CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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European Commission

EN

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018

FINAL SYNTHESIS REPORT

Foreword

The urgency of lifelong learning has never been clearer. The speed of change in the labour market and wider society means that building skills throughout life is more than ever a must. Formal education and training can only partly cope with the skills challenges. People learn through work, volunteering, leisure activities, company-based training, online learning and more. However, all too often, individuals cannot use these new skills to access further education or to progress in their careers. As highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Skills Agenda for Europe, people must be able to use the full range of their skills – regardless of where they acquired them - to go further with learning or working. Learning from whatever source has a value – so it needs to be validated. Validation is defined as the process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. In short, validation makes learning visible and gives it value.

Validation is therefore a crucial building block of a real lifelong learning society. It allows better matching of skills with labour demand, helps transferability of skills between companies and sectors, and supports mobility across the European labour market. It combats social exclusion by improving the employability of early school leavers, the unemployed, low-skilled adults, third country nationals, and other groups at risk (see the Upskilling Pathways Initiative).

In 2012, the Council Recommendation on validation encouraged Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. The European Commission and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) assist the Member States in this process, including through the European Guidelines on validation which provide policy and practical advice to Member States and stakeholders. The European Inventory, of which this synthesis report is part, provides a unique picture of how validation is being used at national, regional and local levels in Europe. It includes reports for all Member States, EFTA countries and four European Training Foundation partner countries. It also contains thematic analyses of key issues on design and implementation of validation. The Inventory supports dialogue between stakeholders in developing and implementing validation in Europe.

The European Inventory on validation is an excellent example of long-standing collaboration between the Commission and CEDEFOP. This 7th edition is particularly important, as the first after the 2018 target date set by the Recommendation and will serve as one input to the Commission's report to Member States on progress in implementing the Recommendation. All Member States have taken up the challenge set in 2012 and have been putting in place, each in its own context, national arrangements for validation. Progress has been made in developing validation strategies, but these are typically neither comprehensive in scope, nor fully implemented on the ground. The next chapter of work to make validation a reality will need to address the labour market, education and training and wider community contexts – people need easy access to validation opportunities in all of these settings.

So, there is still work to do. Establishing the legal and strategic frameworks for validation is not enough: effort is needed to connect validation to other practices such as guidance, especially involving private and civil society sectors, with the goal of mainstreaming validation opportunities in learning and working pathways. More needs to be done in training and professionalisation of validation practitioners as well as in establishing data collection and monitoring systems. Through expanding and improving the existing systems, we will be able to make validation a valued choice for all. This report is a further step towards this goal.

Jürgen Siebel
Cedefop
Executive Director

Manuela Geleng
European Commission
Director, Skills

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ES1 Executive summary

ES1.1 Background and Context

This report is part of the 2018 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Its aim is to present a synthesis of the current state of play on the validation of non-formal and informal learning across Europe and to report overall progress towards the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation (hereinafter, Council Recommendation on validation)[1]. The year 2018 acquires a special significance in this update, because the Council Recommendation on validation called on Member States to establish, by 2018, validation arrangements allowing individuals to identify, document, assess and certify their competences.

Validation is a process that aims to make non-formal and informal learning visible socially, in the labour market and in the education and training system, based on the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of such learning. Validation has the potential to contribute to achieving the goals set by the Europe 2020 strategy, as it can contribute to the matching between skills supply and demand, supporting mobility across sectors and countries and fighting social exclusion.

ES1.2 Method

The synthesis is primarily based on an analysis of data collected by country experts between March – June 2018 who provided data according to a set of standardised indicators in 'country fiches' and produced country reports which describe current validation national arrangements in depth. This synthesis report covers 36 countries[2] included in the 2018 European Inventory.

The information collected covers three broad areas: education and training (including five subsectors - general education, IVET, CVET, higher education, adult education), the labour market and the third sector.

ES1.3 Progress towards the Council Recommendation

Like the 2016 Inventory, the project examined the degree of development experienced in relation to 11 principles set out in the Council Recommendation on validation. It is important to note that the Council Recommendation is not prescriptive regarding how progress or achievement should be measured in relation to principles it outlines. Table ES1.1 provides one possible interpretation of the level of comprehensiveness on each recommendation principle, based on the available information and based on the information collected. Given this, the table should not be understood as a final assessment of the state of development in complying with the Recommendation.

[1] The contents of this synthesis report – as those of country reports and fiches - cannot necessarily be taken to reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, Cedefop, the EQF AG Members or the members of the external 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 report.

[2] EU-28, EFTA countries, Turkey. A separate synthesis report has been produced for Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

The level of comprehensiveness in the table is calculated through the creation of a scoring method based on the data collected. The scoring is based on the degree that the different principles are applied across all the areas (education and training, labour market and third sector) equally weighted. This means that if a principle is applied in all areas, the principle will be rated 100%. We applied pre-defined thresholds for country classification: high level of comprehensiveness (if the percentage obtained was between 70% and 100%); medium level of comprehensiveness (30-70%) and low level of comprehensiveness (less than 30%). (A detailed note on the scoring method is provided in Annexes 1 and 2).

Table ES1.1 Degree of comprehensiveness in relation to the Council Recommendation principles

Recommendation principle	Level of comprehensiveness
Validation arrangements in place	High
Guidance and counselling is readily available	High
Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures is available and accessible	High
Validation arrangements are linked to NQFs and in line with the EQF	High
Transparent quality assurance measures support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation	Medium-high
Qualifications or parts of qualifications obtained through validation comply with agreed standards that are the same or equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes	Medium
Synergies between validation and credit systems exist	Medium
Disadvantaged groups are particularly likely to benefit from validation	Medium
EU/ national transparency tools are promoted to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes	Medium
Provision is made for the development of the professional competences of validation practitioners	Low
Skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment	Low

This overview suggests that there are two principles where efforts are to be particularly stepped-up.

Firstly, provision for the professional development of validation practitioners remains the principle with the lowest level of development.

Secondly, further work is also needed to make skills audits available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment. While visible progress can be seen in this last area, with increasing number of countries offering skills audits, such offer in many countries is not immediate or the timeframe within which it is provided is not specified.

Whilst the findings described below show a high level of complementarity with those of the 2016 synthesis report, a simple comparison between the situation in 2016 and 2018 is not possible because the approach to data collection has changed in certain aspects - for example to extend data collection to also cover the labour market and third sector in a number of principles that covered the education and training area exclusively in 2016.

ES1.4 Summary of key findings

This section outlines the key findings emerging from the country research in relation to the principles outlined in the Council Recommendation and broader aspects related to the implementation of validation. Further details and an in-depth overview of each principle are provided in the main body of the report.

Table ES1.2 2018 Inventory summary key findings

Validation arrangements in place	In 2018, validation arrangements are available in at least one of the three broad areas (education and training, labour market and third sector) in all 36 countries. Validation arrangements are most commonly in place across the education and training area. The labour market area has the lower number of countries with validation arrangements in place, but there is good progress from 2016. The third sector remains a significant area for validation. The results show that while countries are developing general strategies for the creation of validation arrangements, they continue to progress at different speeds towards comprehensive validation arrangements.
Information, advice and guidance on benefits, opportunities, and procedures	IAG is usually 'not a requirement' in validation initiatives. When IAG is provided in relation to validation, this is most often focused on the 'process' – i.e. the steps needed to obtain validation - rather than about assessment and outcomes and benefits of validation.
Guidance and counselling is readily accessible	IAG in relation to validation is a widespread practice in education and training and the labour market, but provision is much less prevalent in the third sector area. Coordination across areas is still limited.
Links to national qualifications systems and frameworks / synergies between validation and credit systems	There is a strong link between validation and the NQF. In the education and training area, the most frequent link is that validation gives access to formal education and leads to the acquisition of modules or a part of a formal qualification. Many countries Many countries do not yet have a link between validation and the NQF in the labour market and third sector areas.
Compliance with agreed standards equivalent to qualifications obtained through formal education programmes	Standards for qualifications obtained through validation in the area of education and training, are mostly the same as standards in formal education and training. In the labour market and the third sector a considerable number of countries do not use the same standards for validation as for formal education. In the labour market, in most cases, validation is based on occupational standards.
Transparent quality assurance measures are in line with existing QA frameworks to support reliable, valid and credible assessment	Quality assurance mechanisms are in place in nearly all counties. In the education and training area, it is relatively common, but by no means universal, for countries to apply existing quality assurance frameworks to validation. However, the main trend in this area since 2016 has been a move from the application of existing quality assurance frameworks to the development of quality assurance arrangements specific to validation.
Provision is made for the development of professional competences of practitioners	Entitlement to training for validation practitioners is somewhat patchy across countries. The most common competence requirement in the education and training area is for practitioners to have professional experience, followed by having completed qualifications which are not specific to the delivery of validation initiatives. Within the labour market and third sector areas, entitlement to some form of training for validation practitioners is in place in a small number of countries.

Individuals who are unemployed have the opportunity to undergo a 'skills audit' within six months of an identified need	The use of skills audit processes has increased over the last years. Skills audits are widespread and generally target unemployed people or groups at-risk of unemployment, although often not within the timeframe specified in the 2012 Council Recommendation.
Disadvantaged groups are likely to benefit from validation	In a growing number of countries, validation initiatives are targeting disadvantaged groups. This, however, by no means appears to be a universal trend, and there are marked differences on the particular disadvantaged groups that benefit from validation.
EU/national transparency tools	In a large number of countries, use is made of transparency tools to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes. These most often include Europass and, less often, Youthpass and national tools.
Validation outputs and outcomes	In the education and training area, validation is mostly used for gaining credit towards qualifications, accessing education programmes and to gain exemptions from parts of courses. However, in most countries, it is also possible to obtain at least some type of full or partial qualification through validation. Obtaining a formal qualification through validation in a labour market context is possible in a significant number of countries. Third sector initiatives tend to be more formative than summative, and thus, outcomes are not always connected to formal qualifications.
Take-up of validation / users of validation	Data on the uptake of validation remains limited but available data suggests an upward trend in the number of participants starting/ applying for validation. However, the use of validation still appears to be limited. This is especially so for disadvantaged individuals, who are, in many countries, still not using validation initiatives.
Stages of validation	All four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) are prevalent in education and training and the labour market. In the third sector, the first two stages are more common.
Stakeholder involvement	A wide range of stakeholders are involved in validation. Education and training providers are key stakeholders in identification and documentation, assessment, and certification, along with PES. National organisations (e.g. national agencies and awarding bodies) are consistently involved in a large range of functions, and industry bodies/employers play a key role in setting standards. Provision of IAG is a function undertaken by most types of stakeholders. In the third sector, there seems to be more limited stakeholder involvement.
Coordination	Governmental organisations are increasingly a key player in the education and training area and the labour market but play a limited role in the third sector. There are signs of strengthened cooperation between key stakeholders across the three broad areas that have helped to create 'bridges' and ensure outcomes of validation that take place in one sector/area can be used in another.
Funding	Validation is mostly funded by national public funding. European Social Funding has also been a major contributor to the development of national validation systems and processes in certain countries.
Validation tools	Most of the countries with validation arrangements in place make use of a wide range of tools for obtaining evidence on individuals' knowledge, skills and competences. 'Tests and examinations' are

	the single most frequently used method, followed by 'portfolios' and 'interviews, debates and dialogues'.

Source: 2018 European Inventory country fiches.

The information gathered for the Inventory project also shows that there are some key challenges for consideration in the future:

- The main challenge for the future will be to build on existing good practices in different areas and subsectors and scale up those initiatives to enhance the degree of comprehensiveness with which the Council Recommendation principles are met.
- There is also a need for stronger monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in order to enable better assessment and documentation of costs, benefits and impact of validation in general, and of different types of specific validation initiatives and methodologies. Today data collection on different aspects of validation remains at a low level (such as data on costs, participation, type of qualification or outcomes achieved, user characteristics, success rate, length of procedure).
- There are significant differences in the use of validation between the education and training area and the labour market and third sector areas. Strengthening cooperation between key stakeholders across the three broad areas can help create 'bridges' and ensure outcomes of validation that take place in one sector/area can be used in another.
- Constrained public budgets are an obstacle to the implementation of validation. The 2018 Inventory shows that validation activities have a secure and allocated budget only in a handful of countries, whilst it appears that fees in many countries are covered by the learners themselves (at least partly), or from within learning providers' existing budget. This limits the use of validation initiatives by disadvantaged groups. Moreover, a challenge for many project-based initiatives is the lack of sustainable, long-term funding.

1 Introduction

This report is part of the 2018 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The aim of this report is to present a synthesis of the current state of play on the validation of non-formal and informal learning across Europe and to report overall progress towards the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation[3] (hereinafter, Council Recommendation on validation).

When the first European Inventory was published in 2004, validation of non-formal and informal learning was firmly rooted in the notion of lifelong learning following the publication of the European Commission's 2001 Communication 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality'[4]. Recognising that people learn throughout all stages of their life and in different ways called for a new approach to valuing learning. Across Europe, this led to the introduction of methodologies and systems for the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning. Several countries across Europe developed and applied methods to validate non-formal and informal learning, but national approaches were diverse and validation initiatives were mainly in their early stage of development.

Since the publication of the first European Inventory in 2004, it has been updated six times (2005, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018) as a tool to systematically collect quality information on validation across Europe. Over this period, validation has continued to gain political and institutional commitment. Significantly, the Council Recommendation on validation was adopted in 2012 at a time when Europe's economies were strongly affected by the 2008 recession. Validation of non-formal and informal learning was, and continues to be, intended to have a pivotal role in increasing employability and mobility (across sectors, occupations and geographies), as well as in providing motivation for lifelong learning, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged individuals and those with low qualification levels.

The Skills Agenda for Europe was launched in 2016, including actions such as Upskilling Pathways[5], the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills[6], and proposed revisions of the Europass Decision and the EQF Recommendation. The European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed and signed by the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the Commission in 2017. All have emphasised the need for lifelong development of skills to enable people to participate actively in society and the labour market.

This has contributed to clarifying the role of validation of non-formal and informal learning within comprehensive strategies for skills anticipation, development, recognition and use. Making learning more visible through validation empowers individuals and facilitates upskilling and access to and progression within the labour market, leading to a more flexible workforce and better match between skills and employment. As emphasised by Cedefop (2018), validation promises to reduce the barriers between learning in education and training and learning at work, and to enable more flexible learning progression throughout life. Moreover, it is increasingly acknowledged that the attraction of the validation of non-formal and informal learning

[3] Council of the European Union (2012).

[4] European Commission (2001).

[5] European Commission (2016).

[6] European Commission (2017).

for policymakers is that it can reduce the qualifications deficit among the adult population and, under certain conditions, lower the costs of reskilling[7].

More recently, new and evolving policy reforms that aim to improve the quality and effectiveness of lifelong learning opportunities across Europe, emphasise the importance of validation. The 2017 Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)[8] indicates as one of its aims "better linking formal, non-formal and informal learning and supporting the validation of learning outcomes acquired in different settings" and brings forward the principle that qualifications should be described in terms of learning outcomes. In addition, the 2018 Europass Decision[9] also supports better integration and visibility of learning acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings, including experiential learning, providing for skills assessment, self-assessment together with information and guidance on validation opportunities. Indeed, the Europass online platform shall provide web-based tools for: "documenting and describing skills and qualifications acquired through working and learning experiences, including through mobility and volunteering".

As with the 2014 and 2016 updates, the 2018 Inventory aims at providing an overview of validation practices in Europe and reporting progress towards the implementation of the Council Recommendation on validation. The latter acquires a special significance in this update, because the Council Recommendation on validation called on Member States to establish, by 2018, validation arrangements allowing individuals to identify, document, assess and certify their competences.

The synthesis is primarily based on an analysis of data collected by country experts through a 'country fiche database', providing data according to a set of standardised indicators and country reports which describe current validation national arrangements.

The report offers an overview of the validation landscape in 33 countries (EU-28, EFTA countries, Turkey). For Belgium, two country reports were produced[10] and for the United Kingdom[11], three country reports were produced. As such, the total number of country reports produced was 36. A separate synthesis report has been produced for Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia. In addition to country reports, as part of the Inventory a series of thematic reports and three international case studies were also produced.

The information collected covers three broad areas separately, to differentiate the broad range of practices available. By broad areas, we refer to the education and training area (divided into five subsectors - general education, IVET, CVET, higher education, adult education), the labour market area and the third sector area. A detailed note on the methodology used to produce the 2018 European Inventory is provided in Annex 1.

[7] Cedefop (2018).

[8] The 2017 Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017/C 189/03). Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/en.pdf

[9] The Europass Decision (EU) 2018 /646. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018D0646&from=EN

[10] Two reports have been prepared for Belgium as follows: Flanders, Wallonia.

[11] Three reports have been prepared for the United Kingdom as follows: England and Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales.

1.1 Principles for validation in the 2012 Council Recommendation

This report synthesises a large volume of data on policies and practices on validation across Europe. This section provides an overview of current progress towards the objectives set up in the Council Recommendation on validation. In order to evaluate the progress, the Inventory draws on 11 principles that the Council Recommendation outlines:

1	Validation arrangements in place
2	Guidance and counselling is readily available
3	Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures is available and accessible
4	Validation arrangements are linked to NQFs and in line with the EQF
5	Qualifications or parts of qualifications obtained through validation comply with agreed standards that are the same or equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes
6	Provision is made for the development of the professional competences of validation practitioners
7	Transparent quality assurance measures support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation
8	Synergies between validation and credit systems exist
9	Disadvantaged groups are particularly likely to benefit from validation
10	Skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment[12]
11	EU/ national transparency tools are promoted to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes

Note: For all principles, except 7, 8, 9 and 11 data have been collected in all three areas. For principle number 10, see footnote 10.

It should be noted that the Council Recommendation on validation is not prescriptive regarding how progress or achievement should be measured in relation to the principles it outlines. The information provided in this report is thus one possible interpretation of the degree of development with respect to the principles outlined in the Council Recommendation. The figures are based on responses provided by country experts to a series of questions related to indicators that pertain to capture the level of development. Based on these data, the report aims to provide information for illustrative purposes and to aid exchanges, development of mutual understanding and interpretation of the principles as well as the identification of priority areas for future action.

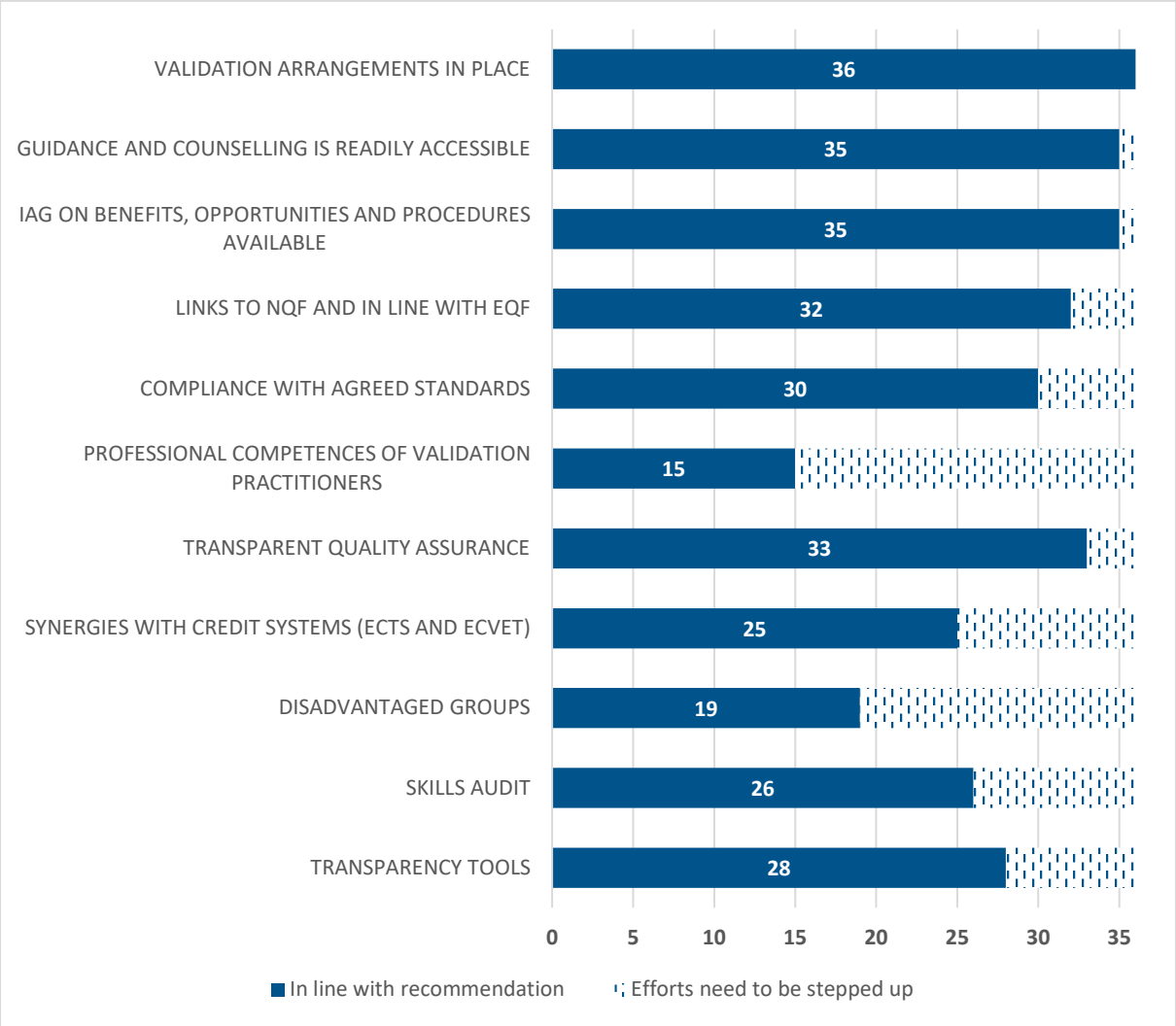
[12] The country fiche included two questions in relation to Skills Audit. Across all areas, the question was as follows: *"Are skills audits, where the definition is compatible/informed by the Council Recommendation in place? "*. This is the case in 26 countries as presented in Figure 1.1. The second question was asked in the labour market area only as follows: *'Is it standard practice to offer people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment the opportunity to undertake a skills audit?'* This is currently the case in 15 countries. To assess the level of implementation, this indicator is used in Figure 1.2.

1.2 Overview of progress

1.2.1 Level of activity

Figure 1.1 below provides an overview of progress across the 11 principles in the 36 country reports covered in the 2018 Inventory. The figure shows the number of countries in which the principle is present in at least one of the three broad areas[13]. The figure is an indication of the extent to which the Recommendation is being implemented in Europe.

Figure 1.1 Overview of progress across the 11 principles (number of countries)



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

The Figure shows that a large majority of the countries have introduced measures in line with the principles outlined in the Council Recommendation. All countries have validation arrangements in place[14], in at least one area, and practically all provide guidance and counselling. Compliance with agreed standards, links to NQF and the existence of transparent quality assurance mechanisms are also very common. By

[13] In the case of the education and training area, this means that the principle has been met in at least one of the five sectors (GE, IVET, CVET, HE, AE).

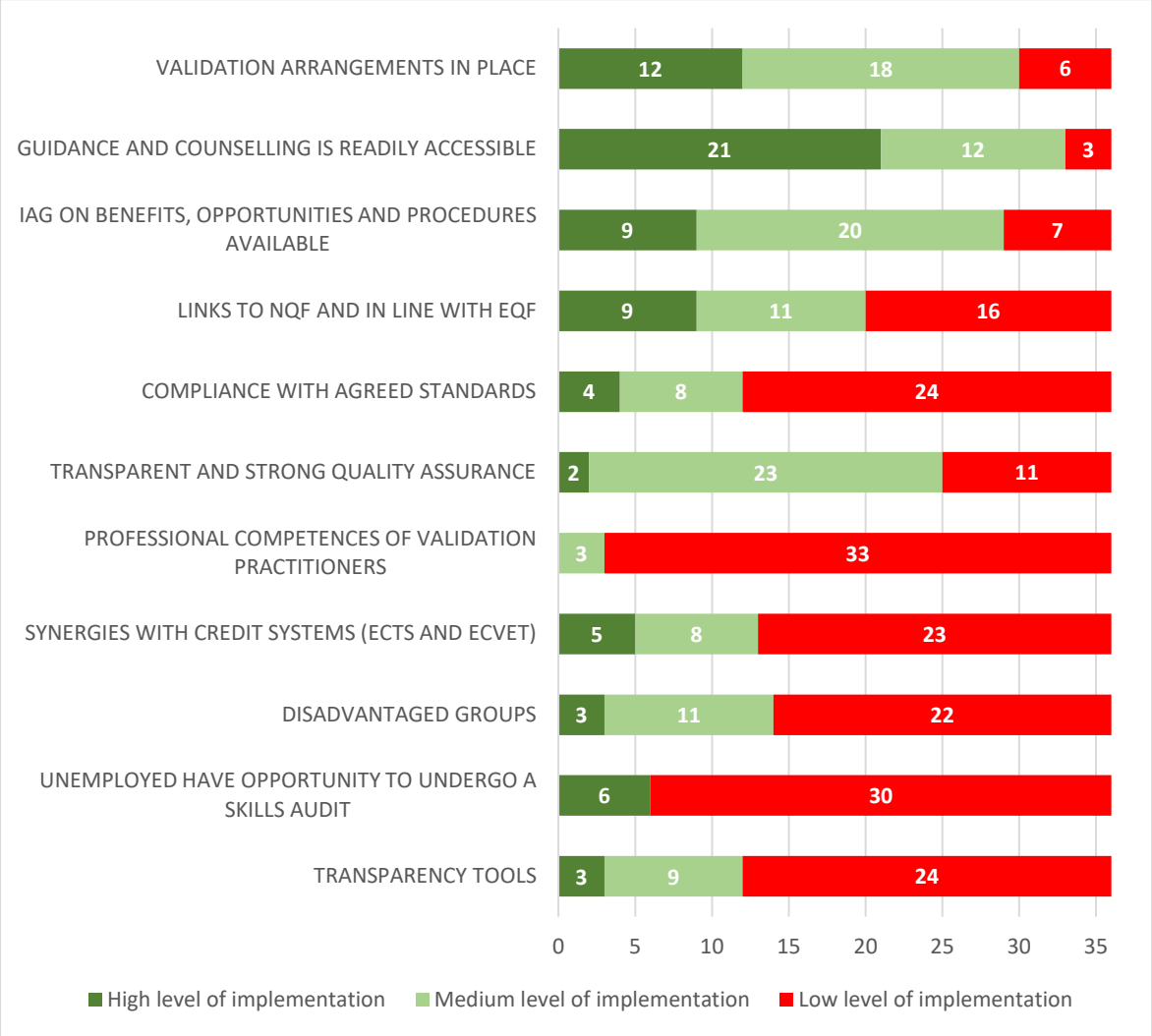
[14] A detailed overview per country is provided in Annex 3.

contrast, further effort seems to be required in the professionalisation of validation practitioners, as fewer countries seem to have in place measures to support the professional development of validation practitioners. Ensuring usage of validation opportunities by disadvantaged groups continues to be a key challenge that countries face. While most principles are applied, the level of their implementation varies significantly (see next section).

1.3 Comprehensiveness of validation initiatives

Whilst the previous section suggests that a fair amount of progress has been made towards the Council Recommendations on validation, a more nuanced picture emerges when taking a closer look at the degree and comprehensiveness of implementation for each principle. To complement Figure 1.1 that provides an overview of the number of countries meeting the respective principles in at least one of the three areas, Figure 1.2 aims to capture the degree to which the different principles are implemented across all the areas in which validation exists. Based on a complex scoring methodology (further details on the scoring methodology are provided in Annex 2) the figure provides an indication of the extent to which the different principles included in the Council Recommendation are implemented across all the areas and subsectors of education and training in which validation is possible. Unlike earlier versions of the Inventory, where a binary distinction between meeting / not meeting the criteria for each country fiche question was used, this methodology allows a more granular analysis of progress towards each principle outlined in the Council Recommendation.

Figure 1.2 Overview of the level of implementation of the Council Recommendation on validation (number of countries)



Source: 2018 European Inventory.
Note: Skills audit only referring to LM initiatives.

The validation landscape emerging through Figure 1.2 shows that, although an important level of activity has been registered in countries directed towards meeting the principles included in the 2012 Council Recommendation, the level of comprehensiveness of their implementation stands at a less advanced stage. Validation arrangements are increasingly present across all three areas and countries seem to be making an effort to create strategies and comprehensive approaches, but progress is uneven between areas. Validation continues to be closely connected to education and training, although there is greater emphasis on initiatives in the labour market and third sector areas too. As such, significant effort is still required in some areas and principles to fully implement the Council Recommendation.

Principles can be classified in three groups based on the level of implementation.

Group 1. High level of implementation – There are several principles that have a good degree of comprehensiveness, meaning that the majority of countries have a medium to high level of implementation in relation to that principle, and that in many of the countries there are arrangements in place in the three broad areas: education and training, labour market and third sector. As such, most of the validation arrangements that exist will also have accessible guidance and counselling. Similarly,

information and guidance measures are also in place in sectors where validation exists in a large majority of countries. The link of validation and NQF also seems to be growing across the different areas in several countries. Finally having transparent and strong quality assurance mechanisms is another principle that is an integral part of the validation system in the majority of countries.

Transparent quality assurance mechanisms to support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation currently stand at medium-high degree of progress.

Group 2. Medium level of implementation – The principles of compliance with standards, synergies with credit systems (ECTS and ECVET); disadvantaged groups; transparency tools show a medium level of implementation in terms of comprehensiveness.

Group 3. Low level of implementation – There is a large majority of countries with low level of implementation in relation to two principles. First, the training of practitioners involved in the provision of information and guidance or assessment for validation is seldom provided with the associated forms of entitlement to support their work (i.e. paid leave for training, covering the costs of the training, etc.). Second, although skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment in more than one third of the countries, the possibility to undergo a skills audit is not immediate or the timeframe within which it is offered is not specified.

2 Policy frameworks for validation

2.1 Validation arrangements

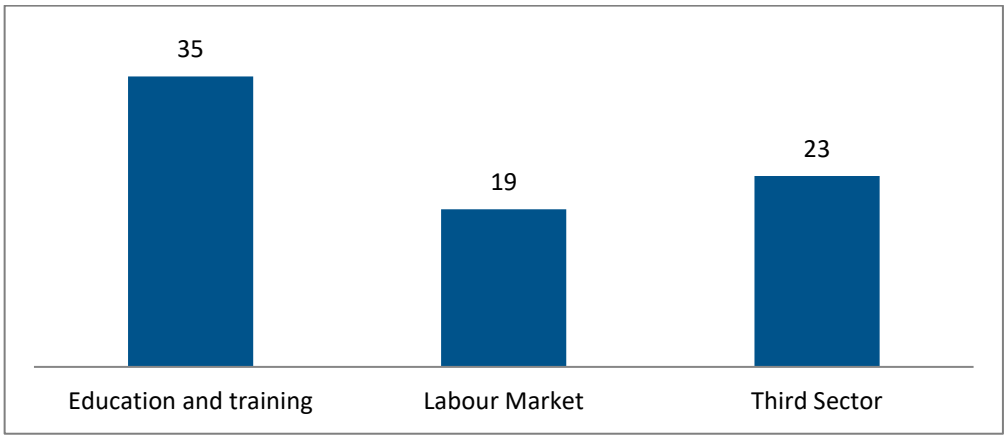
Since 2016, the European Inventory has collected information on validation arrangements across three broad areas: education and training, the labour market and third sector[15] areas. Data from the 2018 Inventory shows that there are now possibilities for validation in at least one of these broad areas in all 36 countries under study. As shown in Figure 2.1, validation arrangements are most commonly in place across the education and training area whereby all countries have validation arrangements in place in at least one subsector of education and training, except Croatia[16]. This is consistent with the situation in 2016 but shows an increase from 31 countries in 2014 and 26 countries in 2010. It should however be noted that, in a few countries, validation opportunities remain very limited and it may be questioned whether they represent a systematic validation arrangement.

[15] See Annex 1 for a detailed note on methodology and definition of subsectors of education and training and labour market and third sector areas.

[16] Country information was collected up to June 2018. The procedure for applying for, validating and recognising prior learning and an award of qualification at level 5 of the CROQF (Croatian qualification framework) and lower, will be set out in the Ordinance on the recognition of prior learning due in 2019 (see the 2018 Country Report for Croatia for further details).

In the third sector area, validation arrangements are in place in 23 countries[17], while in the labour market area, arrangements are in place in 19 countries[18][19].

Figure 2.1 Number of countries with validation arrangements in place across the education and training, labour market and third sector areas (2018)



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

A closer look at the 2018 Inventory data allows for a more systematic exploration of the situation regarding the subsectors of education and training. Validation arrangements continue to be most common in IVET and CVET, and almost as much in higher education. Moreover, countries continue to progress gradually towards comprehensive validation arrangements across the subsectors of education and training. The Thematic Report: 'Bridging the Gap – Validation creating routes and links between sectors' produced as part of the 2018 Inventory provides examples of how validation in Europe has helped to create 'bridges' between education and training, the labour market and the third sector areas - i.e. when the outcome of validation that takes place in one area/subsector means that the learning validated can be used for entry into / outcomes in another area/subsector.

2.2 Validation strategies

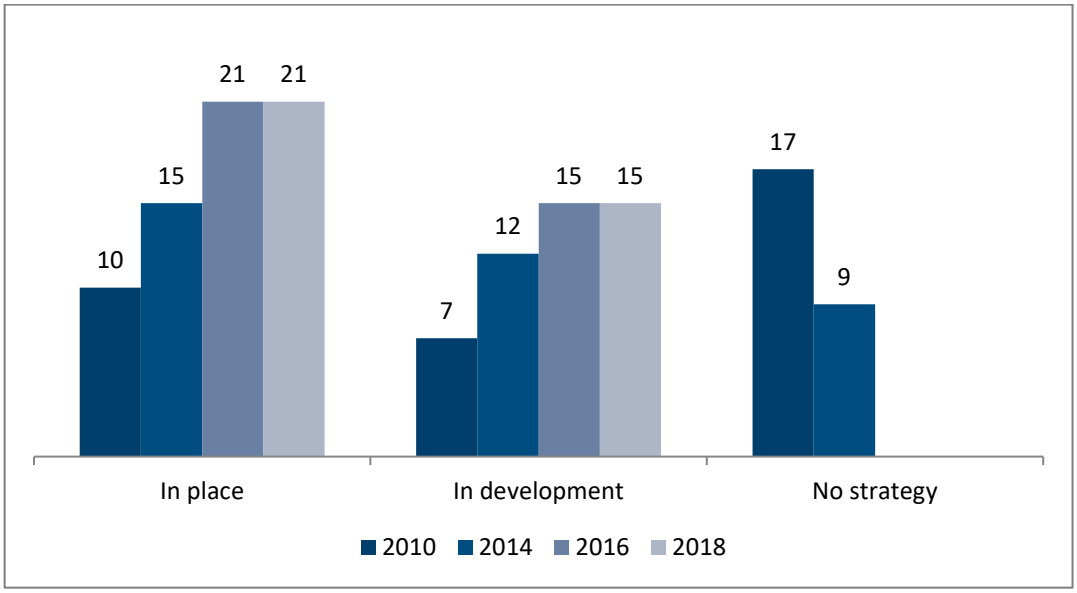
It is important to understand the policy framework and strategy in which validation arrangements operate. The Inventory asked national experts to indicate if validation arrangements are embedded into a strategy, that is, whether there are overarching legal frameworks or policies specifically and explicitly establishing validation initiatives. While by 2010, 17 countries had no validation strategy, by 2018 in all 36 countries, some type of strategy for validation is either in place (21) or being developed (15) as illustrated in Figure 2.2 below. Across European countries, validation strategies are embedded within strategic frameworks on lifelong learning. In several countries, the development of a validation strategy has gone hand in hand with the development of National Qualification Frameworks (NQF).

[17] Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (S).

[18] Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom (E&NI), United Kingdom (S), United Kingdom (W). In Austria and Switzerland, specific projects are in place, but these tend not to be supported by systematic arrangements.

[19] Indicators for the collection of data on the labour market and third sector were introduced from the 2016 Inventory onwards.

Figure 2.2 Number of countries with validation strategies in place by year



Source: 2018, 2016, 2014, 2010 European Inventory[20].

Countries adopt different approaches to implement validation, depending on their national circumstances. The 2018 data shows that 20 countries have developed or are in the process of developing national arrangements (such as a legal framework, strategy and/or policy) encompassing the education and training area, the labour market and the third sector[21], while 16 countries have developed or are in the process of developing sectoral arrangements for validation. The distinction between a national or sectoral approach tries to capture the extent to which policies on validation respond to an overall approach or if they are developed differently for different sectors.

In several countries the approach to validation is interwoven with the development of NQFs, as is the case of Poland or Malta. Some countries adopt a general approach to validation but adapt it to different regions that will have considerable autonomy for the deployment of solutions as is the case of Italy or Spain. In some countries, validation efforts are concentrated in specific subsectors of education and training.

Whatever the case, many countries are working towards creating more coherent common strategies. In Austria, the National Validation Strategy was published in December 2017, after several years of development. Turkey was developing its national strategy under the development of the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF) and now has in place validation arrangements in adult education and CVET, as part of a broader focus on the development of occupational standards to improve the link between education and employment. Belgium-Flanders is developing a new law on the validation of learning, to be adopted in 2019 aimed at increasing coherence of validation between different policy domains of education, employment, youth, culture and sports and communication with key stakeholders. In Bulgaria, one of the main priorities of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020) is to introduce a learning outcomes validation system to enhance parity between formal

[20] In 2010-14 experts where asked if countries have a national strategy in place for validation, while in 2016 and 2018 it was asked "What kind of approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning is prevalent". It is assumed that if there is an approach there is a strategy.

[21] It is possible that the country experts, in responding to this question, refer only to the 'education and training' area and its subsectors, rather than 'learning' as a whole, including the labour market and third sector.

education and training, non-formal training, and informal learning. Also, the VET Development Strategy (2015-2020) defines the building up of a system of validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning as a priority in the context of lifelong learning.

2.2.1 Prioritisation by area

Prioritisation in validation strategies was examined in terms of the provision of public funding or the development of policies/regulations for validation. Validation continues to be closely connected to education and training, although there is greater emphasis on initiatives in the labour market area too. In 27 of the 35 countries with validation arrangements in place in the education and training area, validation is prioritised in at least one subsector of education and training. In the labour market area, 11 countries reported prioritising validation. Third sector initiatives, by contrast, were given priority only in five countries. In nine countries it is reported that validation is not prioritised in any sector because all sectors/areas are similarly prioritised. Table 2.1 provides a more detailed overview by area.

Table 2.1 Prioritisation of validation by area

Validation is prioritised in one or more subsector of education and training	Priority on the labour market area
Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (E&NI), United Kingdom (S)	Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom (E&NI), United Kingdom (S)
Priority in the third sector area	**No priority (all subsectors/areas are similarly prioritised)**
Cyprus, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands	Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom (W)

Source: 2018 European Inventory.

2.3 Validation outputs and outcomes

2.3.1 Validation outputs

The process of validation can lead to different outputs. These should respond to the needs of the individual. Table 2.2 shows in which countries a specific type of outcome can be obtained in at least one of the subsectors of education and training. Award of a full formal qualification is possible in 22 countries. This is more common in IVET in which around three quarters of the countries with validation arrangements in place allow for the acquisition of a full qualification. In the rest of the subsectors of education and training, awarding full qualifications is possible in around half of the countries.

Most countries allow for the award of parts of qualifications (27 out of 35 countries), normally in the form of credits, modules or exemptions. Access to formal programmes through validation is also possible in 27 countries. This is the most common output in

higher education, with 21 countries from 28 offering this, while in IVET or CVET this is only possible in 16 countries, respectively.

There are a few countries that provide other types of certificates, not linked to formal education. These tend to be certificates with labour market value, such as the *Certificados de profesionalidad* in Spain or the *Titre de competence* (Skills Certificate) in Belgium-Wallonia. Even if not included in the formal system, these certificates tend to use similar standards as in the formal system. Individuals can normally use them to access the labour market directly or to obtain exemptions or access to formal programmes. Training specifications as an output of the validation process are provided in 18 countries.

The data shows, thus, that while validation is increasingly becoming a route to access formal programmes and achieve a certification or some type of qualification, it is not yet a fully established and accepted route throughout Europe.

Table 2.2 The outputs of validation by country

A) Award of full formal qualification (22)	
Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland)	
B) Award of part of a formal qualification (27)	**C) Award of other non-formal qualification/ certificate (15)**
Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) United Kingdom (Wales)	Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom (Scotland), United Kingdom (Wales)
D) Award of credit points (25)	**E) Award of modules (22)**
Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) United Kingdom (Wales)	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) United Kingdom (Wales)
F) Exemptions from part of course (25)	**G) Access to formal programmes (e.g. programmes in formal education) (27)**
Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) United Kingdom (Wales)	Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) United Kingdom (Wales)

H) Training specification (i.e. to map what training needs to be completed in order to achieve a (full) qualification) (18)	I) Access to the labour market (e.g. a qualification that is compulsory to exercise a certain job) (9)
Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Wales)	Belgium-Wallonia, Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, United Kingdom (Wales)

Source: 2018 European Inventory. Note: The table relates to the education and training area only.

Data on validation outputs was also collected in the labour market and the third sector areas. Country experts were asked if validation initiatives in these areas were linked to formal education and training - a similar trend to 2016 can be observed. Third sector initiatives tend to be more formative than summative, and thus, outcomes are not always connected to formal qualifications - in only six countries[22] are third sector initiative outputs linked to formal education. Obtaining a formal qualification through a labour market initiative is possible in 14[23] countries, while only in four of the third sector initiatives. Access to formal education programmes after labour market validation initiatives is possible in eight countries, while this is the case in four of the third sector initiatives.

3 Developing and implementing validation

3.1 The four stages of validation

Education and training area

The 2012 Council Recommendation specified four stages in the validation process: identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning outcomes. These four stages permit the articulation of the concept and make it easier to adapt it to different realities and needs.

In general, the stages of identification and documentation are more related to formative approaches, which aim to provide feedback to the learning process or learning career and offer insights for development and improvement. The stages of assessment and certification are more related to summative approaches, which aim explicitly at formalising and certifying learning outcomes. Assessment and certification are always preceded by some form of identification and documentation.

All four stages of validation are in place in the vast majority of countries. Assessment and certification are particularly prevalent, but identification and documentation also feature strongly. Certain stages of validation are emphasised in certain subsectors – at least in some countries.

The extent to which each of the four stages is used in practice, will depend on the needs of the individual concerned and the purpose of validation. For example, assessment and certification are often used in formal education for obtaining qualifications. What constitutes assessment, however, is wide-ranging and can

[22] Finland, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom (Scotland).

[23] Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Cyprus, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland), United Kingdom (Wales).

include observations, interviews and portfolios as well as examinations. Where the emphasis of validation is more upon identification and documentation, the purposes of validation may be more related to gaining access to formal programmes or for entry to an exam. For instance, in the higher education subsector, validation is often used to support access to higher level education programmes, so focuses less on certification, and often requires proof of relevant professional work experience.

It is interesting to note that the four stages are not necessarily undertaken as separate phases. In Luxembourg for example, the identification/ documentation phases are usually not carried out separately.

Also, some countries set out a pre-stage of information, guidance and counselling. In Cyprus or Norway information and guidance are important components of the process, prior to identification and documentation. The Pearson awarding body in England also sets out 'awareness, information and guidance' as the first part of a validation process. This highlights the importance of information, guidance and counselling in the validation process, as noted in Cedefop's European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning[24]. However, a key consideration is the extent to which information, guidance and counselling are integrated throughout the process or are a (pre)stage in the process.

The terminology to describe the activities under the four stages defined by the Council Recommendation on validation is not consistently used across the Member States, but it broadly covers the same elements of the four stages proposed at EU level. For example, in Bulgaria, in relation to VET, validation includes two main stages, a) identification of professional knowledge, skills and competences acquired by a candidate; and, b) recognition of a professional qualification degree or partial professional qualification. These stages are more broadly defined compared to the definition used in the Council Recommendation. In Spain, the stages 'identification' and 'documentation' are subsumed under one stage called 'counselling'.

While there are examples of the four stages of validation being in place in all countries covered by the 2018 Inventory, countries typically do not have data on the number of beneficiaries making use of each stage.

Labour market and third sector areas

In the labour market, all stages of validation feature strongly in the large majority of countries covered – in the case of assessment and certification this can sometimes be in collaboration with external bodies and educational institutions. There are only one (assessment and certification) or two (identification and documentation) countries where this is not the case.

Assessment often features where validation is linked to the attainment of an occupational standard, and this may take the form of observation of work practices or the assessment of a portfolio of work. Employer or trade associations are often involved in this process. For example, in Iceland, within the initiative on validation of employability skills, the validation assessment focuses on validating skills linked to the work experience of each participant, and most participants move into employment following the process. In Scotland, Scottish Vocational Qualifications are assessed through evidence of performance against certain work-related tasks during day-to-day work. Assessments are based on evidence collected by the candidate, usually from their work, rather than formal exams and often make use of portfolios. Assessment may also be carried out by the public employment service.

[24] Cedefop, European Commission (2015).

Employers are themselves unlikely to certify informal and non-formal learning but may refer to other public sector bodies to undertake this task.

Assessment and certification were only used by 10 countries (from 23) in the third sector area. However, documentation is extensively used in the third sector (21[25] countries), as is also identification (17[26] countries). The third sector therefore focuses predominantly on formative/developmental validation stages, rather than summative validation. The focus tends to be on initial guidance, reflection and recognising and identifying skills, and gathering evidence. A further consideration is that third sector and labour market actors can have a significant role to play in referring individuals to competent authorities for the assessment and certification stages of validation where appropriate.

3.2 Stakeholder involvement in validation

Stakeholder involvement is crucial in order to build trust in the system and ensure that the outcomes of the validation process are accepted in society. One of the principles of the Council Recommendation is the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in validation initiatives, such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.

Across the countries covered in the 2018 Inventory, various stakeholders have responsibility for different aspects of validation – from the design of national strategies, to the setting up of standards, delivery of advice and guidance or assessment. This section looks at the involvement of different types of stakeholder in different validation functions, beginning with an analysis of the education and training area. We then turn to an analysis of the situation in the labour market and third sector areas.

Education and training area

There are some notable patterns of involvement for the following types of stakeholder (see Table A4.1 in Annex 4):

- **Government organisations** are the main actor in the coordination of validation within the education and training area (29[27] countries) and across the subsectors of education and training (25 countries). By contrast, other stakeholder types - except national organisations – are infrequently involved in coordination roles. This could be expected, as coordination is normally carried out by institutions/ organisations close to a national Ministry. Government organisations are also key stakeholders in the design of national strategies (30 countries) and quality assurance mechanisms (28 countries). Again, government organisations are dominant in these functions.
- **National organisations** (such as national agencies and awarding organisations) are consistently involved in the whole range of functions in over a quarter of countries and are particularly involved with setting up standards and certification.

[25] See Table A4.1 in Annex 4 for details of specific countries.

[26] Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (S).

[27] Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (E&NI), United Kingdom (W).

- **PES** have a strong role in the provision of IAG (27 countries). This role has grown since 2016, which probably reflects a widening of IAG provision outside of education and training providers as validation has become more common in other areas and institutional settings. For example, in Sweden, various organisations share the responsibility for the provision of IAG on validation. These include public employment services, but also guidance and career counsellors in educational institutions, or municipalities, and national authorities involved in validation procedures. In relation to employment, trade unions and sectoral employer organisations also provide IAG. IAG provision offered by PES may or may not be mandatory. For instance, in the Czech Republic, learners do not have an entitlement to IAG, however, PES has financial means to support adult learners and provide them with information and guidance on validation.
- Social partners (**chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts; employer organisations; trade unions**) tend to be frequently involved in the setting up of standards, and on assessment. They are less involved with other functions, although they often play a role in the provision of IAG.
- **Education and training providers** are a key stakeholder with regards to identification and documentation (28 countries), assessment (29 countries), and certification (28 countries). However, the role of education and training providers has diminished since 2016 with regard to coordination, design of national strategies, design of QA mechanisms, and setting up standards. Government organisations have taken on increased responsibilities for these functions, especially through setting out policies, guidelines, and quality assurance regulation. This is in line with the finding that by 2018, in all 36 countries under study some type of strategy for validation is either in place (21) or being developed (15), as discussed in Section 2.

Labour market and third sector areas

When looking at stakeholder involvement in the labour market area, a similar pattern of stakeholder involvement can be observed (see Table A4.2 and Table A4.3 in Annex 4):

- **Governmental organisations** are the main stakeholder regarding coordination within the labour market (10[28] from 19 countries) and coordination with the education and training and third sector areas (12 countries). Government organisation are also involved in the design of national strategies (11 countries), provision of IAG (9 countries), and design of QA mechanisms (11 countries). However, governmental organisations, are often not involved in identification and documentation, assessment, and certification in a large proportion of countries. National organisations and education and training providers, as well as PES, tend to be involved in the case of identification and documentation.
- **National organisations** (such as national agencies and awarding organisations) play a significant role across all functions.
- **PES** is a key stakeholder in the provision of information, advice and guidance and play a key role in the identification and documentation stages of validation.
- **Chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, and employer organisations** or individual employers, as in the case of the education and training area, play an important role in setting standards. Employer organisations or individual employers are not significantly involved in identification and

[28] See Table A4.2 in Annex 4 details of specific countries.

documentation and in assessment according to the information provided by national experts, although this is an area that would benefit from additional targeted research.

- **Education and training providers** are a key stakeholder with regards to all stages of validation, along with PES and national organisations.

Provision of IAG is undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders but is relatively less common amongst private employment agencies, youth organisations, other civil society organisations, and employer organisations or individual employers.

Turning to the third sector, there is no extensive involvement by most types of stakeholder. This is likely to be a reflection of the third sector being characterised by bottom-up and less formalised validation practices and initiatives that focus on the identification and documentation stages of validation.

- **Governmental organisations** play a considerable role in coordination within the third sector area (8[29] from 23 countries) and coordination with the education and training and labour market areas (7 countries). Governmental organisations are also a key stakeholder in the design of national strategies (9 countries).
- **Youth organisations** (13 countries) and **other civil society organisations** (13 countries) are significantly involved with provision of IAG (10 countries), and identification and documentation (9 countries).

3.3 Funding

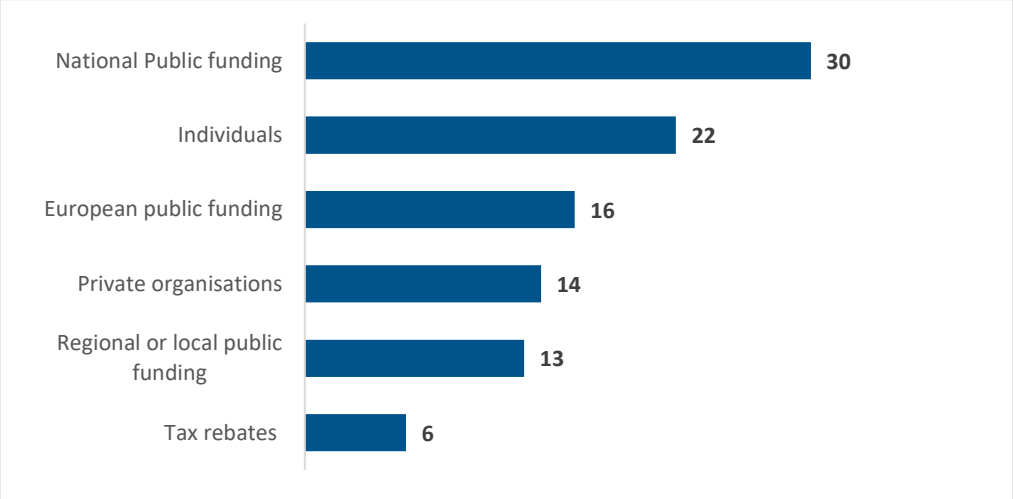
This section looks at how validation is funded, and examines the relative prevalence of different funding sources, first in the education and training area as a whole, and then by subsectors, before turning to the labour market and third sector areas.

Education and training area

As shown in Figure 3.1, across the education and training area, the most common source of funding is national public funding (30 countries), followed by funding from individuals (22 countries). The pattern of funding sources is very similar to that in 2016.

[29] See Table A4.2 and Table A4.3 in Annex 4 details of specific countries.

Figure 3.1 Main sources of funding for validation (number of countries) across all areas of education and training



Source: 2018 European Inventory (multiple responses possible).

National public funding is by far the most common source of funding in all areas and is particularly prevalent in IVET (24 from 29 countries) which is likely to be because this is an area where the state has a large responsibility.

However, there is rarely a specific designated state budget for validation. Rather, public funding comes through a mix of various sources, including education and training institutions, PES, national vocational training bodies, and IAG agencies. For example, in Bulgaria, there is no national framework explicitly allocating funds for validation. Validation procedures can be funded by individuals, companies, and programmes and projects financed by national and regional funds, EU structural funds or funds from the European Economic Area.

The PES plays a specific role in funding in a few cases. In Austria, for example, the Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the PES of Austria support those who are preparing for validation to achieve the compulsory school leaving certificate, the apprenticeship diploma (exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship examination), the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*[30] or the *Berufsreifeprüfung*[31]. In Denmark, PES work with unemployed people to clarify the aim and purpose of validation and fund the documentation phase[32].

It is common that individuals pay a fee towards validation. Funding from individuals is particularly significant in CVET (16 from 30 countries) and general education (8 from 16 individuals).

Funding from private organisations is most prevalent in CVET (12 from 30 countries), probably reflecting that employers are investing in validation on behalf of their employees.

European funding, principally through the European Social Fund (ESF), constitutes a source of funding similarly across subsectors of education and training, except that it is relatively uncommon in higher education (4 from 28 countries). ESF has indeed been a major contributor to the development of national validation systems and

[30] Limited Higher Education Entrance Examination.

[31] General Higher Education Entrance Examination for leavers of the apprenticeship training and VET schools.

[32] In Denmark these stages are referred to as clarification and documentation.

processes in certain countries. In Cyprus, the ESF has co-funded the establishment and development of the System of Vocational Qualifications as far as the development of vocational qualification standards and the assessment and certification of persons are concerned. In the Czech Republic, many IVET schools were supported in their effort to become centres for adult learning and validation by three projects funded by the ESF. In Romania, ESF is increasingly being used as a source of funding for the development of methods and structures for validation at regional and national level.

Labour market and third sector areas

In the same way as for the education and training area, national public funding is the most common source of funding for validation in both the labour market (15 from 19 countries) and third sector areas (11 from 23 countries).

In the labour market, national public funding includes PES in some cases where validation is targeted towards job seekers. In the Netherlands, employers making redundancies can offer employees a procedure for an *Ervaringscertificaat* (certificate of expertise), or an *Ervaringsprofiel (*validation portfolio*)*. The scheme is targeted at unemployed people and employed people at risk of losing their jobs. The cost of this procedure is subsidised by the employment agencies, (*Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen*). Half of the costs are subsidised for companies with more than 25 employees, and all costs are subsidised in the case of companies with fewer than 25 employees. In Austria, those involved in up-skilling processes can find a range of subsidies in order to fund validation activities, for example by the PES Austria.

Funding through individuals is also common in the labour market area (11 from 19 countries), as is the use of private sources (10 from 19 countries). Employers and individuals are likely to share the cost of validation in many cases.

In the third sector area, there is less national public funding available than for the education and training and labour market areas. This could be partly related to the areas in which the third sector is more active in relation to validation, such as self- or third party (youth organisation) documentation of knowledge, skills and competences.

3.4 Information, advice and guidance

The Council Recommendation on validation identifies access to guidance and counselling as one of the conditions that can spur the development of validation, and states that Member States should ensure widespread dissemination of information and guidance on the opportunities for, procedures and benefits of validation.

As well as looking at the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) as a whole, this section considers the content of the advice and guidance (process, assessment, or outcomes and benefits of validation), and whether its provision is required or not. We first look at the education and training area before turning to the labour market and third sector areas.

Education and training area

All countries but one provides IAG to candidates in at least one education and training subsector. This is an improvement over the situation in 2014 and 2010, and in line with the situation in 2016.

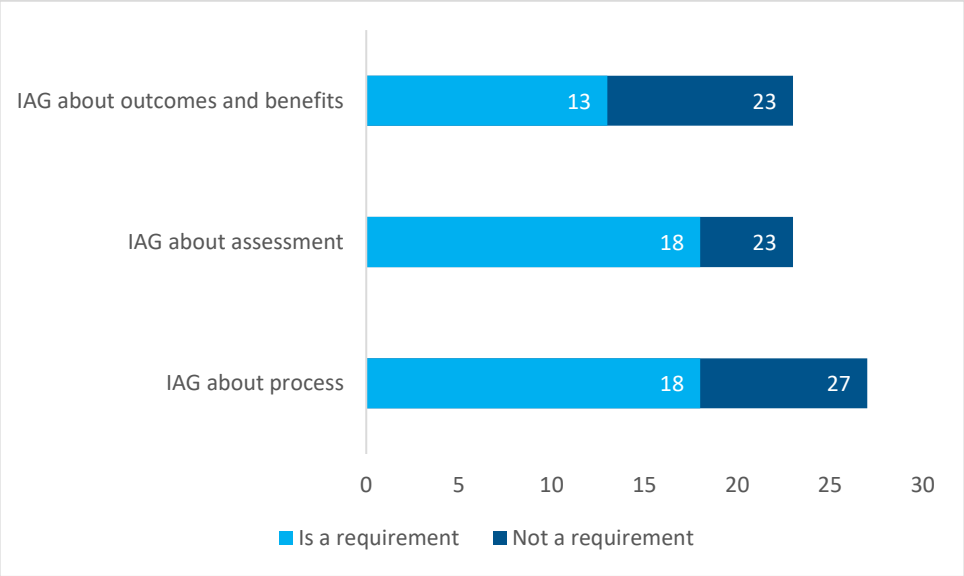
A high number of countries provide IAG in each of the education and training subsectors. In IVET all countries (29 countries) provide IAG, and in each of the other subsectors IAG is also available in the large majority of countries.

IAG is mostly provided in relation to process - all countries provide IAG about the process in at least one subsector. Fewer countries provide IAG on assessment (30 from 35) and outcomes and benefits (30 from 35). Looking at the different subsectors of education and training, IAG is less often available in relation to validation in general education and adult education.

Between 2016 and 2018 the number of countries providing IAG has increased in the three categories of process, assessment, and outcomes and benefits. Notable increases include the number of countries in CVET providing IAG about process, which has increased from 21 in 2016 to 28 in 2018. In CVET the increase registered is from 15 countries to 23 in the case of IAG about assessment. Adult education also saw an increase from 11 countries to 17 regarding IAG about assessment.

As shown in Figure 3.2 below, overall, IAG is more commonly 'not a requirement' in validation initiatives. This is the case for all three aspects of IAG provision (process, assessment and outcomes).

Figure 3.2 Type of IAG provision (number of countries) across the education and training subsectors



Source: 2018 European Inventory[33].

In some countries, education and training institutions are obliged to provide IAG about validation. For example, in the higher education sector in Belgium-Wallonia, the provision of support and guidance to candidates undertaking validation procedures is compulsory. A law officially recognises the function of the 'VAE counsellor', who plays a key role throughout the VAE procedure, providing guidance not only to candidates but also to members of VAE juries and programme coordinators, and who are recruited directly by universities. This is similar to Bulgaria, where an individual consultant is allocated to each candidate to assist throughout the validation process. The consultant is responsible for the preparation, completion and delivery of a candidate's portfolio and personal information to the validation institution as well as for the preparation and registration of the certificates following a successful validation procedure. In Finland, in VET the provider has a legal obligation to arrange adequate guidance and counselling services to the enrolled students. Each individual is

[33] The number of countries is above 36 because the analysis is based on a 'count of countries'. The data in this figure represents the number of countries where the indicator applies in *at least one* sector of education and training where there are validation arrangements (but may not apply to all sectors in that country).

provided with a personal competence development plan, in which the learner's individual study plan and prior learning, including non-formal and informal are documented. The competence development plan is updated according to the needs of the individual. There are similar arrangements in the Netherlands and in Sweden, although the obligation centres on IAG about the process of validation in these countries – and less so on IAG on assessment, outcomes or benefits of validation.

In Estonia, institutions are required to inform students about the conditions of and procedure for validation of non-formal and informal learning[34], including the terms and cost of assessment as well as the conditions to contest the results. They are also required to ensure that all applicants have access to the necessary information, guidance and counselling.

Most commonly, IAG about validation is provided by education and training institutions that carry out validation procedures. The way in which IAG is provided tends to be at the discretion of institutions, although there may be national guidance on the matter.

In some countries, however, for example Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Spain, and England, there are a range of agencies that play a role in providing IAG about validation in addition to education and training institutions, for example PES, social partners, third sector bodies, and employers. While providing IAG about validation may be a component of their activities, in many cases the provision is not necessarily a legislative requirement.

In countries where there is a designated agency for validation, this body can have a specific role and responsibility regarding provision of IAG. For example, in Belgium-Wallonia, validation centres have a central role in the provision of IAG to candidates. The main objective is to help the candidate to assess whether s/he has good chances to successfully complete the validation process, by applying various self-evaluation tools available for the different occupations. Candidates receive information on the validation process, its different stages, the examination methods, etc. In Portugal, IAG about validation is available from the *Centros Qualifica*. These centres are devoted to informing, counselling, and guiding learners (young people and adults) who seek to improve school and professional certification through education and training and the validation of competences. In France, where VAE is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, every individual has the right to receive information and advice on the VAE process provided by the 'regional information points', as well as a range of different stakeholders. In Luxembourg, the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth has a specific unit in charge of *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE), which is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance to candidates. Support to candidates is provided by practitioners from different guidance services which have been specifically trained for this task.

Some differences by subsector of education and training can be observed in relation to IAG provision. In CVET, IVET and general education, IAG about process and about assessment, exhibit a relatively even balance of countries where provision is a requirement and those where it is not. By contrast, in higher education and adult education it is much more frequent that IAG about those aspects is not a requirement. On the other hand, IAG on outcomes and benefits of validation tends not to be a requirement. This is especially the case in higher education, where the provision of IAG about outcomes and benefits is a requirement in only three countries.

[34] Termed Recognition of Prior Learning nationally.

Labour market and third sector areas

Fifteen countries (from 19) provide IAG about validation in the labour market area. The figure is much lower for the third sector (9 countries from 23).

In the same way as for the education and training area, in the labour market most IAG provision is about the process of validation (16 countries). Twelve countries provide IAG about assessment. Only in a small number of countries the provision of IAG is a requirement in the labour market area: four in relation to process (Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, and Malta) and three in relation to assessment (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Malta). In Malta, Sector Skills Units (industry-focused unit that develops occupational standards and designs qualifications)[35][36] are responsible for providing guidance and counselling services to individuals submitting their documented experiences for validation, although more commonly other parties carry out the validation process. In Iceland, the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) accredits lifelong learning centres. Career counsellors located at these centres provide information, advice and guidance on validation projects in their areas. This group of career counsellors is a formal network which shares experiences and works towards the development of adult guidance often through cooperation with ETSC. They coordinate portfolio work, attend assessment interviews as needed, and provide follow-up after the process. The role of the career counsellors entails the provision of motivational support too, which has proved to be crucial for the success of validation projects.

In the third sector, eight countries provide IAG on the process of validation, and this is a requirement in only two countries (Denmark and Italy). In Denmark, this may be related to the formality of voluntary work. The Governments' Civil Society Strategy, 2017, included 12 goals and brought a strong focus on inclusion through voluntary work, also for citizens outside labour market and education. In addition, unemployed citizens are allowed to carry out voluntary work up to 15 hours per week, without reduction of unemployment benefit. Voluntary work is included in the legal framework for validation of learning acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

3.5 Links to national qualifications systems and frameworks

The Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework published in May 2017[37] aims at better linking formal, non-formal and informal learning and supporting the validation of learning outcomes acquired in different settings. Criteria 3 for the referencing of NQFs to EQFs explicitly indicates the need to link NQFs to validation arrangements as a necessary condition to improve transparency of lifelong learning systems.

NQFs built on learning outcomes-based level descriptors 'provide reference for validation of non-formal learning and make it possible to build on the learning taking place outside formal education, at work and during leisure time'[38]. All countries covered in the 2018 European Inventory have developed an NQF and with the exception of Spain, all have referenced these to the European Qualifications Framework.

[35] Government of Malta, Legal Notice 295/2012, 2012.

[36] Currently established in the following sectors: Building and Construction; Health and Social Care; Automotive; Hospitality and Tourism; Hair and Beauty; Printing and Digital Media; IT; and Education Support.

[37] Council of the European Union (2017).

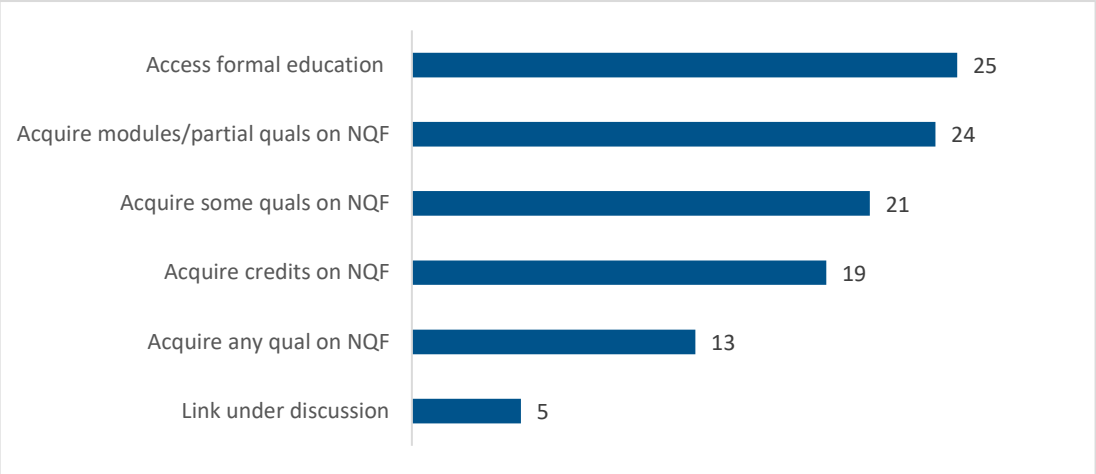
[38] Cedefop (2018:10).

Education and training area

The development of NQFs has been an important driver of validation initiatives in several countries, including Greece, Croatia, Malta, Poland and Belgium. The NQFs in these countries represent a shift towards a learning outcomes approach that is a necessary condition for facilitating the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In most cases, and across all subsectors of education and training, qualifications included in the NQFs can be accessed through validation (25 countries). Modules, partial qualifications or credits can also be acquired through validation to varying degrees across Europe. Moreover, and as illustrated in Figure 3.3, in 13 countries[39] any qualification included on the NQF can be acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Figure 3.3 Link between validation and the NQF (number of countries)



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

Although the questions in 2010 and 2014 were not exactly the same as in 2016 and 2018, the link between validation and the NQF has been explored in each of the Inventory updates[40]. Since 2010, there has been a marked increase in the number of countries where learning acquired through non-formal and informal learning can be used to acquire some kind of credit in formal education. In 2010, this was possible in only 12 countries under study; by 2016 this figure increased to 28 countries, and in 2018 it is possible in a total of 31 countries.

Labour market and third sector links to the formal education sector

[39] Cyprus, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom (England Northern Ireland).

[40] Data collected on this issue is not directly comparable over the four periods of the Inventory because the questions asked of experts were somewhat different. To facilitate comparison in the education and training sector, for 2016 and 2018 data, we have collapsed two categories of indicator ('learning acquired through non-formal / informal means can be used to acquire any qualification on the NQF'; and 'learning acquired through non-formal / informal means can be used to acquire some qualifications on the NQF'). For this we have counted countries with at least one education and training sector where either or both of these indicators apply. This matches the indicators for 2010 and 2014 ('learning acquired through non-formal / informal means can be used to acquire a qualification on the NQF'; and 'learning acquired through non-formal / informal means can be used to access formal education covered in the NQF').

Validation initiatives in the labour market can lead to obtaining a (part of a) qualification on the NQF in 13 countries (an increase from 8 in 2016). In most cases, education and training providers and national organisations are involved in the assessment and certification of validation initiatives in the labour market. However, in some countries Chambers of Industry, Commerce and Skilled Crafts and PES are also involved in these stages of validation.

In most countries validation initiatives in the third sector are not linked to formal qualifications. The focus is often on formative validation and thus the identification and documentation of learning that takes place in this sector, rather than gaining a qualification on the NQF.

3.5.1 Standards and certificates

The definition of standards is a central element for the legitimacy, trustworthiness and reliability of validation processes[41] because validation will most often involve reference to a standard[42] and to facilitate validation, standards 'have first and foremost to be (re)defined and described in the form of learning outcomes or competences'[43]. Bearing in mind that gaining a certificate is one important purpose of validation, this section looks at whether the standards used for those qualifications that can be obtained through validation are the same or equivalent to the standards used in the case of qualifications obtained through formal education and training programmes.

Education and training area

In many countries, both qualification and occupational standards are used in validation – making it easier to value learning undertaken in different contexts and according to different logics. Where qualification and occupational standards are closely linked, this signals a close relationship between the occupation and qualification. In Belgium-Wallonia, occupational standards are developed by social partners together with education and training stakeholders and used by education and training providers as well as public sector training providers responsible for designing the procedures, methods and approaches for validation[44]. In Switzerland, qualification standards are developed by labour market organisations, to ensure that a strong relationship between occupational, educational and training standards and employment is ensured.

In 27 out of 35 countries, standards for qualifications obtained through validation are exactly the same as standards for qualifications obtained through formal education and training programmes in at least one education and training subsector, while in the other subsectors, standards may be equivalent (e.g. of a similar nature and level) or different in certain subsectors.

A closer look at the subsectors of education and training shows that IVET and CVET demonstrate close alignment of standards for qualifications obtained through validation and standards for qualifications obtained in formal education.

[41] CEDEFOP (2015).
[42] Some very descriptive forms of documentation may be the exception.
[43] Bjornavold, J. (2007).
[44] Validation in the field of continuous vocational training has been developed by a Consortium de Validation des Compétences. This comprises of five of the most important public sector training providers in French-speaking Belgium and is responsible for designing the procedures, methods and approaches for validation.

In 11 countries, the standards used in the qualifications obtained through validation are equivalent in nature and level but not the same as those used in formal education in at least one education and training subsector.

Labour market and third sector areas

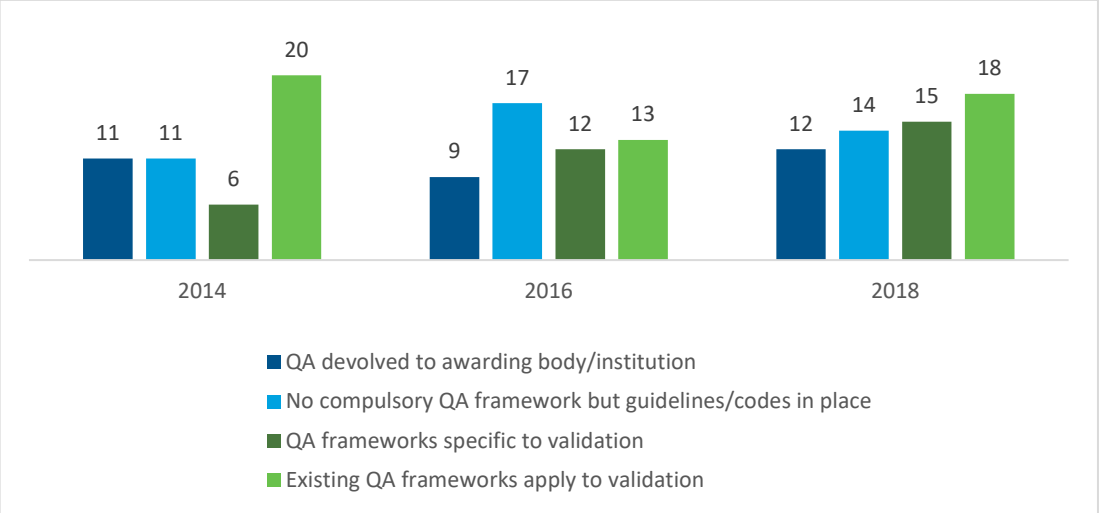
Eight out of the 19 countries that have validation arrangements in place in the labour market use the same standards for validation in that area as for formal education. In Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Iceland and Turkey the standards used for validation in labour market initiatives are different to those used in formal education. In most cases, validation is based on occupational standards.

In the third sector, in three out of 23 countries that have validation arrangements in place, the standards used for qualifications obtained through validation are exactly the same to those used for formal education qualifications. In some countries, the standards used for validation are 'different' to those used in formal education.

3.6 Quality assurance

There are different approaches to quality assurance in validation across countries and across the subsectors of education and training. As shown in Figure 3.4, the main trend that can be observed since 2014 in this area is the increased adoption of quality assurance arrangements specific to validation. The number of countries with specific quality assurance arrangements for validation in at least one education and training subsector has more than doubled from 2014 (six countries) to 2018 (15 countries). This suggests that as countries have developed their validation systems and initiatives, they have moved away from general quality assurance arrangements to more specific quality assurance measures for validation. It also implies an understanding in the view of an increasing number of countries that validation arrangements require some specific form of quality assurance. For example, in recent years Germany has developed specific quality assurance measures for validation as part of validation projects/initiatives in partnerships with key stakeholders. In Greece, in the IVET sector, quality assurance for validation is incorporated into awards provided by EOPPEP, the competent institution for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Figure 3.4 Quality assurance of validation arrangements in at least one subsector of education and training (number of countries)



Source: 2004, 2016, 2018 European Inventories (multiple responses possible).

A closer look at the data shows that in some countries movement towards quality assurance arrangements specific to validation has been facilitated by the introduction of new legislation where the quality assurance of validation is made more explicit in legal terms - this is the case in Iceland, Italy and Malta. In other countries, the development of specific quality assurance frameworks for validation can be attributed to the tightening of quality assurance systems more broadly or to specific quality assurance developments in formal education.

Even though quality assurance specific to validation has grown, Figure 3.4 also shows that it is still most common for countries to apply existing quality assurance frameworks to validation in at least one subsector of education and training (18 out of 35 countries). Although the application of existing quality assurance framework to validation has remained consistent for nine countries since 2014 (in at least one subsector of education and training), many other countries have seen changes in their approaches to quality assurance of validation from that period.

As also shown in Figure 3.4, 14 countries have non-compulsory quality codes or guidelines in place which is a lower figure than in 2016 (17 countries). This can be explained by an overall increase in the number of countries moving towards quality assurance arrangements specific to validation and/or applying existing quality assurance arrangements to validation since 2016.

The number of countries where quality assurance is devolved to the awarding body or institution is slightly higher in 2018 (12 countries out of 35) than it was in 2016 and 2014. This situation is more common in higher education than in other subsectors of education and training, as it is often the case that individual higher education institutions establish their own quality assurance procedures on validation. The increase from 2016 referred to above, however, is mainly due to changes in the IVET and CVET subsectors of education and training.

The 2018 Inventory asked experts to identify the main strengths of the quality assurance system for validation across countries. The aspect most frequently reported – in 24 of 35 countries – is that the procedures are similar across institutions, which enables the quality assurance for validation to be consistently applied. Professionals knowing the system well and all phases of validation being covered were the next most popular responses. Other strengths such as support for providers to implement the system and that the quality assurance is highly customised for validation purposes were mentioned by 11 and 10 countries respectively. Less than a quarter of countries find that quality assurance is flexible and easy to change according to need or that there is consensus among institutions involved in validation that the system works well. The pattern of responses was similar in 2016.

Whilst the 2018 Inventory did not collect information on the quality assurance of validation in the labour market and third sector areas, evidence from the country reports suggest that outside the formal education and training system, the quality assurance of validation initiatives in those areas can be very diverse. Overall, the data indicates that different quality assurance procedures exist to support validation in these areas, but these are not always consistent with the approaches observed in the education and training area.

3.7 Developing the professional competences of validation practitioners

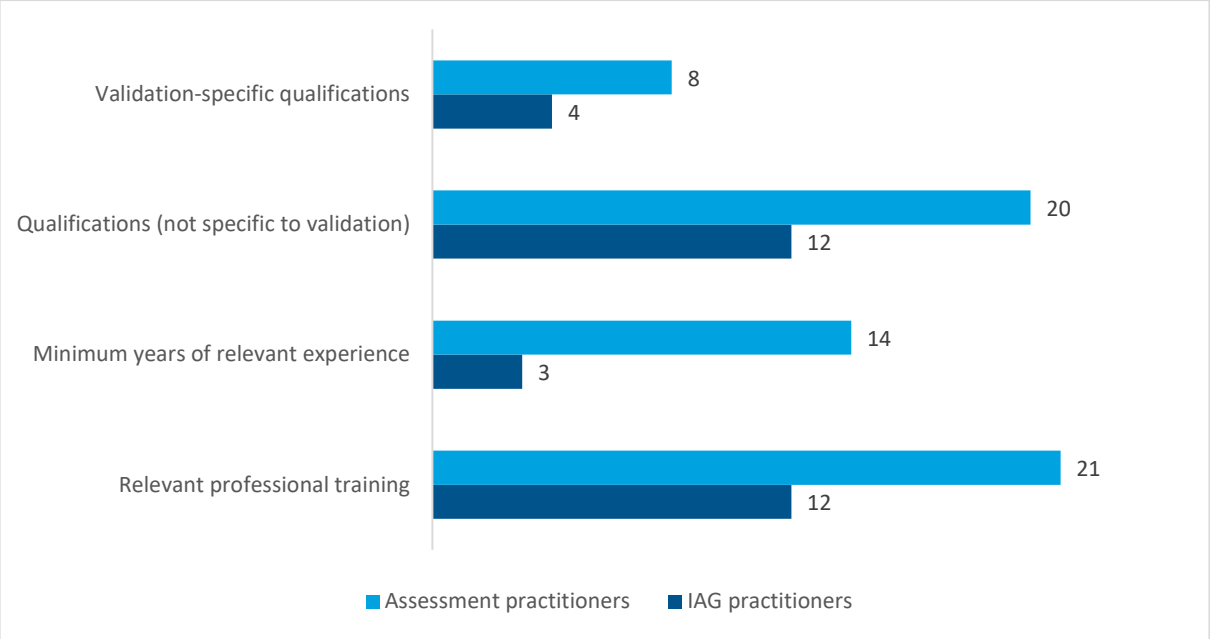
The Council Recommendation asks Member States to ensure provision is made for the development of the professional competences of practitioners involved in the

validation process. Country experts were asked if there are any mandatory (imposed) requirements in terms of qualifications, experience or training on advice and guidance practitioners and assessors involved in validation.

Education and training area

Figure 3.5 presents the number of countries which impose competence requirements on professionals delivering assessment and IAG on validation in one or more subsectors of education and training. For both assessment and IAG professionals, where mandatory imposed requirements were reported, the most common is professional training, followed by having completed qualifications which are not specific to the delivery of validation. The requirement for relevant professional training and minimum years of relevant experience for validation practitioners is more notable in IVET and CVET than in other subsectors of education and training.

Figure 3.5 Requirements on practitioners involved in IAG and assessment in validation (number of countries)



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

The 2018 data shows that it is more common to impose qualification requirements on practitioners involved in assessment than those involved in IAG. In certain countries, legislation stipulates that the qualification requirements for practitioners involved in the assessment of validation are the same as for those involved in teaching and assessment for the same or similar qualifications in the formal education system.

Taking a closer look at how the requirements for IAG practitioners involved in validation has changed over the period 2016-2018, the data shows that there has been an increase in the number of countries that have established requirements for relevant professional training for IAG practitioners (12 countries in 2018 compared to four in 2016). The data also shows a slight decrease in the number of countries that impose requirements for validation specific qualifications for IAG practitioners in 2018 compared to 2016 (four countries in 2018 compared to five in 2016).

Regarding assessment practitioners in validation, the data shows that there has been a slight increase in the number of countries that impose requirements for qualifications not-specific to validation (20 countries in 2018 compared to 19 in 2016), minimum

years of relevant experience (14 countries in 2018 compared to 11 in 2016) and relevant professional training during (21 countries in 2018 compared to 18 in 2016). There has however been a notable decrease in the number of countries that impose requirements for validation-specific qualifications for assessment practitioners (eight countries in 2018 compared to 15 in 2016), much more marked than in the case of IAG practitioners (four in 2018 compared to five in 2016).

3.7.1 Training for validation practitioners

For the 2018 Inventory, data concerning entitlement to training for validation practitioners was collected across the education and training area, labour market and third sector areas.

Education and training area

The 2018 data shows that some form of entitlement to training for practitioners involved in the assessment of validation is in place in 17 countries with validation arrangements in place in at least one subsector of education and training. Some form of entitlement to training for IAG practitioners is in place in 15 countries. By form of entitlement, this may include paid time for training, cost of training covered, and financial assistance to cover the cost of training for example.

A closer look at the data shows that in eight of these countries with validation arrangements in place in at least one education and training subsector, the cost of training is fully covered for both IAG and assessment practitioners. In Denmark, assessment practitioners are also entitled to paid leave for training. Some financial assistance is available to both IAG and assessment practitioners to support the costs associated with training in Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal. In Switzerland and Turkey, the cost of training is fully covered for assessment practitioners but not IAG practitioners.

Overall, 2018 and 2016 data show some progress regarding entitlement to training for validation practitioners compared to the situation in 2014, but this is still far from universal. Only four out of eight countries that require assessors involved in validation initiatives to hold validation-specific qualifications offer some form of entitlement to training (Iceland, Italy, Switzerland and Turkey). Greater efforts are required to ensure practitioners involved in validation have some form of entitlement to undertake professional development.

Labour market and third sector areas

Within the labour market and third sector areas, entitlement to some form of training for validation practitioners is in place in a few countries only. In the labour market, the cost of training IAG practitioners is fully covered in Belgium-Flanders, Iceland and Slovakia. Belgium-Flanders and Iceland also fully cover the cost of training for assessment practitioners. In Turkey costs for training are fully covered for assessment practitioners but not for IAG practitioners. Some financial assistance is available to IAG and assessment practitioners to support the costs associated with training in the Netherlands.

Within the third sector, IAG and assessment practitioners are entitled to paid leave for training in Italy. Belgium-Flanders fully cover the cost of training for IAG practitioners. As in the case of the labour market, some financial assistance is available to IAG and assessment practitioners to support the costs associated with training in the Netherlands.

Across the labour market and third sector areas, training entitlement is available to IAG practitioners more often than for assessment practitioners. Overall, entitlement to training is much more limited in these two areas than in the education and training area.

3.8 Trends in validation take-up and users of validation

Previous Inventory reports highlighted the need to improve data collection around validation and the monitoring of validation-related initiatives[45]. Today data collection on different aspects of validation (participation, type of qualification or outcomes achieved, user characteristics, success rate, length of procedure, etc.) remains at a low level. Nevertheless, in 2018 there is an increase in the number of countries that collect and monitor data on the use of validation. In 2016 there were 13 countries in which experts were unable to provide information on users, whereas in 2018 this was reduced to nine countries. For 26 countries experts provided information on the use of validation in at least one subsector of education and training.

It is important to note that data collection is still not comprehensive: for example, even in those countries that have some data collection procedures on the use of validation in place, data is collected on some but not all subsectors in which validation arrangements are in place. Lack of information is more pronounced in the adult education and higher education sectors, where almost three-quarters of the experts in countries with validation arrangements in place were not in a position to provide information on the use of validation. With regards to the labour market area, 11 of 19 countries provide data on the number of users, and 8 of 23 countries in the third sector area.

Overall the upward trend in the number of users of validation observed in 2016 has been maintained in 2018 as illustrated in Table 3.1 below. This trend is more pronounced in subsectors close to the labour market, particularly CVET, adult education and labour market initiatives. In 2018, in 17 of the 26 countries in the education and training area, four of the ten countries in the labour market and three of the six in the third sector where data on users is available, an upward trend in the number of participants starting/applying for validation since 2016 can be observed. In nine countries the numbers have remained stable while in six countries the number of participants starting/applying for validation have decreased. In France, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Denmark, the decrease in numbers might be explained by a certain level of maturity of the system for validation where new impetus may be required to boost numbers.

[45] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF (2016).

Table 3.1 Take up of validation as reported by experts

	Education and training area	Labour market area	Third sector area
Increased	Belgium-Flanders[46], Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Iceland[47], Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland[48], Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey	Cyprus, Iceland, Malta, Sweden, Turkey	Finland, Italy, Latvia
Remained the same	Belgium-Flanders[49], Czech Republic, Germany, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Poland[50], Switzerland	Belgium-Flanders, Czech Republic, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland	Ireland
Decreased	Denmark, France, Iceland[51], Netherlands[52], Romania, Switzerland[53]	Liechtenstein	Belgium-Flanders, Poland

Source: 2018 European Inventory.

Regarding the characteristics of users of validation, across the education and training area, the main users of validation, as could be expected, are adult learners (19 countries). Contrasting data from 2016 and 2018 reveals that jobseekers and individuals at risk of unemployment are making greater use of validation in more countries over this period, while workers seem to be using validation less compared to 2016. No data on the characteristics of users was available in 16 countries.

3.8.1 Use of validation by the groups covered by the Upskilling Pathway Recommendation

The 2018 Inventory also explored the use of validation by the groups covered by the Upskilling Pathway Recommendation[54], namely low-skilled adults, including young adults not covered by the Youth Guarantee, and long-term unemployed people. Validation arrangements targeting these groups exist or are in development in most countries – though to a different extent. Specific initiatives are most frequently in place for long-term unemployed people, closely followed by adults with low skill levels. The

[46] Increase reported in GE, IVET. Remained the same in AE.

[47] Increase reported in CVET. Decrease in GE, IVET, AE.

[48] Increase reported in CVET, IVET. Remained the same in GE.

[49] Cf footnote 44.

[50] Cf footnote 46.

[51] Cf footnote 45.

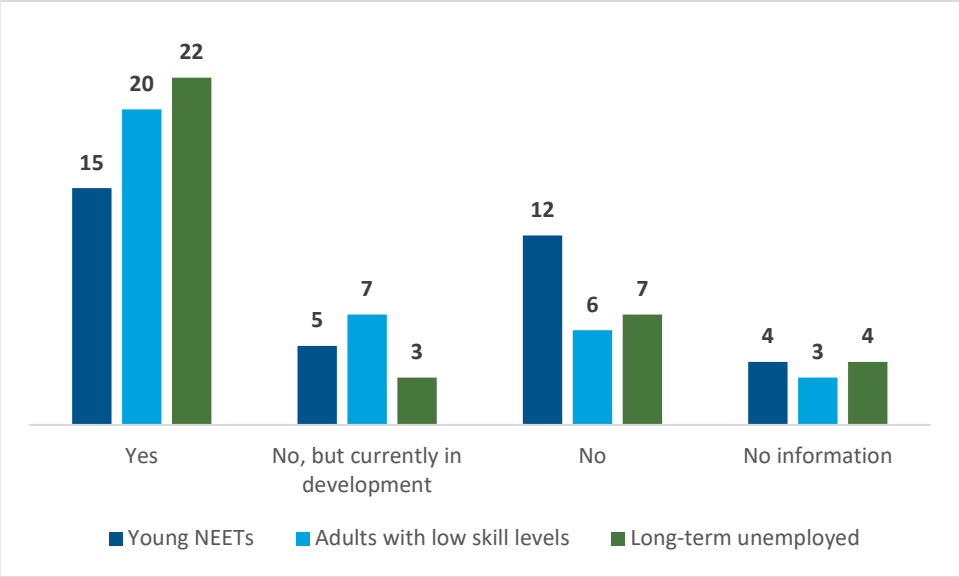
[52] Decrease reported in HE.

[53] Decrease reported in CVET.

[54] Council of the European Union (2016).

Upskilling Pathways approach is being extended to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Figure 3.6 below provides an overview of the current situation.

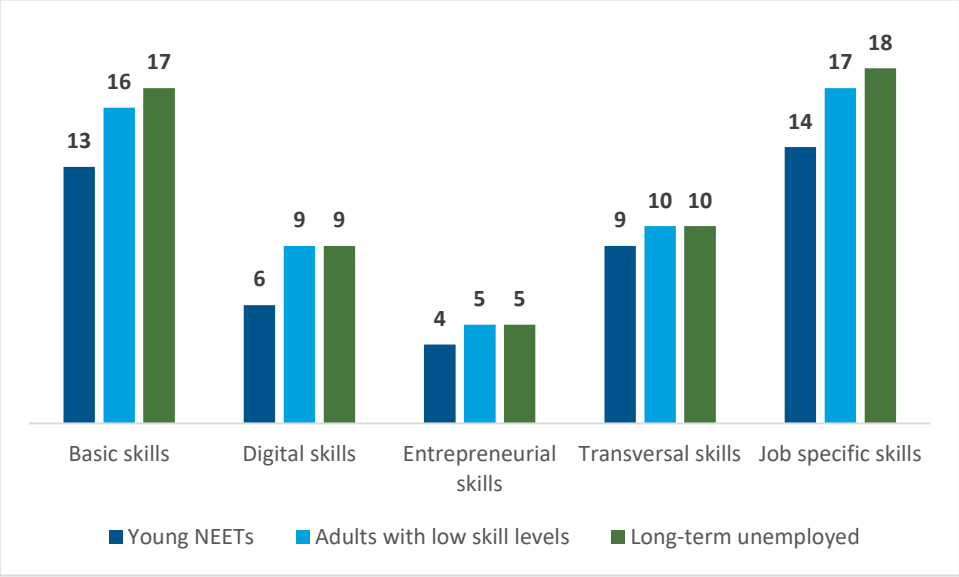
Figure 3.6 Number of countries with validation arrangements targeting disadvantaged groups covered by the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

As Figure 3.7Figure 3.7 shows, the skill areas covered by validation initiatives vary more between types of skills than in the number of countries with initiatives in relation to a given type of skill. Schemes most frequently include the validation of job-specific skills and/or basic skills (13-18 countries addressing these skills for the different target groups in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation). Digital, entrepreneurial and transversal skills receive less attention.

Figure 3.7 Types of skills covered by the validation initiatives



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

3.8.2 Validation of non-formal and informal learning for migrants and refugees

With regards to migrants and refugees, as shown in Table 3.2, eight countries have (systematic) validation arrangements in place for these groups. It should be noted that many of these initiatives are targeted towards 'highly skilled' individuals – see the Thematic Report on Upskilling Pathways, produced for the 2018 European Inventory.

Table 3.2 Status of validation initiatives for migrants and refugees

Current status of validation initiatives for migrants/refugees	Country
Systematic arrangements in place[55] / arrangements in place but not fully systematic	AT, BE-FR, FI, DE, DK, NL, SE
Project based initiatives in place	CY, CZ, EL, HU, IS, IT, LV, NO, CH, TR, UK-S
No specific arrangements in place	BE-NL, BG, ES, IE, FR, LU, MT, PL, RO, SK, UK-ENI, UK-W
No information	HR, EE, LI, PT, SI, LT

Source: 2018 European Inventory.

All the initiatives identified for migrants and refugees include the validation stages of identification and documentation. Initiatives identified in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden also include assessment and certification. In the majority of these countries, validation initiatives also lead to the identification of training options.

Migrants and refugees are a dominant user of validation in only four countries, two of which do not have (systematic) arrangements in place: Finland, Italy, Turkey and the Netherlands. In Finland and the Netherlands (countries with systematic arrangements in place), migrants and refugees are a dominant user group of validation in the higher education sector. In Italy and Turkey, validation opportunities for migrants and refugees are available through project-based initiatives, primarily in the CVET sector. These findings suggest that migrants and refugees are generally not making much use of validation opportunities across different areas. Moreover, many initiatives focus on the highly qualified/skilled newcomers and not on the low skilled, vulnerable (e.g. disabled people, women), unemployed or underemployed migrants/refugees – see the Thematic Report on Migrants produced for the 2018 European Inventory.

[55] Defined as: Specific arrangements that involve validation targeted towards migrants and refugees. By this, we mean systematic arrangements that allow for open access; meaning generally there are no conditions in place to prevent access to the initiative (or that they are reasonable); broad coverage meaning the initiative is open to the majority of the target group; no time element meaning the initiative is stable and not restricted to a short-time frame (of one year for example); it is supported by a funding package).

4 Skills audits[56]

Skills audits can be a useful tool to increase the employability of citizens. Various EU documents, including the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways[57] (UP), promote skills audits to identify and document individuals' knowledge, skills and competences. The Upskilling Pathways initiative was launched to combat low skills among the EU's adult population[58]. An upskilling pathway is a three-step process including skills assessment, learning opportunities and finally the validation and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences. This builds on the idea outlined in the Council Recommendation on validation to offer individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment the opportunity to undergo a skills audit aimed at further informing decisions about career orientation, education or training.

Currently, 26 countries have skills audits in place. Whilst the data is not fully comparable with those from earlier Inventory editions[59], this figure suggests a significant increase over the past years, as Table 4.1 shows, and that skills audit processes have gained attention at Member State level in line with the 2012 Council Recommendation over the last years[60].

Importantly, the development appears to be *'cumulative'*: all countries that had skills in place in 2016 have these arrangements in 2018 as well. In addition, six further countries introduced these provisions: Austria[61], France, Greece, Malta, Poland and Sweden.

Table 4.1 Overview of countries with skills audit (2014-2018)

2014	2016	2018
Countries with a possibility to undergo a skills audit	**Countries that integrate skills audits into existing arrangements for validation**	**Skills audit in place**
BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, EL, FI, FR, HU, HR, IT, LU, LV, NL, NO, PL, SE, SI, TR	BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, HR, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO, UK-S	AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, CZ, DE, DK. FI, FR, EL, ES, HR, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, UK-S
17 countries	20 countries	26 countries

Source: 2018, 2016, 2014 European Inventory.

[56] A skills audit is understood to be a 'process aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and/or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes'.

[57] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en

[58] For further information, please refer to the thematic report 'The role of validation in an upskilling pathway for young NEETs, adults with low-skill levels and long-term unemployed' as part of the 2018 Inventory Update.

[59] The 2018 country fiche asked: Are skills audits, where the definition is compatible/informed by the Council Recommendation in place?

[60] In 2014, 17 countries were reported to offer possibilities to undergo skills audits whilst in 2016, 20 countries were reported to have integrated skills audits into existing arrangements for validation.

[61] In 2016, it was reported that were no skills audits as such, but career orientation/professional plan initiatives are available from Public Employment Services.

Regarding the offer of skills audits to people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment[62], this is a standard practice in 15 countries. In three of these countries, the skills audit is offered within three months (Belgium-Flanders, Finland and Italy) and in another three countries it is offered within six months (Croatia, Czech Republic, Iceland), whilst a timeframe is not specified in eight countries (Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland). Romania is currently debating whether to introduce skills audits. In 18 countries, there are no skills audits as such in relation to the labour market and targeting unemployed people or people at risk of unemployment, but in 15 of them career orientation/professional plan initiatives are available from Public Employment Services.

Table 4.2 Overview of skills audits targeting unemployed people or people at risk of unemployment (2016-2018)

Standard practice to offer a skills audit to those unemployed or at risk of unemployment	2018		2016	
	Countries[63]	Number of countries	Countries[64]	Number of countries
Yes, within three months	BE-fl, FI, IT	3	DK, IT, FI	3
Yes, within six months	HR, CZ, IS	3	CZ, HR, IS	3
Yes, but no timeframe specified	EL, IE, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, CH	8	BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, EL, IE, LU, MT, PL	8
No, but there is a proposal to introduce it	RO	1	RO, SK	2
No, and there is no proposal to introduce it	AT, LI, SI, UK-E&NI	3	LI, SI, UK-E&NI	3
There are no skills audits as such, but career orientation/professional plan initiatives are available from Public Employment Services	BE-fr, BG, CY, EE, DE, HU, LT, NO, PT, SK, ES, SE, TR, UK-S, UK-W	15	AT, BG, CY, DE, EE, ES, HU, LT, LV, NL, NO PT, SE, TR, UK-S, UK-W	16

Source: 2018, 2016 European Inventory.

5 Validation tools and methods

The Council Recommendation highlights the importance of using appropriate tools and instruments that allow for validation of non-formal and informal learning and draws attention to the relevance of common European tools for transparency, such as Europass and Youthpass.

Validation tools are central to the quality, legitimacy and acceptance of the validation process. But they also influence the way individual learners experience validation and shape whether their full range of experience is captured. Different instruments shed light on different aspects of learning experiences. Through using an array of tools, individuals are provided with the opportunity to reflect their full range of skills, knowledge and competences.

[62] The question in relation to the labour market area is as follows: Is it standard practice to offer people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment the opportunity to undertake a skills audit?

[63] Information not available for France whilst expert indicated for DK the “don’t know” option.

[64] Information not available for France.

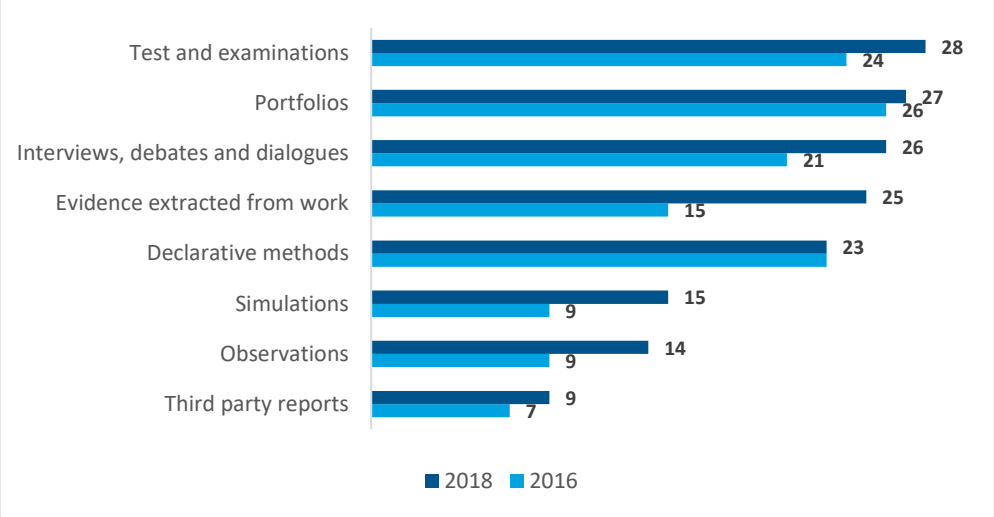
As an example, tests and examinations bring relatively quick results which then can be linked to formal education standards. On the one hand, they are often perceived negatively and approached with caution by individuals who may have negative past experiences in formal education. On the other hand, it can be argued that interviews and dialogues can have high degree of validity than some other methods as they enable dialogue which means that they can help to avoid misunderstandings in the formulation of questions and answers. Nevertheless, the assessor's experience, communication and facilitation skills play a strong role in this case in ensuring the validity, reliability and fairness of the process.

Both the 2014 and 2016 Inventories discussed the methods used to carry out validation and found that an increasing number of countries made use of different methods of validation. As presented in the subsequent sections, this finding is also confirmed by the 2018 Inventory data.

5.1 Tools for extracting evidence

In 2018, most of the countries with validation arrangements in at least one of the education and training subsectors make use of a wide range of tools for obtaining evidence on knowledge, skills and competences. As Figure 5.1 shows, 'tests and examinations' were identified as the single most frequently used method. This was reported to be in use in 28 countries, followed by 'portfolios' (27 countries) and 'interviews, debates and dialogues' (26 countries). 'Third party reports' appear to be least commonly used, reported by 9 countries. It is, however, expected that, in line with the Upskilling Pathways recommendation, the use of documentation (reports or skills profile i.e. in the form Europass) will gain further attention in the future.

Figure 5.1 Validation methods reported to be in use in one or more education and training subsectors where validation arrangements are in place 2016-2018 (number of countries)



Source: 2018, 2016 European Inventory (multiple responses possible).

Whilst the overall picture emerging from the 2018 Inventory data is largely comparable to the situation in 2016, it also suggests certain developments in this area. In general, more countries make use of the different validation methods compared to the previous inventory. In 2016, 'portfolios' were most prevalent but in 2018 they have been surpassed by 'tests and examinations'. As for the latter, these appear to be typically organised by education providers and, to a lesser extent, by other stakeholders.

‘Evidence extracted from work’ and ‘simulations’ and use of ‘observations’ gained considerable popularity in 2018 compared to 2016.

The analysis of methods used in different subsectors of education reveals interesting nuances. In the field of VET (both IVET and CVET), a number of methods are applied more often than any other subsector of education and training. This finding is especially notable regarding ‘simulations’ and ‘observations’. Conversely, the reported uptake of these two methods in the field of higher education is much lower than in any other subsector. The use of ‘portfolios’ and ‘declarative methods’ however, was most common in higher education.

5.2 Use of standardised tools

The validation step of identification needs to recognise the *‘non-standardised’* character of non-formal and informal learning and be adaptable enough to differing ‘personal histories’. At the same time, it is crucial that the range of identified knowledge, skills and competences identified are then translated into standardised, recognisable and acknowledged outcomes.

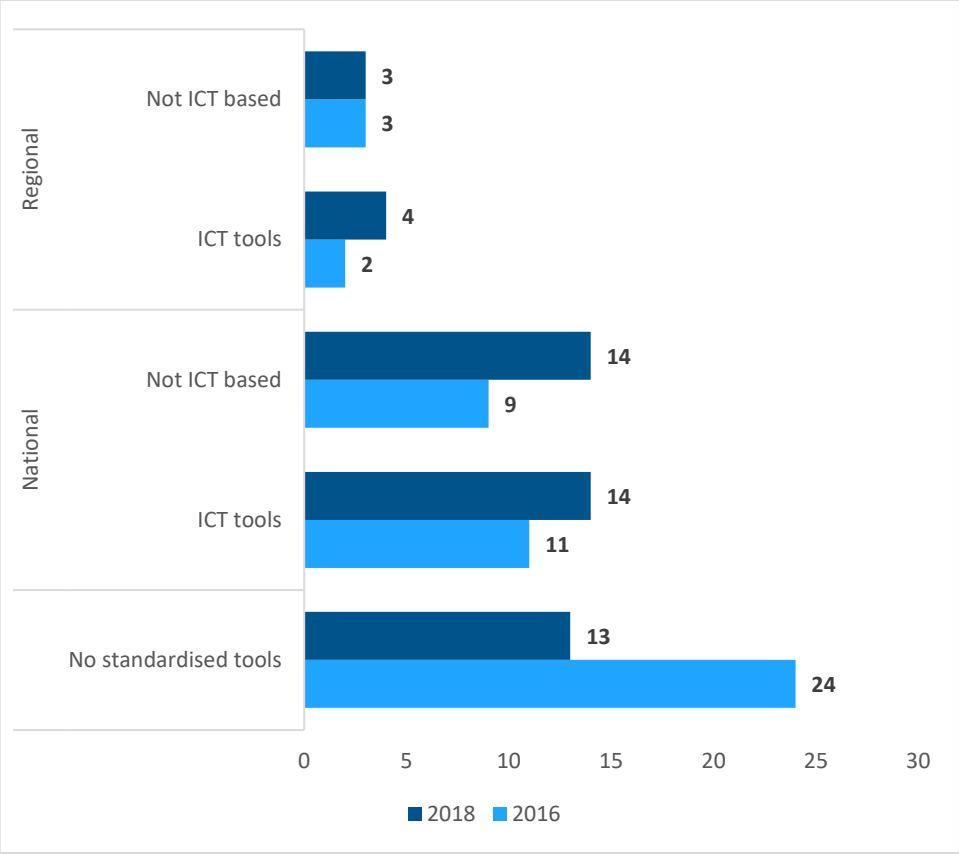
To that end, countries often apply standardised tools (ICT-based and non-ICT based) to allow self-assessment. The use of these tools, particularly ICT-based, offers the advantage of reaching more people and their use is associated with lower cost. However, they often fail to recognise the particular combination of skills and competences specific to each individual.

This section looks at the use of ICT and non-ICT based national and/or regional standardised tools for validation (i.e. online tools, portfolio templates) in European countries within the education and training area. Data were not collected for the labour market and third sector areas for this question.

A total of 23 countries use standardised tools in at least one subsector of education and training. These tools most often have a nationwide scope whereas a significantly lower number of countries indicated the use of regional standardised tools, without major differences between ICT and not ICT-based tools.

In addition to the overall reported increase in the uptake of standardised tools compared to 2016, another notable aspect is that both ICT and not-ICT based tools are used in an equal number of countries.

Figure 5.2 Nationally/regionally standardised tools/templates used in validation in one or more education and training subsectors where there are validation arrangements (number of countries)



Source: 2018 European Inventory (multiple responses possible).

Standardised tools and templates are used more frequently in VET (predominantly, IVET), As to the type of tools, VET shows the most balanced picture with regards to the use of ICT and non-ICT based tools. Country data furthermore suggests that non-ICT-based tools are most prevalent in the field of general education. Conversely, the share of ICT-tools in adult education is markedly higher than non-ICT.

5.3 Transparency tools

Linked to the themes of validation methods and standardised tools, the Council Recommendation promotes the use of EU/ national transparency tools to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes, making a particular reference to Europass and Youthpass.

Rather than focus on promotion – which is part of the implementation of the European tools - the discussion here focuses on the general acceptance of these transparency tools by employers and educational institutions.

Data available for 2018 shows that in the large majority of countries (28 countries) some kind of transparency tool is in use to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes. The most commonly used transparency tool at EU-level (in 18 countries[65]) is the Europass portfolio of documents – which can document non-formal and informal

[65] BE-NL, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom – W.

learning. This suggests a general acceptance of this document by employers and educational institutions for validation purposes. In six of these countries, Youthpass is also used to document non-formal and informal learning and employers and educational institutions normally acknowledge that it appropriately describes skills acquired by its holders.

The 2018 Inventory data also shows that in 18 countries[66], national tools are used to document non-formal and informal learning, however the country fiche database did not ask further questions to specify their exact features and further research is needed to understand the link between transparency tools and validation.

6 Conclusions

A clear evolution in the area of validation can be seen across the Inventories over the last decade. The 2010 Inventory noted, comparing the situation to the 2008 and earlier Inventories that "a new landscape in the validation of non-formal and informal learning has appeared". That new landscape entailed an increase in the profile of validation as a topic for discussion in education, training and employment policies. This followed intensive activity in related areas, in particular on the shift to learning outcomes brought about by the EQF recommendation of 2008. However, the 2010 Inventory also noted that validation remained in many countries "a marginal activity, with pockets of activity and good practice". Systems were beginning to be established but the scale of implementation was limited. Around two thirds of the countries covered in the 2010 Inventory were classified as having a medium-low or low degree of development in the area of validation.

Two years after the introduction of the Council Recommendation of validation, a new Inventory (2014) took stock of the situation in Europe and showed a transition from validation being a topic of discussion to an expansion in the development of national validation strategies and policies. However, in most countries, the Inventory reported, there was a need to further develop practical validation arrangements. Having a strategy, the Inventory noted, does not necessarily mean that it is enacted, although its existence can help to direct efforts and enhance clarity for users as well as accountability regarding progress. A reduction in the number of countries exhibiting low levels of development was reported. Following the adoption of the Council Recommendation, the Inventory provided an initial assessment of the implementation of its ten principles. This analysis showed good progress in over half of the countries covered by the Inventory with regards to four principles: guidance and counselling being readily available, linkages between NQFs and in line with the NQF, equivalence of standards to those of qualifications obtained through formal education and synergies with credit systems. The Inventory also reported a moderate increase in the take-up of validation, although it also noted that problems persisted in a range of areas: professionalisation of staff and staff development, lack of awareness about the value of validation, access to validation (including poor access to skills audits), equivalence of qualifications obtained through validation and those obtained through formal education, fragmentation of policies coupled with excessive reliance on project-based work and their uncertain financial sustainability) and overall lack of designated state budgets for validation.

The 2016 Inventory reported steady progress compared to the situation in 2014. By this time, six out of the ten principles outlined in the Recommendation were reported

[66] BE-NL, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey.

as experiencing a high degree of development, at least in some areas (education and training, labour market or third sector), although frequently this did not apply across areas. Moreover, four principles remained at a medium or low degree of development, with the provision for the development of professional competences of staff involved in validation and the prioritisation of disadvantaged groups in validation initiatives being the principles presenting a lower degree of development. At policy level, advances in terms of the coordination of policy initiatives in the area were reported, often by means of a coordinating institution. These signalled an attempt to move from the existence of validation initiatives, dominant in the previous periods, to the development of validation systems. These coordinating efforts, however, still operated within a strongly fragmented validation environment. Participation continued to experience moderate increases, but the Inventory noted that systems for the monitoring of take-up remained weak.

Following the evolution from previous periods, validation arrangements in 2018 are available in at least one of the three broad areas (education and training, labour market and third sector) in all countries covered by the Inventory – although most commonly in the education and training area. The 2018 Inventory put greater emphasis on the examination of the comprehensiveness of validation arrangements than previous Inventories, which focused more on the existence of activity. This analysis has shed new light on the progress experienced with regards to the principles enshrined in the Council Recommendation. The analysis highlighted that around half of the principles show a high degree of comprehensiveness across education and training, labour market, and the third sector, whereas with respect to the other half of the principles, comprehensiveness is still a challenge. This is the case, in particular, with regards to the professional development of staff involved in validation and skills audits for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment.

It should be emphasised that the evolution described above is not isolated from other reforms of “lifelong learning systems” that have taken place in European countries during the last decade, and of which validation is part, such as the shift to learning outcomes and the expansion of national qualification frameworks. Such developments push validation forward as they create conditions that facilitate the adoption of actions and policies related to validation. These, in turn, make education and training systems more responsive to individuals’ needs, more flexible and permeable, allowing for the recognition of learning regardless of the context in which it has taken place and facilitating progression within those systems through individualised pathways.

Further work is required, however, in order to make the principles of the Council Recommendation a reality, and to establish comprehensive validation systems in European countries. Together with the further development of national validation systems, it should now be possible to enhance their international dimension, by increasing the transparency of availability of validation options in different European countries, in a user-centred way. This would enhance the synergies/ coherence between validation and related developments, in particular the EQF. For example, an individual may live in country “A” of the European Union, where there are no available options for the validation of his/her skills into a qualification recognised in the NQF. Synergies would materialise if this individual could a) find and access a suitable validation opportunity linked to the NQF in another Member State “B”, and then b) have those skills recognised in country “A” through the link between NQFs of country A and B in the EQF. In practical terms, this could take the form of a search engine where individuals could input individual skills, occupations or desired qualification and the engine returned information (including eligibility requirements) on and links to relevant validation initiatives across Europe.

6.1 Overview of progress by principle

This section provides a brief overview of progress and current status of each principle.

Validation arrangements in place	In 2018, validation arrangements are available in at least one of the three broad areas in all 36 countries. Validation arrangements are most commonly in place across the education and training area. The labour market area has the fewest countries with validation arrangements in place, but there is good progress from 2016. The third sector area remains a significant area of validation. Moreover, countries are developing general strategies for the creation of validation arrangements. Linked to lifelong learning strategies and further implementation of NQFs, validation arrangements are considered within broader country skill strategies. Despite this increase on strategies, we have little information on the level of uptake. Monitoring systems for validation are still limited, and little is known on the level of acceptance of validation as a route for assessment or certification of skills. It seems that validation is still not common, despite an increase on numbers in several countries. This is especially so for disadvantaged individuals, that are still not entering validation initiatives to a significant extent in many countries.
Guidance and counselling being readily available	Significant progress has been made in relation to this principle. Guidance and counselling is a widespread practice in education and training and the labour market, but provision is much less prevalent in the third sector area. However, more needs to be done in creating connections between validation and career guidance practices in order to improve uptake, acceptance and awareness.
Information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures	IAG is usually 'not a requirement' in validation initiatives and is mostly provided in relation to the 'process' – the steps needed to obtain validation - rather than other aspects such as assessment and outcomes and benefits.
Linkages between validation arrangements and NQFs, and synergies between validation and credit systems	Significant links between validation and the NQF have been established. In the education and training area, the most prevalent link is that validation gives access to formal education and leads to the acquisition of modules or a part of a formal qualification. There is still some way to go in the labour market and third sector areas, where many countries still do not have a link between validation and the NQF. However, looking at the labour market area, there have been some encouraging developments, as the number of countries where validation allows the award of (or part of) a qualification on the NQF has increased since 2016.
Qualifications or parts of qualifications obtained through validation using agreed standards that are the same or equivalent to those for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes	In the area of education and training, standards for qualifications obtained through validation are often exactly the same as standards in formal education and training. However, in the labour market and the third sector, a considerable number of countries do not use the same standards for validation as for formal education. In the labour market, in most cases, validation is based on occupational standards.
Development of the professional competences of validation practitioners	While some progress has been experienced in relation to this principle, there is still some way to go in ensuring development opportunities for validation practitioners. Entitlement to training for both IAG and assessment practitioners is somewhat patchy across countries. The most common competence requirement in the

	education and training area is for practitioners to have professional experience, followed by having completed qualifications which are not specific to the delivery of validation. Within the labour market and third sector areas, entitlement to some form of training for validation practitioners is in place in a few countries only.
Quality Assurance measures	By 2018, quality assurance mechanisms are in place in nearly all counties covered by the Inventory. The use of quality assurance procedures specific to validation is becoming more common. In the education and training area, the number of countries with specific quality assurance arrangements for validation has more than doubled from 2014 to 2018.
Disadvantaged groups and validation	In a growing number of countries, validation initiatives are targeting disadvantaged groups. This, however, by no means appears to be universal and there are marked differences between which particular disadvantaged groups can benefit from validation. Tools and methods should be line with the needs of the individual and overall purpose of validation. This is of particular importance considering the range of different target groups that benefit from validation. Validation arrangements targeting these groups exist or are in development in most countries but to a different extent. Specific validation initiatives are most frequently in place for long-term unemployed people, closely followed by adults with low skill levels. A small number of countries have arrangements in place for migrants and refugees.
Availability of skills audits for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment	Skills audit processes have gained an increase over recent years. Skills audits are widespread and generally target unemployed people or groups at-risk of unemployment, although they do not always follow the timeframes suggested in the Council Recommendation – which refers to the provision of skills audits ideally within six months of an identified need.
Use of EU/ national transparency tools to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes	A large majority of the countries covered (28 in total) make use of transparency tools, which most often include Europass and, less often, Youthpass and national tools.

Source: 2018 European Inventory country fiches.

As it stands, four principles can be considered to be at high level of implementation. First, the principle where the highest level of implementation has been registered refers to the accessibility of guidance and counselling around validation. Second, information and guidance on benefits, opportunities and procedures is very well provided for. Third, in more than half of the countries covered, validation arrangements and their outputs are linked to NQFs and are in line with the EQF. Finally, some type of quality assurance (including transparency and the strengths of the QA) is also an integral part of the validation system in the majority of the countries.

Yet another four principles are at medium level of implementation: compliance with agreed standards; synergies with credit systems (ECTS and ECVET); disadvantaged groups; transparency tools.

At the same time, two principles require efforts to be stepped up: Offering of a “skills audit” as a standard practice to people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment and professional development for validation practitioners. It is, however, expected that with the introduction of the Upskilling Pathway, skills audits will gain further attention in future years. The training of practitioners involved in the provision of information and guidance or assessment for validation is seldom provided

with associated forms of entitlement or training support (i.e. paid leave for training, covering the costs of the training).

6.2 What's next for validation?

The 2018 update to the European Inventory shows considerable progress has been made and that a wide range of good practice exists from the validation taking place across Europe. However, information presented in the 2018 country reports demonstrate that a number of obstacles and challenges remain in relation to the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning across European countries.

In particular, the following points should be considered for the future:

- **Moves toward a more comprehensive reach for validation:** As mentioned there is an abundance of validation structures and practices that meet the Council Recommendation principles in the different areas and subsectors of education and training analysed. However, only rarely are those available across and between the three areas of education and training, the labour market and third sector or across the gamut of education and training subsectors. A key challenge for the future will be to build on existing good practices in different areas and subsectors and to scale up those initiatives and enhance the degree of comprehensiveness in which the Council Recommendation principles are met.
- **Develop comprehensive monitoring systems in relation to validation:** While some progress has been registered in relation to the collection of data on validation, the Inventory clearly shows the need for stronger monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in order to enable better assessment and documentation of costs, benefits and impact of validation in general, and of different types of validation initiatives and methodologies. Valid and reliable data on the application and take-up of validation of non-formal and informal learning also remains scarce. Although some countries / learning providers do collect data relating specifically to validation, others do not distinguish between learners who have benefited from validation and those who have pursued a formal route to a qualification or a place on a course. Often, data is not systematically collected / analysed at national level, although it may be available at the level of the provider or project.
- **Strengthen cooperation between key stakeholders**: There also remains significant differences in the use of validation between the education and training area compared to the labour market and third sector areas. Strengthening cooperation between key stakeholders across the three broad areas can help create 'bridges' and ensure outcome of validation that takes place in one sector/area can be used in another.
- **Improve the sustainability and financing of validation:** Constrained public budgets are an obstacle to the implementation of validation. The 2018 Inventory shows that validation activities have a secure and allocated budget only in a handful of countries, whilst it appears that fees in many countries are covered by the learners themselves (at least partly), or from within learning providers' existing budget. Although there are a number of pilot projects (often EU-funded), sustainability remains a key issue for these initiatives. Ensuring mechanisms are in place to mobilise and spur validation across the three broad areas is needed. Depending on national circumstances, this may require strengthening legal and/or governance arrangements for validation.

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Annex 1 Note on methodology

The 2018 update of the European Inventory on validation provides an overview of validation policies and practice in 39 European countries[67] in the form of individual country reports. Two country reports have been produced for Belgium[68] and three for the United Kingdom[69] to take account of the devolved responsibility for education and training policy in these countries. These regions will be referred and counted as 'countries' in the current report. In addition, the 2018 Inventory Update also includes three international case studies that present successful validation practices from beyond Europe[70], and, five thematic reports that look at certain aspects of validation in greater depth[71].

This Synthesis Report is based on an analysis of the EU28, EFTA countries and Turkey, in order to stay aligned with previous versions of the Inventory. A separate synthesis report has been produced for Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

The synthesis is based on an analysis of the data collected through a 'country fiche', which was completed by country experts alongside the country reports. The fiche mapped the situation in each country according to standardised indicators. Data was collected in these different sections:

- The country situation as a whole;
- The Education and training area:
  - General education;
  - Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET);
  - Higher Education;
  - Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET);
  - Adult Education;
- The labour market area; and
- The "third sector" area.

By labour market, we refer to initiatives in which private sector institutions play a central role (alone or in collaboration with public sector institutions.). These initiatives might be promoted, for example, by employers or employers' associations.

In the third sector, validation initiatives might be associated with youth work or volunteering, or might be validation arrangements developed by third sector organisations such as charities or NGOs to support a variety of target groups (e.g. third country nationals, unemployed people, young people at risk of exclusion, people with a disability, etc.). They may or may not be connected to formal education activities. While there is some overlap and synergies between the activities in these sectors, in general it was possible to differentiate between them during the data collection.

[67] EU-28, EEA EFTA countries, Switzerland, Turkey and ETF countries (Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia).

[68] Belgium – Flanders, Belgium – Wallonia.

[69] UK - England and Northern Ireland, UK - Wales, UK - Scotland.

[70] Nova Scotia scheme from Canada, ChileValora scheme from Chile, Hong Kong Qualification Framework from Hong Kong).

[71] Bridging the Gap: Validation creating routes and links between sectors; How digital forms of assessment and self-assessment might place a new challenge and opportunity for assessment methodologies; Validation of non-formal and informal learning for migrants and refugees; How social partners (chambers of industry and commerce, trade unions) and other labour market-related stakeholders are involved in validation arrangements; The role of validation in an upskilling pathway for young NEETs, adults with low-skill levels and long-term unemployed people.

The analysis is presented by country 'count' and for this reason it is useful for the reader to have an understanding of how to interpret the numbers and charts presented in this report. Questions within the country fiche were a mix of multiple choice and single response options, with some allowing for free-text entries. The presence of multiple-choice questions means that the totals can come to more than the total number of countries with validation arrangements in place in some questions. The questionnaire for the sectors of education and training (listed above) was the same across all five sectors. Different questionnaires were used for the labour market and third sector areas. The responses to the questions included within the 'general', labour market and third sector parts of the country fiche database were answered once only for each country. This allows for certain disaggregated analysis by sector, which is useful to understand more accurately the European situation in relation to specific aspects. However, the report mainly focuses on the overall situation in Europe.

Where the 'number of countries' is presented, this refers to the number of countries which gave each answer to the question. In the case of education and training sectors, when presenting the 'count of countries', the data figure represents the number of countries where the indicator applies in *at least one* sector of education and training where there are validation arrangements (but may not apply to all sectors in that country). Each country is counted once, regardless of the number of sectors where the category applies.

The synthesis report provides also a comparison with 2016 Inventory data and, to the extent possible, with 2014 and 2010 data in order to present key trends and developments towards meeting the aims set out in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation. Comparability of data is not always possible due to the changes in the way data has been collected over time and the change in the total number of countries covered in each Inventory update[72].

It is important to keep in mind that validation is a complex issue, which is approached in very different ways across the countries of Europe. While it is difficult to apply standardised indicators to such a complex topic, this study tries to find some common ground for comparison at European level. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the analysis work give us a good indication of the landscape of validation across Europe in 2018 and how this has changed since the previous Inventories in 2016, 2014 and prior to that in 2010.

[72] The 2016 and 2014 Inventory updates covered 36 countries described in 33 country reports. The 2010 Inventory update covered 32 countries described in 34 reports.

Annex 2 Scoring methodology

To provide a more in-depth overview of progress, the indicators included in the 2018 country fiche data on the Council Recommendations principles have been scored to capture their degree of implementation. This approach has allowed for a more detailed mapping and presentation of data – compared to earlier Inventories where a binary distinction between meeting/ not meeting the criteria for each country fiche question was used. Using the assigned scores, the countries were then classified into three predefined categories as follows:

High level of implementation	70-100%	
Medium level of implementation	30-70%	
Low level of implementation	<30%	

Scoring for individual principles was undertaken for and on the basis of the sectors where validation arrangements are in place.

Example of scoring and country classification approach at a glance

Scoring approach:

Country fiche question: *Please select from the following about the provision of information and guidance (IAG) to candidates in this sector:*

Answer options:

A) IAG is provided about the process, and is a requirement

B) IAG is provided about the process, but is not a requirement

C) IAG is provided about assessment, and is a requirement

D) IAG is provided about assessment, but is not a requirement

E) IAG is provided about the outcomes and benefits, and is a requirement

F) IAG is provided about the outcomes and benefits, but is not a requirement

G) Not applicable

H) Do not know

I) Information not available

Calculation of score: *The principle in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation asks that information and guidance on the benefits of, and opportunities for, validation, as well as on the relevant procedures, are available to individuals and organisations. It thus asks for IAG on three aspects: the process, assessment and outcomes/ benefits of validation. Given this, the scoring employed was: A or B= 1; C or D= 1; E or F= 1. Scores are added and divided by 3.*

Above approach in practice:

- Spain IVET: B, C and F are selected = 3

- Final score: 3/3=1

Country classification:

In relation to the six principles where data has been collected across all sectors, under this approach, each of the three broad sectors are weighted equally. The weighting is based on five education sectors (each individually weighted as 1); the labour market weighted as 5 and the third sector weighted as 5, so that each sector is weighted equally in the end. Assuming validation arrangements are in place in all sectors of education, the labour market and the third sector, the maximum score available is 15.

Calculation of the scores for individual principles is undertaken on the basis of the sectors where validation arrangements are in place.

Annex 3 Description of validation arrangements by country

	EDUCATION	LABOUR MARKET	THIRD SECTOR
AUSTRIA	VA in all sectors	Specific projects	Specific projects
BELGIUM FLANDERS	VA in all sectors	VA in place	Specific projects
BELGIUM WALLONIA	VA in 3 sectors: CVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Not applicable
BULGARIA	VA in 4 sectors: GE, IVET, CVET, AE	Not applicable	Not applicable
CROATIA	No validation arrangements	VA in place	VA in place
CYPRUS	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, CVET, AE	VA in place	VA in development
CZECH REPUBLIC	VA in 1 sector: CVET	VA in place	Specific projects
DENMARK	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE, AE	Not applicable	Specific projects
ESTONIA	VA in 4 sectors: GE, IVET, HE, AE	Not applicable	Not applicable
FINLAND	VA in all sectors	Not applicable	Specific projects
FRANCE	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE	Not applicable	Not applicable
GERMANY	VA in all sectors	Not applicable	Specific projects
GREECE	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, CVET, AE	Not applicable	Not applicable
HUNGARY	VA in 3 sectors: CVET, HE, AE	Information not available	Specific projects

ICELAND	VA in all sectors	VA in place	Specific projects
IRELAND	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Specific projects
ITALY	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Specific projects
LATVIA	VA in 4 sectors: GE, IVET, CVET, HE	Not applicable	Specific projects
LIECHTENSTEIN	VA in 2 sectors: IVET, HE	VA in place	Not applicable
LITHUANIA	VA in all sectors	Not applicable	Not applicable
LUXEMBOURG	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE	VA in place	Not applicable
MALTA	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE	VA in place	Not applicable
NETHERLANDS	VA in all sectors	VA in place	Specific projects
NORWAY	VA in 4 sectors: GE, IVET, CVET, HE	VA in development	Specific projects
POLAND	VA in 4 sectors: GE, IVET, CVET, HE	VA in place	Specific projects
PORTUGAL	VA in 3 sectors: GE, IVET, HE	Not applicable	Not applicable
ROMANIA	VA in 2 sectors: GE, CVET	Not applicable	Not applicable
SLOVAKIA	VA in 2 sectors: CVET, AE	VA in development	Not applicable
SLOVENIA	VA in 4 sectors: GE, IVET, CVET, HE	Do not know	Specific projects
SPAIN	VA in all sectors	Not applicable	VA in development
SWEDEN	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Specific projects

SWITZERLAND	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE	Specific projects	Specific projects
UNITED KINGDOM ENI	VA in 3 sectors: IVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Information not available
UNITED KINGDOM S	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Specific projects
UNITED KINGDOM W	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Not applicable
NORTH MACEDONIA	VA in 3 sectors: GE, IVET, AE	VA in development	Not applicable
KOSOVO	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, AE, HE	Not applicable	Information not available
MONTENEGRO	VA in 4 sectors: IVET, CVET, HE, AE	VA in place	Not applicable
TURKEY	VA in 2 sectors: CVET, AE	VA in place	Specific projects

Note: The table includes North Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro that have not been used in this report to maintain consistency with previous inventories. Further information on these countries is available in their respective country reports and the synthesis report specific for these countries.

Annex 4 Stakeholder involvement in validation

Table A4.1 Number of countries (from 36) by type of organisation and function relating to validation arrangements in the education and training area

	Coordinating role (within this sector)	Coordinating role (between sectors)	Design of national strategies for validation	Provision of information, and advice guidance	Design of QA mechanisms	Setting up standards	Identification and documentation	Assessment	Certification
Government Organisations	29	25	30	15	28	24	6	4	8
Education and training providers	2	2	6	27	13	14	28	29	28
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Providers	1	0	1	25	1	1	11	4	1
Youth organisations	1	0	4	12	2	2	13	3	2
Other civil society organisations	1	0	1	12	1	1	12	3	3
Chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts	3	2	7	15	6	18	5	10	7
Public Employment Services	4	4	5	27	4	4	20	9	2
Private Employment Services	0	0	0	8	1		8	4	1
National organisations	10	9	12	16	13	15	12	13	15
Employer organisations or individual employers	2	3	5	11	4	17	8	11	5
Trade unions	2	2	6	12	3	14	2	3	2

Source: 2018 European Inventory. Multiple responses possible. Data is based on the total count of countries across all sub-sectors of education and training with validation arrangements in place in one or more sub-sectors (35).

Table A4.2 Number of countries (from 19) in the labour market area by type of organisation and function relating to validation arrangements

	Coordinating role (within this sector)	Coordinating role (between sectors)	Design of national strategies for validation	Provision of information, advice and guidance	Design of QA mechanisms	Setting up standards	Identification and documentation	Assessment	Certification
Government Organisations	10	12	11	9	11	9	2	1	2
Education and training providers	0	1	1	7	4	3	9	9	8
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Providers	0	0	0	9	0	0	3	1	0
Youth organisations	0	0	0	4	0	0	3	1	0
Other civil society organisations	0	0	0	5	0	0	4	1	1
Chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts	3	0	3	6	2	8	2	4	4
Public Employment Services	4	3	1	11	4	3	11	5	3
Private Employment Services	1	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0
National organisations	6	5	6	9	9	7	6	9	8
Employer organisations or individual employers	2	2	4	5	1	7	3	4	3
Trade unions	2	1	5	6	1	4	0	2	2

Source: 2018 European Inventory. Multiple responses possible. Data is based on the total count of countries across the labour market with validation arrangements in place (19).

Table A4.3 Number of countries (from 23) in the third sector area by type of organisation and function relating to validation arrangements

	Coordinating role (within this sector)	Coordinating role (between sectors)	Design of national strategies for validation	Provision of information, advice and guidance	Design of QA mechanisms	Setting up standards	Identification and documentation	Assessment	Certification
Government Organisations	8	7	9	3	7	4	0	0	0
Education and training providers	1	0	1	2	1	4	4	5	5
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Providers	0	0	0	6	0	0	1	0	0
Youth organisations	5	2	2	13	4	4	10	4	3
Other civil society organisations	2	3	1	13	2	2	9	2	1
Chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Public Employment Services	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0
Private Employment Services	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0
National organisations	4	4	4	7	3	5	2	2	2
Employer organisations or individual employers	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Trade unions	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0

Source: 2018 European Inventory. Multiple responses possible. Data is based on the total count of countries across the third sector with validation arrangements in place (23).