given that all the quality assurance reports are rather internal bureaucratic documents and none of them are made public for a broader audience.

8.2 Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework for validation centres is based on the Decree No. 4543/468 of 23 August 2004: Some changes on the evaluation approach are expected to be developed in the near future in order to meet the new provisions of the Education Law no.1/2011. However, at present, there is a monitoring procedure that includes the following steps:

- The assessment centre submits a report every trimester, containing information about the occupations/qualifications for which they assess corresponding competences, number of assessments, number of issued certificates, candidates' appeals and ways in which they were addressed;
- NQA, through their external observers, monitors the activity of the assessment centre;
- In the event that the centre does not meet one performance criteria set out in the legal framework, it is notified by the president of NQA. The centre has 60 days to address the identified shortcoming(s);
- If the centre does not succeed in addressing the shortcoming(s), the NQA withdraws the authorisation of the centre.

According to the interview with representatives of the NQA management, the NQA intensified its monitoring visits of assessment centres in 2015 in order to make their activity more efficient. To better monitor the validation activities of the assessment centres, the NQA reorganised its staff involved in validation under the structure of the National Accreditation Centre. Although the procedures were not changed, the NAC staff is in charge of monitoring the level of implementation of the current procedures in order to increase the quality of the validation services of the assessment centres.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

There are no specific funding mechanisms in place at national level for validation and the situation has not improved compared to the previous report in 2014. Validation services are free of charge only for unemployed individuals, financed by the unemployment insurance fund. According to the current legislation, any registered job seeker is entitled to benefit, free of charge, from information, counselling and validation services that are offered by the National Agency for Employment at the county level.

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

However, the LLL Strategy foresees a clear measure on financial support and other financial incentives mechanisms that should be put in place until 2020. So far, no specific steps have been carried out in terms of planning or implementing this strategy.

9.2 Distribution of costs

No specific changes have been introduced compared to the situation reported in 2014. Each assessment centre should pay a fee for authorization to assess specific qualification skills. The costs for validation process are covered by the individuals and in some cases by the employers or the sending organisations. The costs for the validation process is subject to market forces and may vary from 150 EUR to 300 EUR¹⁵ per person, depending on the number of validated competences and on the pricing policy of each assessment center. However, the costs for validation are in general advertised by assessment centres as considerably cheaper than the costs for going down the route of a full course in order to qualify. In recent years, some ESF projects have also implemented validation for some target groups and costs were covered by the project. (2014 Report)

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Since 2014, there has been no progress in the area of researching or reporting the cost-effectiveness of validation procedures. Therefore, there are no quantitative or qualitative research papers, reports or data on benefits to individuals at the national level in Romania.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

There is still a challenge to extract valid public data on the authorised centres, number of qualification and beneficiaries in Romania. The official site of the NQA provides a list with all the authorised centres and qualifications, but it is rather difficult to analyse the data provided in the table. The difficulties in analysing data are also caused by the fact that one assessment centre may be authorised for various qualifications that have a variable number of years of validity (from 1 to 3 years). An additional challenge in analysing the data stems from the fact that every year, one assessment centre could be registered in different types of situations such as: newly accredited, re-accredited, withdrawn accreditation. Therefore, a more accurate public accessible data of validation would provide a better picture of the trend in validation in Romania.

¹⁵The costs are only estimated based on public information provided by assessment centres (for e.g.: <http://www.phoenixconsulting.ro/centru.html>)

According to the data provided by the NQA, compared to the 2010-2013 period, the number of active authorised centres and beneficiaries in 2014-2016 remains constant and there is an increase of the number of qualifications. However, the year 2015 seems to mark an important increase compared to the previous year, especially in the case of the number of qualifications and beneficiaries.

	No. of accredited centres	No. of accredited centres	Number of beneficiaries
2010-2013	61	116	21,900
2014-2015	61	197	22,765
	No. of accredited centres	No. of accredited centres	Number of beneficiaries
2014	27	78	8,158
2015	34	119	14,607

9.4.2 Validation users

The most common qualifications obtained through validation were at qualification levels 2 and 3. The majority of validation users were certified in the services and construction sectors.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants/ refugees and other disadvantaged groups

There are no specific regulations for the validation to address the needs of migrants/ refugees.

10 Validation methods

Since 2014, the validation methods have remained the same. No ICT-based assessment methods are yet in use for validation. As mentioned in the 2014 report, article 3 (h) from annex 1 of Order No. 4543/468 stipulates that the methods used in the evaluation of professional competences include “self-evaluation, direct observation, oral test, written test, project-based evaluation, simulation or structured observation, reporting or evaluation by others”.

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

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

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods	X		
Interview	X		x
Observation			x
Portfolio method		X	
Presentation	X		x
Simulation and evidence extracted from work			x
Tests and examinations	X	X	x
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify			

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Examples

Validation of prior competences for Social Pedagogy students

The ESF-funded Project under the intervention measure 1.2. „Quality in higher education” (from May 2014 to November 2015), implemented by the University „Alexandru IoanCuza” – Iași, aimed to test 300 students in order to identify their prior learning in the field of social pedagogy as well as to open the full process of validation for 50 students in the same area.

In the framework of this project, a specific validation methodology was developed. The methodology is available at: <http://mediaec.uaic.ro/Virtual%20Scientific%20Library/content/atacheddocs/2c1cf6fe0c16862dc35813f228669f8a.pdf>

Source: <http://darps.uaic.ro/>



Country report Romania

2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



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