TRANSVAL-EU

VALIDATION OF TRANSVERSAL SKILLS ACROSS EUROPE

European State of the Art Report, December 2021

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List of Acronyms	
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CERTUM	System of certification of competences and recognition of training credits (Umbria region)
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment
CLEA	Certificate of professional knowledge and skills (Certificat de Connaissances et de Compétences Professionnelles, France)
CTT	Competence Test Tool
CTCF	Common Transversal Competence Framework
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESCO	European standard taxonomy for skills, competences, qualifications, and occupations
EU	European Union
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
IDI	Individual in-depth interviews
IQS	Integrated Qualifications System (Poland)
ISQF	Icelandic Qualifications Framework

ICT	Information and Computer Technology
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MBK	Skills Audit Method (Metoda Bilansu Kompetencji)
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PES	Public Employment Services
PQF	Polish Qualifications Framework
PSL	Personal, social, and learning-to-learn competences
QPI	Questionnaire on professional interests
RECTEC	Recognising transversal competences in relation to employability and qualifications (Reconnaître les compétences transversales en lien avec l'employabilité et les certifications)
RNCP	National Directory of Professional Certifications (Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles, France)
SOLO	Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes
TC	Transversal Competences
TSC	Transversal skills and competences
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VPL	Validation of prior learning

Executive Summary

Transversal skills and competences set the foundation for personal development, resilience, the ability to communicate and work constructively with others, problem-solving skills, and the ability to manage one's learning and career. As defined by the European Classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) "Transversal skills and competences (TSCs) are learned and proven abilities which are commonly seen as necessary or valuable for effective action in virtually any kind of work, learning or life activity. They are 'transversal' because they are not exclusively related to any particular context (job, occupation, academic discipline, civic or community engagement, occupational sector, group of occupational sectors, etc.)."[1]

Although transversal competences are of increasing importance in work and daily life, they typically are only an implicit part of the guidance and validation process. There is a need for greater clarity of concepts underpinning approaches to transversal skills and competences in validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) processes. The TRANSVAL-EU policy experimentation aims to address the need for practitioners working in the area of VNFIL to support and assess learners' transversal skills and competences.

This state-of-the-art report brings together information on current policies and practices to support guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences in VNFIL across Europe. The report is based on desk research conducted by TRANSVAL-EU partners and on a European-wide stakeholder survey.

The report is organised as follows:

Chapter 1 explores concepts underpinning the notion of 'transversal skills and competences' and highlights evidence on the need for greater attention to this area. This is followed by a presentation of stages for the validation of non-formal and informal learning as set out in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning.[2] The need for greater clarity and coherence across the different frameworks that shape VNFIL within and across countries is also noted. The ultimate aim is to ensure that transversal skills and competences are visible, valued and supported.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of key international policy frameworks and instruments which have been developed to support lifelong learning. While frameworks have alternately promoted lifelong learning to support social justice (a humanist/holistic approach to support personal development and citizenship) and as a means to support economic growth and employment (a utilitarian, labour-market

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[1] Noack, M. 2021, Unpacking transversal skills and competences: Towards lifelong learning. Cedefop. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/210629_unpacking-transversal-skills_noack.pdf
[2] Council of the European Union 2012, Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, pp. 1–5.

oriented approach), more recent frameworks have attempted to balance these different aims. Alignment of validation methods and tools with the overall aims promoted in more recent frameworks is essential.

Chapter 3 sets out an overview of country-specific approaches. It includes information on country definitions of competences, and of transversal competences and provides overview of EU guidance policies, and current developments in relation to practitioner profiles and quality assurance in VNFIL.

Chapter 4 highlights selected good/innovative practices in the guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences as identified in the desk research conducted by TRANSVAL- EU partners for this report. Good practices to support professional learning for guidance and validation practitioners, as well as in documentation and assessment of learner skills and competences, and quality assurance are featured. Each of these cutting-edge approaches have the potential to strengthen guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences.

The final chapter (chapter 5) reviews the challenges and enablers to strengthen validation of transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation processes.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Both in work settings and daily life, there is a growing need for individuals to develop high-level competences to address complex challenges. Individuals are called on to adapt to changes and to learn and re-learn throughout life. Problem-solving, communication, the ability to work with others as well as autonomously, and learning are among the transversal competences highlighted as important by employers and policy makers.[3,4,5]

The TRANSVAL-EU project aims to address the need for practitioners working in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) to support and assess learners' transversal skills and competences. Although increased importance is placed on transversal competences, they typically are only an implicit part of the guidance and validation process.

There is also a need for greater clarity of concepts underpinning approaches to transversal skills and competences in VNFIL. Over time, the concept of *competence* has been subject to a range of interpretations. Competences, which have roots in both constructivist and behaviourist schools of thought, have been at the centre of frameworks supporting holistic and humanist aims for lifelong learning, as well as frameworks supporting more utilitarian and labour-market oriented aims. Current policies for lifelong and life-wide learning set out broad, holistic aims, including for the development of transversal competences, different international and national frameworks as well as tools to support guidance and assessment have been developed over several decades, and may need to be more fully aligned.

Greater conceptual clarity and coherence as to how competences and transversal skills and competences are defined in policy frameworks, as well as in guidance and validation tools and practices, is needed. Making transversal skills and competences explicit, rather than implicit, in the guidance and validation processes can ensure that they are valued and supported. It may also ensure that learners are prepared to address complex challenges in their work and daily lives more effectively.

This state-of-the-art report is among the first outputs of the TRANSVAL-EU project, which aims to address these concerns. TRANSVAL-EU will pilot innovative approaches for validating transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation practices in five partner countries (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland). Outputs are to include: a framework setting out descriptors and levels of progression for a range of key transversal skills and competences; a pilot training programme to support VNFIL guidance and validation practitioners in the identification, documentation, assessment

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[3] Cedefop 2014, https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/dashboard/importance-transversal-skills?skill=Communication+skills&year=2014&country=EU
[4] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018, Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, OJ C 189, 4.6.2018
[5] Council recommendation of 22 May 2017, European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

and certification of transversal skills and competences; field trials experimentations; and evaluation of the study's impact on practitioners and learners.[6]

In this introductory chapter, following a short description of the study methods and scope of the report, concepts underpinning the notion of *transversal skills and competences* are explored. Findings from surveys and studies on 'workplace skills gaps' in relation to transversal skills and competences on both the supply and demand sides (i.e. employers and adult working-age population) are then highlighted. This is followed by a presentation of the four steps of the VNFIL process as set out in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of nonformal and informal learning. Finally, the need for greater clarity and coherence across the different frameworks that shape VNFIL, and within validation and guidance processes to ensure that transversal skills and competences are visible, valued and supported is discussed.

Scope and methods of the report

This state-of-the-art report brings together information on policies and practices to support guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences in VNFIL across Europe. The report includes a more in-depth focus on the five countries where training of guidance and validation practitioners will take place as well as field trials to implement innovative and effective approaches for validation of transversal skills and competences in the four-stage VNFIL process (in Austria, Belgium (FR), Italy, Lithuania, and Poland).

In consultation with study project partners, common templates for the country- and EU-level research were developed to ensure comparability of information gathered through desk research (documents and programme or project websites) and interviews with implementing institutions.

The country-level partners provided information on national background and policies on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), the types of organisations providing VNFIL in the different stages of the validation process. They also provided information on support for guidance and validation practitioners, and on quality assurance arrangements. The country-level partners were also asked to identify innovative approaches to the validation of transversal skills and competences and any evaluations on the impact of different tools and approaches.

The European-level partners reviewed EU-level policies (frameworks and recommendations). Overviews of relevant EU-funded projects and related good practices were also included in the review. A total of 48 good practices were identified through this process. In addition, selected academic articles

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[6] Depending on qualifications and roles, guidance personnel and practitioners may have very different functions and provide different types of support. Table 3.3 in chapter 3 sets out examples of practitioners' profiles across European countries.

and policy reports exploring concepts underpinning approaches to lifelong learning, validation of non-formal and informal learning and transversal skills and competences were reviewed.

Finally, as part of the TRANSVAL-EU project, a European stakeholder survey (administered in 2021) collected replies from 179 VNFIL professionals and provided additional insights (see Annex 2). In addition, this report also refers to academic research to frame debates and tensions related to the design and implementation of VNFIL of transversal skills and competences.

Box 1.1: Key terminology

Competence - Ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development). Alternatively, competence is defined as the ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. NB: Competence is not limited to cognitive elements (involving the use of theory, concepts or tacit knowledge); it also encompasses functional aspects (including technical skills) as well as interpersonal attributes (e.g. social or organisational skills) and ethical values.[78]

Guidance and counselling - Information, advice and guidance (IAG) - Range of activities designed to help individuals to take educational, vocational or personal decisions and to carry them out before and after they enter the labour market. It may include counselling on (personal or career development, education; assessment (psychological or competence/performance-related); information on learning and labour market opportunities and career management; consultation with peers, relatives or educators; vocational preparation (identifying skills/competences and experience for job-seeing); referrals (to learning and career specialists). Guidance and counselling can be provided at schools, training centres, job centres, the workplace, in the community or other settings.[9]

Informal learning - Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. Informal learning outcomes may be validated and certified.[10]

Learning outcomes - Set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal. Alternatively, they may be defined as statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.[11]

Lifelong learning - All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.[12]

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[7] Cedefop 2014, Terminology of European education and training policy: A selection of 130 key terms. 2nd edition. Luxembourg: Office of Publications

[8] Note that European Union documents prefer the terms *competence and competences*. The terms *competency* and *competencies* are sometimes used by other organisations. Literature on human resources underlines that the term *competence* refers to *what* an individual can do in relation to a specific standard. The term *competency* refers to *how* the individual performs a task, and how the standard is achieved. See
https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/entrepreneurship/difference-between-competence-and-competency-explained-with-diagram/40696 for further explanation of the differences.

[9] Cedefop 2014, Op cit.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

Non-formal learning - Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.[13]

Transversal skills and competences - Transversal skills and competences (TSCs) are learned and proven abilities which are commonly seen as necessary or valuable for effective action in virtually any kind of work, learning or life activity. They are 'transversal' because they are not exclusively related to any particular context (job, occupation, academic discipline, civic or community engagement, occupational sector, group of occupational sectors, etc.).[14]

Validation - Process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. Validation consists of four distinct phases:
- identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
- documentation to make visible the individual's experiences;
- formal assessment of these experiences; and
- certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.[15]

Transversal skills and competences: what they are and why they are important

Transversal skills and competences, which may also be referred to as core skills, life skills, 21st century skills, basic skills or soft skills, set the foundation for personal reflection and development, resilience, the ability to communicate and work constructively with others, problem-solving skills, and the ability to manage one's learning and career (TRANSVAL-EU proposal; European Skills Agenda[16]). As defined by the European classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) "Transversal skills and competences (TSCs) are learned and proven abilities which are commonly seen as necessary or valuable for effective action in virtually any kind of work, learning or life activity. They are 'transversal' because they are not exclusively related to any particular context (job, occupation, academic discipline, civic or community engagement, occupational sector, group of occupational sectors, etc.)"[17]

Melacarne and Nicolaides highlight four "macro-categories" of transversal skills and competences:
- ***Cognitive*** - Problem solving, analytical, synthetic skills, which may be applied within different contexts.

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Noack, M. Unpacking transversal skills and competences: Towards lifelong learning. Cedefop 2021. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/210629_unpacking-transversal-skills_noack.pdf

[15] Council of the European Union 2012, Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf

[16] https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en)

[17] Noack, M. 2021, Unpacking transversal skills and competences: Towards lifelong learning. Cedefop. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/210629_unpacking-transversal-skills_noack.pdf

- ***Organisational*** - Decision-making, focus on achieving results, resilience, etc.
- ***Social -*** interpersonal relations, negotiation, etc.
- ***Emotional -*** Empathy, self-esteem, capacity to deal with stress. (pp. 45 – 46).[18]

Individuals develop "… more complex ways of knowing, which become more systemic, strategic, and interdependent." (Melacarne and Nicolaides, 2019, p. 46). In other words, as individuals develop and deepen specific competences, they also cultivate transversal skills and competences.

In other literature, Mezirow's influential theory of transformative learning emphasises the importance for adult learners in modern societies to develop their capacity for autonomous thinking, "… essential for full citizenship in democracy and for moral decision making in situations of rapid change. The identified learning needs of the workforce implicitly recognize the centrality of autonomous learning." (p. 7). Individuals transform their frames of reference through critical reflections on their assumptions, and through discourse and communication with others.

Illeris (2014) extends Mezirow's definition, arguing that in addition to the cognitive dimension, the emotional and social dimensions, and the situatedness of learning processes need to be considered. Transformative learning, he argues, requires "… changes in mind and behaviour, [which] are followed by more concrete changes in understanding and acting"[19] (p. 160).

Various commentators have also highlighted the importance of "collective competence" as being central to learning at work, in particular.[20,21,22] Teamwork within the workplace involves collective learning and interchange and is shaped by the context and culture of any given organisation.[23] Mezirow described transformative learning as involving discourse, noting that "… learning is a social process, and discourse becomes central to making meaning" (p. 10).[24]

While TRANSVAL-EU is focused on the need for transversal skills and competences in the workplace, these definitions highlight that personal identity and motivation are also relevant. For example, Hoskins and Deakin Crick (2010) define competence as:

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[18] Melacarne, C. and Nicolaides, A. 2019, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 163, Fall 2019, Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

[19] Illeris, K. 2014. The development of a comprehensive and coherent theory of learning. European Journal of Education, 50, 29 – 40. **https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12103**

[20] Boreham, N., 2004, A theory of collective competence: challenging the neoliberal individualisation of performance at work. British Journal of Educational Studies, 52, 5-17.

[21] Engeström, Y., 2001, Expansive learning at work: towards an activity theoretical reconceptualization. London: Institute of Education.

[22] Lave, J., & Wenger, E., 1991, Situated learning: legitimate peripheral Participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[23] Canning, R., 2013, Rethinking generic skills. European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 4, 2, pp. 129-138.

[24] Mezirow, J. Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. 1997, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 74, 5-12. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401

'…a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world in a particular domain. One's achievement at work, in personal relationships or in civil society are not based simply on the accumulation of knowledge stored as data, but as a combination of this knowledge with skills, values, attitudes, desires and motivation and its application in a particular human setting at a particular point in a trajectory in time. Competence implies a sense of agency, action and value'. [25]

This definition is also directly relevant to a holistic understanding of transversal skills and competences, which include not only knowledge and skills, but which also are grounded in the individual's biography, attitudes, emotions, motivations, values and social relationships. The individual brings these attributes to each new context, while also continuously learning and deepening their competences.[26]

Adults' transversal skills and competences: competence and skills gaps

International surveys and studies have highlighted important gaps between employers' demand for individuals with transversal as well as job-specific competences, and on the supply side, the proportion of working-age adults with the competences needed. Validation and guidance practitioners have an important role to play in supporting individuals to reflect on their transversal skills and competences.

Employers' demand for transversal skills and competences

Employers' hiring decisions are based on a complex mix of factors, including evidence of an individual's job readiness. Brown and Souto-Otero (2020), drawing on a big data analysis of 21 million job advertisements in the UK[27], found that employers are most likely to focus on evidence that the applicant is 'job ready' (i.e. will not require extensive training), and that they are able to demonstrate job-specific skills as well as generic soft skills (i.e. transversal skills and competences). In all job classifications analysed[28] both technical and social skills were most frequently highlighted in job requirement descriptions (with the exception of caring, leisure and other service occupations, where job advertisements featured the need for qualifications more frequently than a demonstration of social skills). In other research, Brown and Hesketh (2004) found that job candidates are expected to demonstrate social skills and potential 'fit' with an organisation through a 'narrative employability'

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[25] Hoskins, B.; Deakin Crick, R. 2010, Competences for learning to learn and active citizenship: different currencies or two sides of the same coin? European journal of education, Vol. 45, No 1, Part II, pp. 121-137. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-3435.2009.01419.x

[26] Jarvis, P. 2006, Towards a comprehensive theory of human learning. Routledge.

[27] Brown, P. and Souto-Otero, M. 2020, The end of the credential society? An analysis of the relationship between education and the labour market using big data. Journal of Education Policy. 5(1):95-118. 10.1080/02680939.2018.1549752

[28] Based on SOC classifications, job advertisements were targeted to managers, directors and senior officials; professional occupations; associate professionals and technical occupations; administrative and secretarial occupations; skilled trades occupations; caring, leisure & other service occupations; sales & customer service occupations; process, plant & machinery operatives; and elementary occupations.

describing their cultural background, life experiences, extra-curricular activities, and social networks[29]. Cole, Rubin, Field and Giles (2007) found that employers view job applicants with low qualifications but significant work experience and engagement in extra-curricular activities as highly employable.[30]

Data from the Cedefop Skills Panorama highlight the need for significant percentages of adults to develop their transversal skills. The Panorama provides an analysis of the most frequently sought skills across the European countries and regions based on analysis of over 100 million online job advertisements[31]. For job descriptions aligned with the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification the most sought-after attitudes and values indicated in the online advertisements in 2020 were the ability to: adapt to change (49.9%); deal with uncertainty (16.7%); work independently (13.9%); meet commitments (13.5%); and manage quality (8.4%).

Employers responding to the 2014 European skills and jobs survey on "transversal skills gaps", reported on the percentage of employees lacking specific skills, by occupation. A summary of responses from employers in a range of sectors (associate professionals, clerks, elementary workers, farm and related workers, managers, operators and assemblers, professionals, service and sales workers, and trades workers) is included in Table 1.1.[32]

Table 1.1: Transversal competence and skills gaps

Communication skills	The mean (arithmetic average) of communication skills gaps in EU countries in 2014 is estimated at 26.3%. Elementary workers exhibit the highest value equal to 32.6%, while for Managers, the lowest is equal to 16.3%.
Customer handling skills	Customer handling skills gaps average in EU countries in 2014 is estimated at 29.3%. Farm and related workers exhibit the highest value equal to 34.2%, while for Service and Sales workers, the lowest is equal to 21.3%.
Learning skills	Learning skills gaps average in EU countries in 2014 is estimated at 25.2%. Elementary workers exhibit the highest value equal to 32.3%, while for Managers the lowest is equal to 18%.
Planning and organisation skills	Planning and organisation skills gaps average in EU countries in 2014 is estimated at 26.5% Elementary workers exhibit the highest value equal to 33.9%, while for Managers the lowest is equal to 15.4%

[29] Brown P and Hesketh A. 2004, The Mismanagement of Talent: Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004.

[30] Cole, M. S., R. S. Rubin, H. S. Field, and W. F. Giles. 2007, Recruiters Perceptions and use of Applicant Resume Information: Screening the Recent Graduate. Applied Psychology 56 (2): 319–343.

[31] Cedefop 2020, Skills in online job advertisements. https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/dashboard/skills-online-job-advertisements?country=EU27_2020&occupation=&year=2020

[32] Cedefop 2014, European skills and jobs survey. (Data for each indicator in the different sectors may be found at https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/dashboard/transversal-skills-gaps?year=2014&country=EU&skill=Team-working+skills#1)

Problem solving skills	Problem solving skills gaps average in EU countries in 2014 is estimated at 23.5%. Elementary workers exhibit the highest value equal to 32.9% while for Managers the lowest is equal to 12.9%.
Team-working skills	Team-working skills gaps average in EU countries in 2014 is estimated at 24.8%. Elementary workers exhibit the highest value equal to 32.2%, while Managers the lowest is equal to 17.8%.

Source: Adapted from Cedefop 2014 European skills and jobs survey. [33]

Adults' proficiency levels: results of the OECD Survey of Adult Skills

The Survey of Adult Skills, which is part of the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) captures proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. Competences in these three areas are considered as necessary for full participation in the labour market, education and training and social and civic life. Because they are relevant to many social and work contexts and situations, they are considered to be highly transferable[34] (p. 36).

The Survey measures cognitive skills in specific domain and provides insight on adults' capacities for problem solving at increasing levels of complexity. Proficiency levels set for each of the three domains are assessed. Lower levels of proficiency highlight basic problem-solving skills, while higher levels measure the individual's ability to apply basic skills to address complex challenges. Proficiency in the three domains measured has also been found to be positively correlated with several aspects of well-being, including trust, volunteering, political efficacy and self-assessed health.[35]

Box 1.2: Proficiency levels and complex problem-solving

The framework developed for the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills highlights that "… a certain level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy appears to be a pre-condition for success in undertaking more complex problem-solving tasks – a skill for which demand appears to be increasing. Results from ALL [Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey] suggest that individuals with low literacy skills have a very small chance of successfully completing problem-solving tasks." (p. 1).

As an example, at proficiency level 2 in the area of literacy, "[t]asks at this level require respondents to make matches between the text and information and may require paraphrasing or low-level inferences. Some competing pieces of information may be present." At proficiency Level 5 (the highest level)," … tasks may require the respondent to search for and integrate information across multiple, dense texts; construct syntheses of similar and contrasting ideas or points of view; or evaluate evidence-based arguments. Application and evaluation of logical and conceptual models of ideas may be required to accomplish tasks. Evaluating the reliability of evidentiary sources and selecting key information is frequently a requirement. Tasks often require respondents to be aware of subtle, rhetorical cues and to make high-level inferences or use specialised background knowledge." (p. 43).

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[33] Ibid

[34] OECD 2019, Skills Matter: Additional Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris.

[35] Ibid.

Source: OECD (2012) [36] OECD (2019)[37]

The results of the 2017 Survey (most recent data available) highlight that a significant portion of adult populations across countries have low basic skills (Box 1.3). Guidance and validation practices to support development of transversal competences need also to take these factors into account.

Box 1.3: Selected findings of the 2017 Adult Skills Survey

Across the 33 OECD countries participating in the 2017 Adult Skills Survey, on average:

- around one in four adults (23.5%) scored at the two lowest levels of numeracy proficiency (16.4% at Level 1 and 7.1% below Level 1).
- around one-third of adults (29.7%) were proficient at the two highest levels for problem solving in technology rich environments.
- the average literacy score was near the top of Level 2 of the scale (based on a 6-level literacy scale, with Level 1 indicating the lowest level).

The 2017 Survey identified gaps in proficiency levels associated with socio-economic background:

- Older adults typically have lower proficiency in literacy and numeracy.
- Gender gaps in literacy proficiency are small, but they are wider in numeracy, a domain in which men tend to outperform women.
- Because proficiency is related to educational attainment, and in many countries and economies women had tended to attain lower levels of education than men in the past, gender gaps are more pronounced among older cohorts.
- The differences in proficiency between tertiary-educated adults and those who have not attained an upper secondary education are very large in all countries and economies.
- Adults with more highly educated parents tend to have higher proficiency (p. 64)

Prior adult literacy surveys [i.e., the International Adult Literacy survey (1994, 1998) and the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey (2003)] found that a significant number of individuals with low skill levels have lower wages, greater chances of unemployment and disengagement with the labour market.

Source: OECD (2019)[38]

The European Stakeholder Survey conducted as part of the TRANSVAL-EU project also points to the need to address this topic. Of the 179 respondents, 68% believe that insufficient attention is paid to the validation of transversal competences at national policy levels.

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[36] OECD 2012, Literacy, Numeracy and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments: Framework for the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264128859-en
[37] OECD 2019, op cit.
[38] Ibid

Guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences in VNFIL

Guidance and validation practitioners have an important role to play in helping individuals identify and further develop transversal skills and competences that are important in their work and daily lives. Practitioners need to develop their own competences to engage in open dialogue with learners as part of this process, to identify, document and assess the transversal skills and competences learners have developed in different areas of their lives, and to identify potential pathways for further education and training. At the policy level, it is important to ensure that the frameworks, tools and approaches to support VNFIL are aligned. At the practitioner level, investments in training and other forms of professional development are needed.

Validation processes

The VNFIL process, as set out in the Council of the European Union's 2012 Recommendation, urged countries to develop and implement VNFIL policies and practices by 2018, in accordance with their national circumstances and specificities. The Recommendation set out a framework for VNFIL with four distinct phases:

> *1. Identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;*
> *2. Documentation to make visible the individual's experiences;*
> *3. A formal assessment of these experiences; and*
> *4. Certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.*
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 3)[39]

The four stages of the VNFIL process allow for a great deal of flexibility. For instance, the identification and documentation stages of the validation process provide the opportunity for learners to reflect on their personal interests and motivations, and to identify opportunities for further learning and/or training to meet their longer-term aims. These first two stages may be considered as *formative* in that the focus is on identifying next steps and areas for further development.[40] At the formative stage, the individual also may be encouraged to reflect on transversal skills and competences that are part of their "narrative biography" and which may be important for the individual to differentiate themselves, for example, during a job application process.[41] This may also be the point at which guidance and validation practitioners may help individuals to understand the types of transversal skills and competences they will need to develop through further education and training in order to advance to jobs that require higher levels of competence to address complex challenges.

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[39] Council of the European Union 2012, Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. 398/01. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf

[40] Looney, J. and Santibañez, B. 2021, Validation of non-formal and informal learning to support disadvantaged learners: Alternative assessments. European Journal of Education, 56:439–453.

[41] Brown, P. and Souto-Otero, M. Op cit.

At the third stage of the VNFIL process, the learner may participate in a summative assessment of learning outcomes (e.g. a final examination). The final assessment may, for example, take the form of standardised examinations that are administered and scored under uniform conditions (i.e., paper and pencil tests with multiple-choice, yes/no, or close-ended questions)[42], a portfolio bringing together different elements demonstrating relevant achievements, an interview, a demonstration before a jury, or an on-line simulation.

The Council Recommendation on VNFIL emphasises that qualifications (or partial qualifications) obtained through VNFIL at stage four of the process should '[...] comply with agreed standards that are either the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes and as set out in national qualifications frameworks (p. 3).[43]

Coherence across these four steps is important both for the success of the individual learner, and for the validation system itself. Coherence requires careful consideration of practitioners' competences to guide the VNFIL process, the use of assessment tools that are fit for their specific purposes (at both formative and summative stages), and which are also effectively aligned with each other.[44]

Guidance and validation processes focused on transversal skills and competences can be particularly valuable for learners with low qualifications. In addition to helping individuals to distinguish themselves through work and extra-curricular experiences (e.g. participating in or coaching a sports team, volunteering, etc.) [45], they may also have a clear view on the types of broad competences needed for higher levels of education and training, and advanced certification. The VNFIL process may help learners to identify areas for further learning for personal development and/or to earn qualifications. Other research points to "wider" social benefits of adult participation in further learning (Box 1.4).

Box 1.4: Wider benefits of adult learning and VNFIL processes

VNFIL processes may allow learners to earn (partial) certification and identify areas for further learning for personal development and/or to earn qualifications.

Research on the wider benefits of adult learning highlights a number of positive outcomes including learner empowerment, health and well-being and social inclusion as well as employment. De Greef et al. (2012)[46] found that adult education can support social inclusion of vulnerable citizens, who become more active in their communities, and less isolated.

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[42] International Bureau of Education 2021, Glossary of curriculum terminology.
http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/s/standardized-testing
[43] Council of the European Union 2012, Op cit.
[44] Looney, J. and Santibañez, B. 2021, Op cit.
[45] Cole, Rubin, Field and Giles, Op cit.
[46] De Greef, M., Segers, M. & Verté, D. 2012, Understanding the effects of training programs for vulnerable adults on social inclusion as part of continuing education. Studies in Continuing Education. DOI: 10.1080/0158037X.2012.664126

> Dymock (2007)[47] and Dymock and Billet (2008)[48] found that learners gain more self-confidence, experience personal growth and have improved contacts with others as a result of their participation in adult education. Besides this (as a side effect), some learners become more active in their search for a job, and/or in volunteer work (Tett et al., 2006[49]; Department of Labour New Zealand, 2010; De Greef, 2012a[50]; 2012b[51]; 2012c[52]; 2012d[53]). Finally, participation in adult learning is associated with improved physical and psychological health, (De Greef et al., 2014)[54], including lower rates of depression (Berkman et al., 2004)[55].

Source: Authors (VUB)

Gaps in policy support

Transversal skills and competences do not currently have a high profile at European or national policy levels. According to Cedefop's 2018 inventory on VNFIL, only a minority of countries have launched validation initiatives including transversal skills and competences.[56] As illustrated in Figure 1.1, initiatives covering transversal skills and competences have been developed to support youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (9 countries), adults with low skill levels (10 countries) and the long-term unemployed (10 countries).[57]

[47] Dymock, D. 2007, Community adult language, literacy and numeracy in Australia: Diverse approaches and outcomes. Adelaide: NCVER.
[48] Dymock, D. & Billett, S. 2008, Assessing and acknowledging learning through non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy programs. Adelaide: NCVER.
[49] Tett, L., Hall, S., Maclachlan, K., Thorpe, G., Edwards, V. & Garside, L. 2006, Evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) Strategy. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research.
[50] De Greef, M. 2012a, Educatietrajecten van ROC ID College hebben aantoonbaar effect voor inwoners in de regio's Midden-Holland, Zoetermeer en Holland-Rijnland. 's-Hertogenbosch: Artéduc.
[51] De Greef, M. 2012b, Educatietrajecten van het Kellebeek College afdeling Via hebben aantoonbaar effect voor inwoners in de regio West-Brabant. 's-Hertogenbosch: Artéduc.
[52] De Greef, M. 2012c, Educatietrajecten in Den Haag zorgen voor betere taalbeheersing, plek in de samenleving en op de arbeidsmarkt bij inwoners. 's-Hertogenbosch: Artéduc.
[53] De Greef, M. 2012d, Educatietrajecten in Noordoost Twente zorgen voor betere taalbeheersing, plek in de samenleving en op de arbeidsmarkt bij inwoners. 's-Hertogenbosch: Artéduc.
[54] De Greef, M., Segers, M., Nijhuis, J. & Lam, J.F. 2014. Impact onderzoek taaltrajecten Taal voor het Leven door Stichting Lezen & Schrijven op het gebied van sociale inclusie en leesvaardigheid Deel A. Maastricht: Maastricht University.
[55] Berkman, N.D., DeWalt, D.A., Pignone, M.P., Sheridan, S.L., Lohr, K.N., Lux, L., Sutton, S.F., Swinson, T. & Bonito, A.J. 2004, Literacy and Health Outcomes. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
[56] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. 2019. European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory
[57] The Cedefop Inventory does not specify which transversal skills and competences are covered. In Cedefop 2014 European skills and jobs survey. Transversal skills and competences are specified as including communication skills; customer handling skills; learning skills; planning and organisation skills; problem solving skills; and team-working skills https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/dashboard/transversal-skills-gaps?year=2014&country=EU&skill=Team-working+skills#1

Figure 1.1: Types of skills covered by validation initiatives
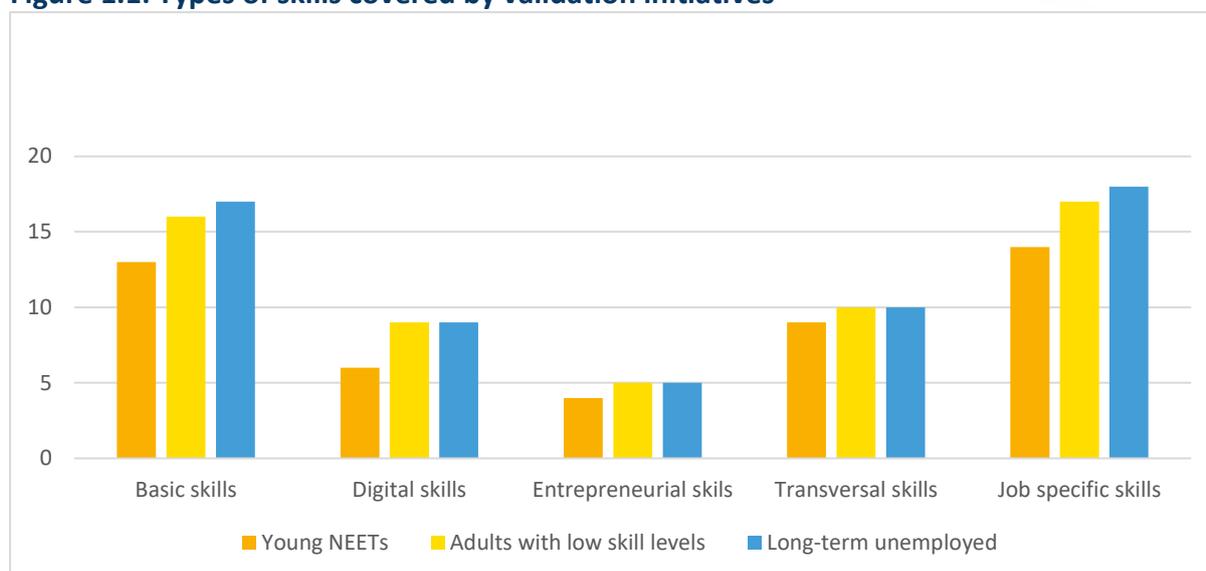
Source: Cedefop (2019)[58]

The TRANSVAL-EU Stakeholder Survey developed as part of this project found that while there is insufficient attention at policy level to transversal skills and competences, guidance and validation practitioners do emphasise their importance when working with learners. Key Stakeholder Survey results are provided in Box 1.5.

Box 1.5: Views on the importance of transversal skills and competences: Selected findings from TRANSVAL-EU Stakeholder Survey

The TRANSVAL-EU Stakeholder Survey sought views on the importance of transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation processes in European countries (respondents were professionals from public, private, non-profit sectors, including education providers, national/regional agencies for validation, certification or accreditation, and local authorities).

Although 68% of the 179 survey respondents answered that they themselves support the development of transversal skills or competences during guidance of learners, 68% also indicated that in their country insufficient attention is paid to the importance of transversal skills and competences during guidance and validation processes. This indicates that even in the absence of national policies and frameworks, professionals in the field do pay attention to transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation processes.

57% of the survey respondents indicated that transversal skills and competences are important for both working life and for personal development. The need to take a more holistic approach to transversal skills and competences is thus accepted by a majority.

See Annex 2 for a full summary of the stakeholder survey.

Source: Authors (De Greef, M. (2021) Vrije Universiteit Brussels).

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[58] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF. 2019. Op cit.

Based on these results, demand for effective practitioner training and validation tools focused on transversal skills and competences to support work and personal development is likely to be high.

Other relevant research has pointed to ensure coherence within and across existing frameworks and tools, such as national qualifications frameworks, and to balance utilitarian or instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to the definition of learning outcomes. These steps can strengthen implementation of validation processes.[59, 60]

New tools to support validation of transversal skills and competences and aligned with qualifications frameworks are also needed. As part of the TRANSVAL-EU project, partners therefore will pilot an adapted version of an existing reference tool (RECTEC/RECTEC+[61]) which identifies a broad set of transversal skills and competences relevant for employment and personal development and aligns these to the eight levels of the European Qualifications Framework (see chapter 2).

Roadmap for the report

The remaining chapters of this report explore the state-of the-art in policy and practice to support guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences. Chapter 2 provides an overview of key international policy frameworks and instruments which have been developed to support lifelong learning. While frameworks have alternately promoted lifelong learning as a means to support social justice (a humanist, holistic approach to support personal development and citizenship) and as a means to support economic growth and employment (a utilitarian, labour-market oriented approach), more recent frameworks have attempted to balance these different aims. However, frameworks and tools may be more closely aligned with utilitarian rather than holistic approaches[62], or transversal skills and competences treated as complementary but not integral elements. Alignment of validation methods and tools with the overall aims for VNFIL is also essential. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the TRANSVAL-EU approach to making transversal skills and competences explicit.

Chapter 3 delves into country-specific approaches. It includes information on country definitions of (transversal) skills and competences, an overview of guidance policies, and current developments in relation to practitioner profiles and quality assurance in VNFIL.

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[59] Gmaj, I. and Fijalkowska, B. 2021, Between a humanistic and economic model of lifelong learning: The validation system in Poland. European Journal of Education, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 407 – 422.
[60] Hébrard, P. 2013, Ambiguities and paradoxes in a competence-based approach to vocational education and training in France - In: European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults 4, 2, S. 111-127. DOI: 10.25656/01:8292
[61] The European RECTEC project: identifying transversal skills for employability and certifications. http://rectec.ac-versailles.fr/
[62] Keevy, J.; Chakroun, B. 2015, Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes: the use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century. Paris: UNESCO. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002428/242887e.pdf

Chapter 4 sets out selected good/innovative practices in the guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences as identified in the desk research conducted by TRANSVAL- EU partners for this report. They highlight selected good practices to support professional learning for guidance and validation practitioners, as well as in documentation and assessment of learner skills and competences, and quality assurance. All of these cutting-edge approaches have the potential to strengthen guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences.

The final chapter reviews the challenges and enablers to strengthen the systematic integration of transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation processes.

CHAPTER 2 - INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN POLICY FRAMEWORKS TO SUPPORT LIFELONG LEARNING AND VALIDATION: CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

This chapter sets out a very brief history of international lifelong learning frameworks, and then focuses more specifically on the central role of the learning outcomes principle in EU policies. Learning outcomes, which emphasise what a learner is expected to know, be able to do and understand – provide a common vocabulary across the different education sectors and across countries. Importantly, the way in which learning outcomes are defined and described in various policy instruments also shape guidance and validation practices.

The final section of the chapter highlights research on guidance and validation practices across Europe. This macro-level research shows that there has been limited attention to transversal skills and competences at policy levels. The findings also point to a miscellany of guidance and validation practices.

International frameworks for lifelong learning

European institutions played a relatively minor role in education policy until the early 2000s, with the publication of the 2001 Communication from the Commission for making the European area of lifelong learning a reality.[63] Since then, EU work on education in general, and VNFIL in particular, has developed considerably. With its relatively late entry into the policy area, EU work built on the earlier significant contributions to lifelong learning and competence-based approaches made by UNESCO and its seminal reports: *Learning to be* (1972)[64] and *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996)[65], which defined the four pillars of education as: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. These reports also highlighted the importance of formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout all stages of life (with the latter element reflecting the importance of a *lifewide* approach, important for informal and non-formal learning[66]). The reports were firmly grounded in UNESCO's enlightenment tradition, a belief in rationalism and progress, and with reference to universal values, individual freedoms, and humanism[67]. The 1996 report, for example, underlined the importance of lifelong

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[63] European Commission. (2001). *Communication from the Commission, Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*. Brussels, 21 November, 2001. COM (2001) 678 final. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM :2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF

[64] Faure, E. et al. 1972, Learning to Be. The World of Education Today and Tomorrow. Paris, UNESCO/Harrap.

[65] Delors, J. et al. 1996, Learning: the treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the international commission on education for the twenty-first century. Paris, UNESCO.

[66] Tuijnman, A. and Boström, A.K. 2002, Changing Notions of Lifelong Education and Lifelong Learning. International Review of Education Vol. 48, No. 1/2, pp. 93 – 110.

[67] Elfert, M. 2015. UNESCO, the Faure Report, the Delors Report, and the Political Utopia of Lifelong Learning. European Journal of Education, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 88- 100.

learning to support the individual's development, including their imagination and creativity, and warned against standardisation and de-humanisation resulting from technological developments.

The OECD's DeSeCo (*Definition and Selection of Competences*)[68], launched in 1997, also had an influence on EU education policies. DeSeCo, defined three broad categories of competence: using tools interactively, interacting in heterogeneous groups and acting autonomously. While the OECD had initially seen lifelong learning (initially referred to as lifelong education) as solely relevant for labour market needs, by the late 1990s, a more expansive view had been adopted. DeSeCo emphasised that "… certain areas of competence are needed not only in the labour market but also in private relationships, in political engagement and so on, and it is these transversal competencies that are defined as key" (p. 7).[69]

In the EU, lifelong learning has alternately been seen as important for supporting personal development; social inclusiveness and citizenship; and economic progress and development.[70] Dukevot describes the "pendulum swing" between these different aims, with social objectives being given higher priority during times of prosperity, and labour market needs receiving more attention during economic downturns.[71]

More recently, European frameworks for lifelong learning have attempted to balance personal, social and economic priorities for lifelong learning. This reflects ongoing concerns on the need to upskill and reskill the workforce, as well as heightened attention to the need to support social cohesion and active citizenship. All three of these priorities are increasingly seen as intertwined. While debates and tensions between humanist and utilitarian aims for lifelong learning continue, there is increasing agreement on the need to ensure that learning outcomes need to be linked to clear standards and should also allow for flexibility in their application.[72]

The learning outcomes principle and the need to address tensions between holistic, learner-centred and utilitarian approaches

The learning outcomes principle has been described as the "glue" for a wide range of tools and initiatives within European lifelong learning frameworks. These include qualifications frameworks (European and national), qualification and education standards, curriculum and assessment design,

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[68]

[69] OECD 2005, Definition and selection of key competencies: Executive summary. Paris.
[70] Tuijnman, A. and Boström, A.K., Op cit.
[71] Duvekot, R. C. 2014, Lifelong learning policy and RPL in the learning society: the promise of Faure? In J. Harris, C. Wihak, & J. van Kleef (Eds.), *Handbook of the recognition of prior learning* (Research into practice, pp. 65–86). NIACE.
[72] Duvekot, R. C. 2014, Op cit.

and quality assurance mechanisms. The principle also underpins the European standard and taxonomy for skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO). The common reference to learning outcomes is also intended to improve links between education and labour markets, to promote learners' vertical and horizontal mobility (respectively, between education levels, and across sectors and geographical areas) and to support learner-centred approaches. The elements of the learning outcomes principle are set out in Box 2.1 and Figure 2.1.

Box 2.1: The learning outcomes principle

The learning outcomes principle has been essential to the development of lifelong learning policies and practices. Cedefop defines learning outcomes as "sets of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal" (pp. 164-165). The Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) extends definitions for both learning outcomes and competences to include responsibility, and autonomy (2008, 2017).

Learning outcomes also encompass the notion of competence, which Cedefop defines as the 'ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development)' (p. 47). Competences are validated "… through the ability of the learner autonomously to apply knowledge and skills in practice, in society and at work." (Cedefop, 2012, p. 35). Ideally, the learning outcomes principle also improves transparency and coherence of qualification systems and qualifications.

Source: Authors, Cedefop (2016)[73], Cedefop (2014)[74], Cedefop (2012)[75] European Council (2008, 2017)[76]

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[73] Cedefop 2016, Op cit.

[74] Cedefop 2014, Terminology of European education and training policy: a selection of 130 key terms. Second edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/ publications/4117

[75] Cedefop 2012, Curriculum reform in Europe: the impact of learning outcomes. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 29. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/ publications/5529

[76] European Council Recommendation on European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Op cit.

Figure 2.1

Learner centred-
approaches

Achieved learning
outcomes, including
transversal
competences

European and national
qualifications frameworks
to support vertical and
horizontal mobility

Lifelong learning
policies and
frameworks
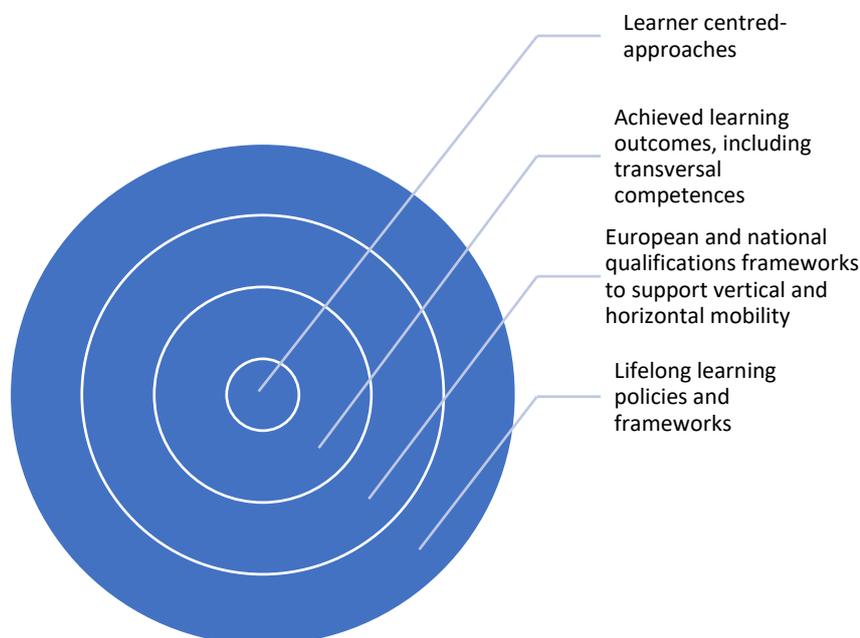
Source: Authors

While key policy documents have established the importance of holistic, learner-centred approaches to VNFIL, the frameworks and tools used to support validation processes are not consistently clearly aligned with this approach. Various commentators have pointed, in particular, to ambiguities and contradictions in the definition of learning outcomes (including the notion of competence) in the different lifelong learning frameworks and in VNFIL approaches and tools used in guidance and validation practices.[77, 78]

The learning outcomes principle has roots in both behaviourist and constructivist theories of learning. Behaviourist theories focus on outwardly observable behaviours and reliable forms of assessment. Constructivist theories, on the other hand, see learning as deeply contextualised and entwined with the learner's social identity, values and relationships. Learning is understood as a process of constructing meaning.[79,80]

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[77] Keevy J. and Chakroun, B. Op cit.
[78] Hébrard, P. 2013, Quelle ''approche par les compétences'' et quels référentiels pour la formation professionnelle aux métiers de la relation humaine ? Les Dossiers des Sciences de l'Éducation.
[79] Merrieam, S. and Cafarrella, R. 1999, Learning in adulthood. A comprehensive guide. (2nd ed.). San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.
[80] Hébrard, P. 2013, Ambiguities and paradoxes in a competence-based approach to vocational education and training in France In: European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol 4 No. 2, . pp.111-127

How learning outcomes are defined and used within different policy frameworks (European and national levels) and guidance and validation tools has a clear impact on the degree to which transversal skills and competences are captured within VNFIL processes. As defined in chapter 1, transversal skills and competences are much more clearly aligned with the constructivist school of thought.

Keevy and Chakroun (2015)[81] argued that the 2008 EQF is grounded in a behaviourist taxonomy, and that this may lead to overly simplistic approaches. In turn, they note, the European Qualifications Framework has influenced National Qualifications Frameworks, and hypothesised that Bloom's taxonomy of learning, which takes a behaviourist approach, has been a common strong, albeit implicit, influence across countries.[82]

The 2017 Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, which repealed the 2008 framework, highlighted the importance of regular review and update of the EQF and national qualifications frameworks to ensure that they are coherent with existing European cooperation and Education and Training strategic frameworks.[83] Further updates therefore will need to balance personal, social and economic priorities for lifelong learning, as emphasised to consider in more recent European strategies for lifelong learning.[84]

A good understanding of the distinction between behaviourist and constructivist approaches can support more effective guidance and validation processes. As Keevy and Chakroun (2015) suggest, both behaviourist and constructivist approaches have appropriate applications.[85]

Learning outcomes defined in terms of the behaviourist approach are close-ended, observable and considered as easier to measure. This approach is well suited to guidance and validation focus on specific, observable tasks or basic knowledge and skills. Standardised tests or questionnaires with close-ended questions or checklists may be used to capture information on the learner's knowledge and/or experiences.

Learning outcomes defined in constructivist terms are process oriented and respect the diversity of individual experiences. A constructivist approach to guidance and validation practices may focus on the learner's personal biography, motivations and personal goals. Validation tools may include portfolios, dialogues, interviews, simulations or observations of problem-solving processes. These different formats allow a focus on transversal skills and competences. Validation practitioners may refer to descriptors and criteria in order to assess the learner's level – whether for formative or summative purposes.

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[81] Keevy, J.; Chakroun, B. 2015, Op cit.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H0615%2801%29
[84] Ibid.
[85] Keevy, J.; Chakroun, B. 2015, Op cit.

The influence of taxonomies of learning on thinking about learning outcomes and learner progression is described in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2: Taxonomies of learning

> Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1956) has had a significant influence on thinking about learning outcomes and learner progression. The hierarchical classification, which is grounded in behaviourist theories of learning, consists of six major categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Subsequent versions introduced classifications for the affective and psycho-motor domains.
>
> Alternative taxonomies rooted in constructivist theories describe the progression from "novice to expert" (the Dreyfus taxonomy, 1986) and the notion of understanding as increasing in number and complexity of connections (the SOLO taxonomy, an acronym for Structure of Observed Learning outcomes, 1982). (Cedefop 2016: 37; Keevy/Chakroun 2015: 49). The Dreyfus and SOLO taxonomies are seen as being more appropriate foundations for guidance and assessment of learner autonomy, as well as the capacity to address complex challenges.

Sources: Bloom[86], Anderson and Krathwhol[87] Beretier and Scardamalia[88] Cedefop, 2016[89].

Various policy documents and tools to support validation of non-formal and informal learning at European and/or national levels may be poorly aligned - with some grounded in behaviourist and others grounded in constructivist models.[90] Hébrard, for example, in his analysis of written documents setting out job activities and standards for vocational education and training in France in the areas of social work and healthcare found that they are typically based on a behaviourist approach, or a combination of incompatible models. Documents may fail to distinguish between competences and activities. They also tend to avoid relational aspects (i.e. with care recipients or with professional colleagues) or the complexity of human relationships.

While this is an isolated example, it nevertheless points to a need for systems to consider their own qualifications frameworks, as well as the definition of learning outcomes and standards, and whether and how these different frameworks and tools can support a more holistic, learner-centred approach to guidance and validation, including for transversal skills and competences. In every country, a review of systems to evaluate coherence and alignment of the different approaches and tools with the different aims for VNFIL.

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[86] Bloom, B. et al. 1956, Taxonomy of educational objectives: the classification of educational goals. Vol.1. New York: David McKay.

[87] Anderson, L.; and Krathwohl D. 2001, A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: a revision of Bloom's taxonomy. New York: Longman Publishing.

[88] Bereiter, C.; Scardamalia, M. 2005, Beyond Bloom's taxonomy: rethinking knowledge for the knowledge age. In: M. Fullan (ed.). Fundamental change: international handbook of educational change. Dordrecht: Springer. http://www.springer.com/us/book/9781402032929

[89] Cedefop 2016, The application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe: A comparative perspective. Cedefop, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. (Main authors: Jerzy Wiśniewski, Jean Gordon, Gábor Halász, Janet Looney and Alain Michel)

[90] Keevy, J.; Chakroun, B. 2015, Op cit.

Box 2.3 sets out a timeline of key EU documents which have shaped approaches to lifelong learning and VNFIL. Concepts underpinning the different policy instruments have shifted over time to reflect new priorities and to support implementation.

Box 2.3: A timeline of key developments in lifelong learning and VNFIL in Europe

The 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training*, which was part of the planning for the 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning, emphasised the importance of non-formal and informal learning to support broad economic and social development. The paper also endorsed the idea of individual ownership of learning to support personal development, integration into work and social life, and civic participation.[91]

The 1999 Bologna Declaration, which created the European Higher Education Area to harmonise qualifications and support student mobility through the development of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), marked the European Union's official entry into education policy.[92] The Declaration also introduced the learning outcomes approach as a core mechanism to support mobility and credit transfer.

The 2000 Lisbon Strategy extended lifelong learning to the entire education sector, including non-formal and informal learning. This was followed by the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration which set the foundation for further work on VNFIL to support mobility and credit transfer.

The European Inventory of approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning was launched in 2000 as one of the first important steps to establishing a European approach to VNFIL, and "Common principles" related to methodologies, validation procedures and coordination mechanisms covering 14 Member States and most of the candidate countries were defined.[93] These were formalised in the Council Conclusion on common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.[94] [95]

The 2004 Council conclusion on common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning[96] built on the learning outcomes principle, setting out definitions of what learners should know and be able to do on completion of a learning process, provided a common approach across EU countries and education sectors. They also allowed learners to demonstrate learning outside of formal education systems.

The 2004 Council Decision on a single Community Framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences in Europe established *Europass* to support documentation of learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2004).[97]

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[91] European Commission 1995, Teaching and learning: Towards the learning society. White paper. Publication Office of the EU.

[92] Harris, J. 2011, European Union: Research and system building in the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), in J. Harris, M. Breier and C. Wihak (Eds.), Researching the Recognition of Prior Learning: International Perspectives. Leicester: NIACE, pp. 127–160.

[93] Colardyn, D., & Bjørnåvold, J. 2004, Validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning: Policy and practices in EU member states. European Journal of Education, *39*(1), 69–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0141-8211.2004.00167.x

[94] Council of the European Union 2004, Common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, 2004/C 398/01**.**

[95] Villalba-García, E. 2021, Validation of non-formal and informal learning: The hero with a thousand faces? European Journal of Education, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 351 – 364. DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12468

[96] Council of the European Union 2004, Common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, 2004/C 398/01.

[97] European Commission 2008, The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

The Council Resolution on key competences for lifelong learning was first introduced in 2006 and then updated in 2018. Transversal skills and competences such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision-taking and constructive management of emotions are embedded in the framework[98].

Additional targeted competence frameworks to support the shift to key competences have been introduced (with the earliest framework published in 2001, and the most recent in January of 2022). These frameworks, which place a strong emphasis on transversal skills and competences, include:

- *The Common European Framework of References for Languages, CEFR (Multilingual)* was introduced in 2001. It sets out six levels of language proficiency. It can be used to support assessment and comparability of qualifications. It is a descriptive tool which can be adapted to a range of contexts.[99]

- *The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, RFCDC (Citizenship)* was approved in 2016. It sets out 20 competences or democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, and includes descriptors for each competence, according to levels of basic intermediate and advanced proficiency.[100]

- The *DigComp (Digital)* reference framework was first published in 2013. DigComp 2.0, published in 2016, set out a conceptual reference model, introduced new vocabulary and streamlined descriptors. DigComp 2.1, published in 2017, set out eight proficiency levels (aligned with the EQF) and examples of use.[101]

- *EntreComp (Entrepreneurship),* introduced in 2016, includes 3 interrelated competence areas: 'ideas and opportunities', 'resources' and 'into action'. There are 5 competences in each of the areas, and eight proficiency levels are set for each of these.[102]

- *LifeComp,* published in 2020, was developed following the introduction of Personal, Social and Learning to Learn competence in the revised 2018 Key competence framework. It includes 9 competences, with three descriptors each.[103]

- *GreenComp (Sustainability)* published in 2022, includes four interrelated competence areas: 'embodying sustainability values', 'embracing complexity in sustainability', 'envisioning sustainable futures' and 'acting for sustainability'. Three competences are defined for each area. They are interlinked and equally important.[104]

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[98] Council of the European Union 2018, Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 "on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning", OJ C 189, 4.6.2018.

[99] Council of Europe 2001, The Common European Framework of reference for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Cambridge University Press. https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97

[100] Council of Europe 2018. Reference framework of competences for democratic culture. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. https://rm.coe.int/prems-008318-gbr-2508-reference-framework-of-competences-vol-1-8573-co/16807bc66c

[101] Carretero Gomez, S., Vuorikari, R. and Punie, Y., DigComp 2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use, EUR 28558 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC106281

[102] Bacigalupo M, Kampylis P, Punie Y and Van Den Brande L. 2016. EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework. EUR 27939 EN. Luxembourg : Publications Office of the European Union; 2016. JRC101581 https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC101581

[103] Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., 2020. LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, EUR 30246 EN, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC120911

[104] Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., 2022. GreenComp The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128040

The 2008 Council Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning[105] was adopted. While several countries had begun to introduce learning outcomes to their national curricula as early as the 1990s, work was fragmented, and comparability was limited.[106] Work toward the development of the EQF began in 2004. Following a process of stakeholder consultation and expert input, the EQF was formally adopted in 2008.

The EQF sets out eight reference levels based on the learning outcomes principle and covers the entire span of qualifications for all levels of education and training. The EQF and subsequent introduction of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), which are referenced to the EQF have supported a more systematic shift to learning outcomes across the Member States and improved the comparability of learning outcomes.

The 2008 Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies set out four priorities to support individuals in their career transitions: 1.) encourage the lifelong acquisition of career management skills; 2.) facilitate access by all citizens to guidance services; 3.) develop quality assurance in guidance provision; and 4.) Encourage coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders.

The 2009 European Guidelines for Validation, set out the main themes for design and implementation of VNFIL at national levels. The Guidelines were revised in 2015.[107]

In 2012, the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was adopted.[108] The Recommendation emphasised the importance of guidance and counselling throughout the process of validation; coordination with relevant actors; linking validation to national qualifications frameworks and standards; reference to learning-outcomes-based standards similar to or equivalent to those in formal education and training; quality assurance; and, provision of qualified professionals. The Recommendation set out a four-stage process for validation: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification. Member States were encouraged to have validation arrangements in place by 2018.

A 2016 Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament introduced the New Skills Agenda, which was based on three key work strands: to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation; to make skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and to improve skills intelligence and information to support better career choices. Among other priorities, the Communication underlined the need for work-based learning to support learners to develop labour-market relevant skills, including transversal and soft skills.[109]

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[105] European Commission 2008, The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

[106] Cedefop 2016, The application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe: A comparative perspective, Luxemburg Publications office of the European Union

[107] European Guidelines for Validating non-formal and informal learning July 2009. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/4054

[108] Council of the European Union 2012, Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, C 398; 22, December 2012, 1–5.

[109] European Commission 2016, European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities p. 13

The 2016 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults[110] targeted adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences (and not eligible for the Youth Guarantee) to provide them with flexible opportunities to improve literacy, numeracy and digital competences, and to advance to higher EQF levels. The recommendation notes the importance of digital competence, and skills such as communication, problem solving, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. Member States were encouraged to offer adults within the priority target groups (e.g., unemployed or at risk of unemployment) the opportunity to undergo kills audit, to identify existing skills and upskilling needs and to apply validation arrangements where appropriate, and in line with the 2012 Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The 2017 Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning highlighted the importance of review and update, on the EQF and of national qualifications frameworks whenever relevant. It also emphasised that the development of the EQF should be fully coherent with existing European cooperation in education and training under the ET 2020 strategic framework and future European education and training strategic frameworks.[111]

The 2018 Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 April 2018 on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) replaces the 2004 Europass framework and called for updates and changes to be made and established an advisory group comprised of Member State representatives and relevant stakeholder groups. The remit of the group was to ensure that a revised Europass framework supports transparency and understanding of skills – including transversal skills – acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning, using web-based tools.[112]

The 2020 Communication - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience[113] updated the 2016 New Skills Agenda. The Communication highlights the need for a paradigm shift in skills to drive the twin digital and green transitions and ensure recovery from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendation highlights that the Commission will foster transversal skills by providing a strategic framework for the recognition of transversal skills and to support validation practitioners in Europe; and develop resources to support validation of transversal skills by employers and employment services. EU-wide online courses and related micro-credentials for validation practitioners, and establishment of a network of validation pioneer organisations that can share best practices may be developed (Action 7 of the Communication).

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[110] Council Recommendation 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN

[111] Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H0615%2801%29

[112] European Parliament and Council 2018, Decision on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC

[113] European Commission 2020, Op cit.

VNFIL across Europe: limited support for validation of transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation practices

The 2018 European Inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning (VNFIL)[114] found that most Member States had some form of validation practice in place. As highlighted above, a minority of countries had developed initiatives to support the validation of transversal skills and competences.

The European inventory on VNFIL also points to a miscellany of validation practices across countries. In terms of validation methods, the inventory found that practitioners use a range of methods, with 'tests and examinations' as the most frequently used methods (28 countries in 2018). This was followed by the use of portfolios (27 countries), interviews, debates and dialogues (26 countries), evidence from workplace performance (25 countries), declarative methods (23 countries), simulations (15 countries), observations (14 countries), and third-party reports (9 countries) (See Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Validation methods used in education and training subsectors where validation arrangements are in place
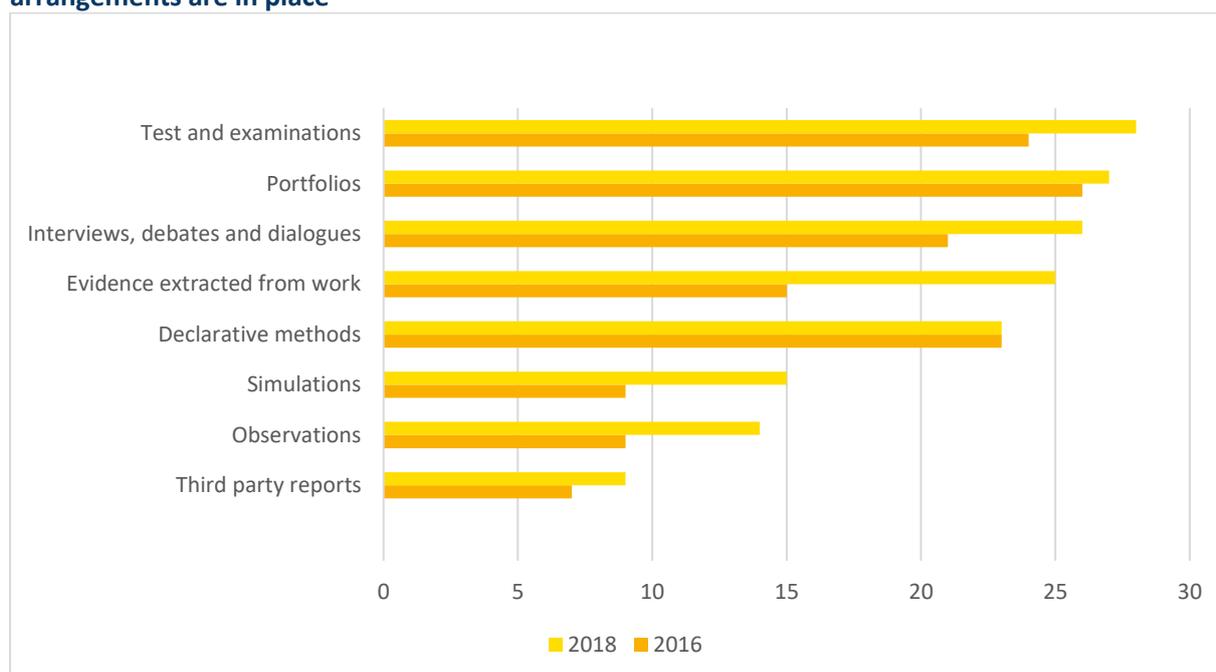
Source: *Cedefop, European Commission, ICF (2019)[115]*

All these methods can potentially be used to capture aspects of transversal skills and competences.

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[114]Cedefop, European Commission, ICF 2019, Op cit.
[115] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019, Op cit

Unfortunately, the Inventory provides only a general level of information. More detail on the design of validation methods and how they are used is needed. Ideally, learners and practitioners will use more than one type of validation method to develop a well-rounded view of the individual learner's competences. Well-designed portfolios may provide opportunities for learners to reflect on their transversal competences and to draw on a range of experiences to consider how they have used them in different contexts. Checklists, when used as part of a dialogue with a validation practitioner, may also support reflection.

During the early, formative stages of VNFIL, more open formats that support learners to explore their 'personal histories' can be invaluable. Skilled practitioners may help learners to explore their strengths and motivations and support the efficacy to take greater control of their own lives.[116] Transparency within this process can also enhance the validation experience for learners.[117] For potential employers, examples of the individual's narrative biography may support perceptions of their potential 'fit' with the organisation.[118]

Portfolios, observations and other open formats may be used during assessment and certification stages (rather than standardised tests with multiple choice formats). However, to ensure reliability of assessment from learner to learner, the learner's competence level needs to be assessed according to criteria and standards. More information is needed on the support and training validation practitioners receive in order to ensure reliability of assessment (i.e., consistency and stability of results).

EU policies to support guidance and validation as part of a coherent process

In the last decade, EU policies have increasingly approached VNFIL guidance and validation as part of a coherent process.

- The 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning identified information, guidance, and counselling as a cornerstone of validation processes. The 2015 European guidelines for VNFIL stress that integrated guidance and validation requires functional validation arrangements, including "impartial and comprehensive information, guidance and counselling throughout the process."[119]
- The Council recommendation on upskilling pathways,[120] notes that the three-step process (skills assessment, a tailored learning offer, and the validation and recognition of the learning

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[116] Duvekot, R. C. 2014, Op cit.

[117] Stenlund, T. 2010, Assessment of prior learning in higher education: a review from a validity perspective, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35(7), pp.783- 797.

[118] Brown, P. and Souto-Otero, M. 2018, The end of the credential society? An analysis of the relationship between education and the labour market using big data. Published in the Journal of Education Policy, https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1549752

[119] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019.

[120] Council Recommendation 2016, Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, Op cit.

- acquired) requires guidance and outreach services to support learners' progression through every step of the upskilling pathway.
- The 2020 Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning stated that "validation of prior learning should include guidance and support at every stage of the process".[121]
- There are several EU policy initiatives where validation and guidance play a role and are mentioned in parallel. For example, the new European Skills Agenda[122] and the 12 Action plan of 2020[123] include some actions relevant to guidance and validation, such as Action 1 (a Pact for Skills to join forces in collective action and Tools and initiatives to support people in their lifelong learning pathways); Action 8 (the Skills for Life); Action 9 (Initiative on individual learning accounts); Action 10 (A European approach to micro-credentials); and Action 11 (New Europass platform).

The 2020 Evaluation of the 2012 Council recommendation on VNFIL[124] recommends closer cooperation and effective coordination between providers of guidance and validation. This has an impact on how practitioners coordinate and work together, the extent to which the four stages of VNFIL are taken into account, and so on.

TRANSVAL-EU approach to making transversal skills and competences explicit

The TRANSVAL-EU project team is elaborating a Common Transversal Competences Framework (CTCF) for use in guidance and validation processes. The CTCF is based a framework developed through the Erasmus+ KA2 project, RECTEC (2016 – 2019) and its successor project, RECTEC+, which together developed a common repository of cross-curricular competences and descriptors aligned with the eight levels of the European Qualifications Framework. The main focus and aim of RECTEC was to promote employability by identifying transversal skills and matching them to professional certificates.

In a series of workshops over the summer months of 2021, representatives from the different TRANSVAL partner organisations addressed each of the three clusters of competences included in the RECTEC/RECTEC+ framework: organisation, social/communication and reflexive competences. The respective competences in the RECTEC framework were reviewed and removed or modified, and new competences were added.

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[121] Duvekot, R., Karttunen, A., Noack, M. and Van den Brande, L. eds., 2020. Making Policy Work – Validation of Prior Learning for Education and the Labour Market. Houten/Berlin: European Centre Valuation of Prior Learning & Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available at: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/it/node/162518 [Accessed 8 Dec. 2021], p. 14

[122] Commission, European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience'. Available at: file:///C:/Users/Gloria/Downloads/Communication_30June_v2.pdf

[123] European Skills Agenda, https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en

[124] European Commission 2020, Accompanying the document Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025.

TRANSVAL-EU project partners favoured a holistic approach, with definitions of transversal competences encompassing not only work-related aspects, but also taking into account a wider perspective to learner empowerment and employability. Care was taken to avoid definitions that could be construed as individual psychological / character traits rather than competences (e.g. for terms such as "resilience" or "flexibility", and which could potentially lead to discrimination. The partners also considered whether proposed competences were both broad and specific enough to be useful and usable in the planned TRANSVAL-EU field trials in different national contexts.

Discussions were also supported by research for the state-of-the-art report and the collection of existing good practices supporting guidance and validation of selected transversal competences. Other frameworks such as EntreComp, Digicomp, the Career Skills Management Framework and the work being done in ESCO were taken into consideration.

The Common Transversal Competence Framework resulting from this process includes the following competences:

- Managing and organising activities
- Solving problems and reacting to the unforeseen
- Cooperating and fostering cooperation
- Resource Management
- Using oral communication in one or several languages
- Taking professional, social and cultural norms into account
- Using written communication in one or several languages
- Communicating using digital technologies
- Critical thinking
- Building one's career path
- Developing one's competences and profile
- Self-reflection

The outlook

The CTCF is a general framework that can be adapted to the specific context of each of the field trials. During the field trial phase of the TRANSVAL-EU project, common competences will be selected so they can be compared across countries. In addition, specific competences to enhance the profiles of the practitioners will be selected. The context-specific needs of field trial participants will be taken into account, and the generic descriptors adapted. This re-contextualisation is a mandatory step for the TRANSVAL-EU field trial partners who will also engage in peer learning activities to create synergies and share lessons learned.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the evolution of lifelong and life-wide learning over the last several decades, and how concepts have been shaped by tensions between humanist/holistic and utilitarian/labour market-oriented approaches. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the way in which learning outcomes are defined and described in various European and national policy instruments also shape guidance and validation practices.

Tools and frameworks anchored in earlier policies may not fully reflect current priorities or thinking on transversal skills and competences. Even when policy frameworks have been revised, attention to transversal skills and competences may be treated as complementary rather than integral to frameworks. Guidance and validation practitioners, who have had varying levels of professional learning opportunities, may not have been prepared to support learners in the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of their transversal skills and competences.

The next chapter will look more closely at national-level approaches to transversal skills and competences. The overview of different policy approaches and of selected good practices sets the scene for mutual learning across countries in the next stages of the TRANSVAL-EU study.

CHAPTER 3 - COUNTRY-LEVEL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Although progress is uneven, all EU countries have VNFIL systems at least partially in place.[125] With regards to validation of transversal skills and competences, however, policy-level developments are still scarce in most countries. [126] In spite of the absence of clear policies promoting guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences at a national level, a number of good and innovative practices within countries – at a regional and local level – illustrate VNFIL initiatives that use innovative approaches, methods, and tools to validate transversal skills and competences.

The first section in this chapter provides a summary of the main conceptual approaches to competences in European countries and the place given to transversal competences within these approaches, if any. Then, an overview of transversal skills and competences in legal and policy frameworks is followed by an overview of country guidance policies and the link with guidance and validation practitioners' competences, including transversal skills and competences; and to conclude, a discussion of current issues on quality assurance for VNFIL relevant for European countries is added. The findings from this chapter draw on research conducted by TRANSVAL-EU partners at a European and national levels (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland, as well as the Nordic region) and is complemented by analysis of the Cedefop Inventory on VNFIL (2019).

Country-level definitions of competences and transversal competences

Most EU Member States have introduced the concepts of 'competence', defined in terms of learning outcomes, as the foundation of their education and training systems.[127] In terms of existing approaches to competence, definitions across countries vary, reflecting the tension identified by relevant research within existing frameworks, between a holistic approach and a more utilitarian, instrumentalist one. On one end of the spectrum, some countries have developed a utilitarian or instrumental approach, emphasising the person's ability to perform activities as expected in employment in a specific work environment.[128] In this approach, competence is understood as a cumulation of acquired skills that are necessary to achieve the outcomes established for each occupational standard.[129] This approach to competences has been applied in **French-speaking Belgium (FR)**, where the 2019 Cooperation Agreement setting the mandate of the CVDC (Consortium de validation des compétences) defines competence as "the – measurable – ability to make use of one's knowledge – knowledge, know-how,

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[125] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019, Op cit

[126] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019, Op cit.

[127] European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) European Training Foundation (ETF); United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO); UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks, 2019.

[128] Le Deist F, and Winterton J, 2005, What Is Competence?, Human Resource Development International, 8:1, 27-46, DOI: 10.1080/1367886042000338227 (p.34)

[129] Bulgarelli, Lettmayr, and Menéndez-Valdés, 2009, The Shift to Learning Outcomes: Policies and Practices in Europe.

and behavioural know-how – strictly necessary to perform a task in a working environment."[130] In the VET sector the focus is mainly on employability, and descriptions of qualifications are defined according to the occupational standards defined by social partners.[131] In the case of **Italy**, the lifelong learning strategy was elaborated in alignment with a labour market reform. This policy established an operational framework – a national system for certification of competences in addition to a national repository of education, training, and vocational qualifications awarded at national and regional levels and described in terms of learning outcomes.[132]

In between the two ends of the spectrum (i.e., from utilitarian to holistic approaches), countries progress towards introducing a competence-based approach, including (or not) transversal skills and competences. There is evidence that significant progress has been made in this direction, either within a lifelong learning strategy or as part of a policy reform towards the integration of competence-based standards in the national curricula and in assessment systems.[133] For example, in **Lithuania**, the level descriptors in the Lithuanian qualifications framework include three types of competences (cognitive, functional, and general) along with "activity characteristics" such as complexity, autonomy, and variability; the latter helped to make the competences framework even more specific to the Lithuanian context.[134] However, VNFIL in Lithuania is still underdeveloped mainly due to the lack of validation reference materials, methodologies, and tools to support the educational institutions in the process. The lack of publicly available information about the VNFIL process and its benefits is a persistent area of concern. In **Poland,** the Integrated Qualification System (IQS) distinguishes between knowledge, skills, and social competences. While 'skills' encompass problem-solving, learning, and communication descriptors, 'social competence' comprises identity, cooperation, and responsibility.[135]

At the other end of the spectrum, competence is understood as a multi-dimensional, holistic notion that encompasses knowledge and skills, as well as social and personal attributes, [136] giving more space to transversal skills and competences to be included in the different definitions. Several researchers[137,138,139,140] have associated the competence-based approaches developed in **France,**

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[130] TRANSVAL desk-based research
[131] Cedefop 2018, Belgium – European inventory on NQF, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/belgium_fr_-_european_inventory_on_nqf_2018.pdf
[132] Cedefop 2018, Italy – European inventory on NQF, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/italy-european-inventory-nqf-2018
[133] Cedefop 2016, Application of Learning Outcomes. Approaches across Europe: A Comparative Study, Cedefop Reference Series 105, Luxembourg: Publications Office, 2016.
[134] Cedefop 2018, Lithuania – European inventory on NQF, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/lithuania-european-inventory-nqf-2018
[135] Cedefop 2018, Poland – European inventory on NQF, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/poland-european-inventory-nqf-2018
[136] Bulgarelli, Lettmayr, and Menéndez-Valdés, Op cit.
[137] Cedefop 2016, Op cit.
[138] Bulgarelli, Lettmayr, and Menéndez-Valdés, Op cit.
[139] Le Deist and Winterton, J. Op cit.
[140] Winterton, J Delamare-Le Deist, F and Stringfellow E, 2006, Typology of Knowledge, Skills and Competences: Clarification of the Concept and Prototype.

Germany, and **Austria** to this approach, regardless of the differences owed to the countries' cultural contexts. In turn, these have influenced other European countries in the development of their own competence frameworks to a greater or lesser extent. The **French** definition of competence encompasses knowledge (*savoir*), functional competences or skills (*savoir-faire*), and behavioural or social competences (*savoir-être*).[141] The three dimensions are interlinked and are part of the whole; instead of a fragmented notion, competences are understood as "dynamic processes of learning, developing and passing on knowledge".[142] Similarly, **Portugal**, has developed a multi-dimensional definition of competence as the "recognised capacity to mobilise knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of work, professional development, education and personal development".[143] In **Spain**, the concept of competence is associated with "the capacity to use knowledge, skills, and social, personal and methodological abilities in any work or learning context – described in the EQF as autonomy and responsibility."[144]

The **German** notion of competence (*Kompetenz*) was made implicit in the dual system of VET[145] from the beginning, though it was not initially a competence-based approach *per se*. However, the German education system has moved progressively to an 'action competence' approach, which has allowed the shift from a subject-based (inputs) to a competence-based (defined in terms of learning outcomes) framework. This change is reflected in the German education system, which no longer aligns content with occupation-related knowledge and skills, but instead with competence and curricula specifying learning fields (*Lernfelder*).[146] The competence of action-taking (*Handlungskompetenz*) is the main goal of VET in the dual system "to enable the learner to take autonomous and responsible action within the workplace".[147] This multi-dimensional concept encompasses occupational competence (Fachkompetenz), social competence (Sozialkompetenz), methodological competence (Methodenkompetenz), and personal competence (Selbstkompetenz), and "each of these dimensions relate to particular knowledge, skills and competences. The latter include moral and social attributes such as taking responsibility and showing awareness of the consequences of occupational action." [148]

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[141] Le Deist, F and Winterton, J, Op cit.

[142] Cedefop 2018, France – European inventory on NQF https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/france-european-inventory-nqf-2018

[143] Cedefop 2018, Portugal – European inventory on NQF https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/portugal-european-inventory-nqf-2018

[144] Spanish Ministry of Education Website for Professional Training. Available at: https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/mecu/preguntas-frecuentes-glosario.html

[145] According to Winterton et al. (2006) "While competence (Kompetenz) was implicit in the system, the main emphasis was on specifying the necessary learning inputs, rather than outcomes, to master a trade. Occupational competence is rooted in the concept of Beruf (usually translated as occupation but encompassing the traditions of the craft from the trade and craft guilds), which defines vocational training theory and associated pedagogy (Meyer, 2002). Within this tradition, modularisation and generic competences are regarded with suspicion since these may damage the unity of the craft (Ertl, 2002)." (p.52)

[146] Winterton, Delamare-Le Deist, and Stringfellow, Op cit., p. 10.

[147] Gordon, J. et al., 2009, Key Competences in Europe: Opening Doors for Lifelong Learners across the School Curriculum and Teacher Education, CASE Network Reports, no. 87, p.36.

[148] Gordon, J. et al., Op cit, p.36.

According to Winterton et al. (2006), the German approach to VET has influenced other European countries in central Europe, and to a lesser degree, some Nordic countries.[149] In **Austria**, there is no common definition of competences. However, in the Austrian National Qualification Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy (e.g. work and study under supervision, take responsibility, exercise self-management within guidelines of contexts, decision-making, manage and transform contexts). In the Austrian school-based VET system, for example, an understanding based on Weinert is used: competences are seen as cognitive abilities and skills to solve certain problems and the associated motivational, volitional, and social readiness and skills to use the problem solutions successfully and responsibly in varying situations.[150] The educational standards introduced since 2004 use this understanding, in which four types of competence are distinguished: professional competence, methodological competence, social competence, and personal competence.[151] In the dual VET system, the newer training regulations refer to the essential vocational action competences ('Handlungskompetenzen'), which also each comprise a technical, methodological, personal, and social dimension.[152]

Another example of a more 'holistic' approach to competences is the **Netherlands**, where the education and training system identifies four types of competences (occupational, career, civic, and learning) which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour.[153]

In **Norway**, learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge (kunnskap), skills (ferdighet) and general competence (generell kompetanse); the latter refers to "the ability to use knowledge and skills in an independent manner in different situations in study and work contexts, by demonstrating the ability to cooperate, the ability to act responsibly, and a capacity for reflection and critical thinking."[154] In **Sweden,** the principles of the 'goals-centred approach' is clearly seen in compulsory education, where the curriculum should "aim to promote pupils' moral, social and cultural development, preparing them for opportunities, responsibilities and the experiences of life."[155] Similarly, **Denmark's** approach to competence includes: a) space for action; the type of work/study related context in which knowledge and skills are brought to play, and the degree of unpredictability and changeability in these contexts; b) cooperation and responsibility; the ability to take responsibility for one's own work and

[149] Winterton, Delamare-Le Deist, and Stringfellow, Op cit.

[150] Kompetenzorientiertes Unterrichten an berufsbildenden Schulen Grundlagenpapier Stand, July 2012, https://www.bildungsstandards.berufsbildendeschulen.at/sites/default/files/files/BBS-Bildungsstandards-KU-Grundlagenpapier-16.07.2012.pdf, p. 10. (Authors' own translation)

[151] Auzinger, M & Luomi-Messerer, K. 2017, Lernergebnisorientierung in der österreichischen Berufsbildung. 3S Research Laboratory (im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Bildung). https://3s.co.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/3s-Umsetzung-der-Lernergebnisorientierung-in-der-%C3%B6sterreichischen-Berufsbildung-Status-Quo.pdf,p. 23

[152] Auzinger, M. & Luomi-Messerer, K. 2017, Op cit, p. 32.

[153] Bulgarelli, Lettmayr, and Menéndez-Valdés, Op cit.

[154] Cedefop 2018, Norway - European Inventory on NQF https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/norway-european-inventory-nqf-2018

[155] Bulgarelli, Lettmayr, and Menéndez-Valdés, Op cit, p.95.

the work of others, and the complexity of the cooperative situations in which one engages; c) learning; d) the ability to take responsibility for one's own learning and that of others.[156]

Transversal competences within country-level frameworks

After looking at the general definitions of the concept of competence in European countries, this section will explore the conceptual definitions of transversal skills and competences. Most of the examples identified are from countries with a 'holistic' approach to competences; in **Finland** and **Iceland,** recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal, and informal) is a key tenet in many policies at different levels of education and training.[157] In Iceland, competences are considered as transferable from one job to another or to other activities in society, and are of great value for the individual to carry.[158] Moreover, both Finland and Iceland have focused on recognising prior non-formal and informal learning developed in the workplace.[159] In **Sweden,** the formal adult education curricula include definitions for relevant transversal skills and competences; on completion of their education, students must have acquired competences such as entrepreneurship competence, and personal, social and learning to learn competence.

In the Nordic countries, within the longstanding tradition in non-formal adult education (Folkbildning), the aim is to help foster the skills needed to give people the tools they need to engage in their societies as active citizens.[160] Clear links have been established between the 'Folkbildning key competences' and the European key competences for lifelong learning[161], including transversal ones such as management and self-management; creativity; innovation; organisational competences; democratic competences and responsibility; and cooperation and diversity competences, among others.[162] There are several examples from the adult education sector in Nordic countries that explicitly address validation of transversal skills and competences. For instance, between 1999 and 2002 the **Norwegian** Ministry of Education conducted the *Realkompetanse* project to allow adults to document competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning using a portfolio and a workplace competence card. Work responsibilities were identified and described by specifying the occupational competences needed, personal capabilities, social competences, and management skills.[163] In **Denmark**, the web-based tool, *Competence cards*, is used in the third sector for self-assessment of key competences, including transversal ones, with versions available for non-formal adult education, voluntary activities, and

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[156] Cedefop 2018, Denmark – European inventory on NQF https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/denmark-european-inventory-nqf-2018

[157] Cedefop*,* 2016, Op cit.

[158] TRANSVAL desk-based research

[159] Cedefop 2016, Op cit.

[160] TRANSVAL desk-based research

[161] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, OJ C 189

[162] Nordic Network for Adult Learning, NVL 2015, Folkbildning and validation of key competences https://nvl.org/Portals/0/_dokumenter/2016/NVL_Folkbildning_key_competences_090316_www.pdf

[163] Winterton, Delamare-Le Deist, and Stringfellow, Op cit.

associations (e.g., sports). The competences assessed are the following: social, organisational, self-management, creative-innovative, intercultural, communicative, learning, and democratic competences. The tool was developed in 2014 and is available in Danish and in English (only the cards).[164]

When it comes to guidance and validation of transversal competences, this is still at an early stage of development in a majority of countries; some examples of policy-level frameworks that consider validation of transversal competences can be identified in **France, Iceland,** and **the Netherlands.** In **France,** all the qualifications included in the National register of vocational and professional qualifications (Repertoire national des certifications professionnelles - RNCP) can be obtained through a VNFIL procedure (VAE – Validation d'Acquis d'Expérience). Any qualification that is included in the RNCP must be defined using an occupational standard, a competence standard (specifying competences and knowledge, including transversal competences), and an assessment standard, as well as the procedure for assessing learning outcomes. Box 3.1 describes the CléA certificate, initiated in 2015, as an example of validation and certification of transversal competences.[165]

Box 3.1: France - CléA

Some certifications listed in the RNCP aim explicitly at the acquisition and validation of transversal skills. Inspired by the existing frameworks (French common base framework[166], Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning [2006 and 2018]), social partners developed a common base framework of professional knowledge and skills (CléA certificate). This certification is accessible to all who seek to validate knowledge and competences in the professional field. It targets the skills considered to be the most useful in professional life, such as "learning to learn", with the exception of those considered to be the responsibility of the education system (e.g., cultural awareness, civic skills, etc.). Transversal skills are clearly formulated without referring to any technical skills and knowledge. The CléA certificate groups these skills into areas, such as working according to the rules laid down by a work team; work independently and achieve an individual goal; lifelong learning; work ergonomically and respect the rules of hygiene, safety, and the environment; etc.[167] The certificate is accessible to all who seek to validate knowledge and competences in the professional sphere. After completing the first evaluation, a personalised training pathway is proposed in order to obtain the certification.

Source: InnoVal Toolbox[168]

In the case of **Iceland**, the ETSC (Education and Training Service Centre, coordinating body for the national strategy of validation of prior learning) developed a tool for assessing 'general employability' competences in adult education, mainly among job seekers and people on social welfare. These

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[164] TRANSVAL desk-based research
[165] Cedefop 2018, France – European inventory on NQF, Op cit.
[166] Since law of 23 April 2005, compulsory education programs are defined on the basis of a „common base framework of knowledge and skills". Revised and enriched by the 2013 law.
[167] Galli and Paddeu July 2021, 'Quelle Certification Des Compétences Transversales En France ?'
https ://www.cereq.fr/quelle-certification-des-competences-transversales-en-France
[168] Innoval project - https ://inno-val.eu/toolbox-innoval/

competences are considered as essential skills that an individual needs to possess or acquire to actively participate in society, in the labour market, and to progress in their work; the aim of this tool is to identify these competences, which include transversal ones, and develop ways of assessing and validating them. However, it can be a challenge for VNFIL practitioners to explain learning outcomes linked to employability competences; in this case, context-specific descriptions of practice in specific work areas (i.e., service jobs, care taking, etc.) are used in the interviews with the candidate throughout the validation process. The guidance process requires to explore these descriptions in depth so that the participants can effectively identify their own competences in relation to the learning outcomes as well as Icelandic Qualification Framework (ISQF) levels.[169] The 11 general employability competences are: adaptability; resource management; continuous learning; work ethics and values; valuing cultural diversity; using information technology; interactive communication; teamwork; planning and organising; critical judgement; and information gathering and processing.[170]

In the **Netherlands**, the national VNFIL system includes the validation of transversal skill and competences through the 'competentiebewijs' (Competence Certificate), awarded to candidates by the National Knowledge Centre (EVC) to validate competences that could be developed further even when changing jobs (generic and transversal skills and competences). Recognised EVC providers can apply to provide this service, based on the standards from the Trans-Professional Competence Structure (Beroeps-Overstijgende-Competentiestructuur) developed by the Examination Chamber Foundation (Stichting Examenkamer). The EVC providers have to demonstrate that they possess the appropriate assessment tools according to these standards, which the assessor will use to measure the competence level of candidates. The Competence Certificate is intended as a labour market instrument, used in coordination between employers and employee organisations represented in the Supervisory Board of the Examination Chamber Foundation, as well as with the EVC Advisory Council. The certificate distinguishes between soft skills (personal characteristics in combination with social, communicative and language skills) and hard skills (functional and technical competences), while competences are understood as the skills required by/for the business community to be able to perform at work.[171] Table 3.1 summarises the main approaches to competences and transversal

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169 TRANSVAL desk-based research

170 TRANSVAL desk-based research: The following 11 general employability skills are applied in practice in Iceland: Adaptability-Adapting to work effectively in ambiguous or changing situations, and with diverse individuals and groups; Resource management – manages resources (financial, human, physical and information resources) to achieve planned goals; Continuous learning – identifying and addressing learning and developmental needs to enhance own performance; Work ethics and values – demonstrating and supporting the organisation's ethics and values; Valuing cultural diversity – building on one's own cultural values and knowledge to work effectively with individuals of diverse backgrounds in a variety of work contexts; Using information technology – using software and information technology to accomplish one´s work; Interactive Communication – Listening to others and communicating articulately, fostering open communication (Persons with hearing impairments may lip read or use sign language); Teamwork – working collaboratively with others to achieve organizational goals; planning and organising – developing, implementing, evaluating, and adjusting to reach goals, while ensuring the optimal use of resources; Critical judgement – evaluating ideas and information while referring to objective criteria to reach rational conclusion; Information gathering and processing – locating and collecting data from appropriate sources and analysing it to prepare meaningful and concise reports that summarize the information.

171 EVC Certificate, https://www.ervaringscertificaat.nl/resources/v1615203030/uploads/files/210101-1_Beroeps_Overstijgende_Competentiestructuur_met_standaarden_op_negen_niveaus.pdf

competences discussed above, and Table 3.2 provides an overview of recommendations from OECD Skills Strategy Reports to some European countries including Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia.

Table 3.1: Country-case examples of approaches to competences and validation of transversal competences[172]

Country	Approach to competences	Validation of TSCs present in policy framework
Belgium FR	Measurable knowledge, know-how, and behavioural know-how – strictly necessary to perform a task in a working environment	No
France	Competence encompasses knowledge (*savoir*), functional competences or skills (*savoir-faire*), and behavioural or social competences (*savoirêtre*).	Yes
Germany	Multi-dimensional concept encompassing occupational competence (Fachkompetenz), social competence (Sozialkompetenz), methodological competence (Methodenkompetenz), and personal competence (Selbstkompetenz)	No
Austria	The educational standards introduced are based on a concept in which four types of competence are distinguished: professional, methodological, social, and personal. In dual VET, the newer training regulations refer to the essential vocational action competences ('Handlungskompetenzen'), which also each comprise a technical, methodological, personal, and social dimension.	No
Netherlands	Identifies four types of competences (occupational, career, civic, and learning) which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour.	Yes
Iceland	Knowledge, skills, and competences are seen "not only from the point of view of the school system but also from the needs and wishes of individuals and of society".	Yes
Norway	Knowledge (kunnskap), skills (ferdighet) and general competence (generell kompetanse); the latter refers to "the ability to use knowledge and skills in an independent manner in different situations in study and work contexts, by demonstrating the	Yes

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[172] Authors' table

| | ability to cooperate, the ability to act responsibly, and a capacity for reflection and critical thinking." | |

Table 3.2: OECD Skills Strategy recommendations at a national level

Country	Recommendations related to Transversal Skills and Competences
Latvia	Transversal skills and competences are included in the context of skills that are considered essential for adults to succeed in their work and private life, but there is no mention of validation in relation to them.
The Netherlands	Transversal skills and competences are defined as social and emotional skills which involve "individual capacities that are manifested in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours"[173]. Recommendations state the need to improve the recognition and validation of skills developed in non-formal and informal education, especially for vulnerable groups.
Portugal	Recommendations point to combining "provision of foundational and transversal skills training with technical/job relevant skills training." [174] Initiatives should include work-based learning opportunities, collaboration between different training providers (e.g. schools and employers), and involving local stakeholders in the design of adult learning programmes.[175]
Slovenia	Recommendation to "provide more flexible modes of learning and strengthen systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning, to boost participation by low-skilled adults."[176]

Source: OECD Skills Studies (2015, 2017, 2019, 2020)

Country-level guidance and validation practitioner profiles

A closer look into the latest Cedefop Inventory on VNFIL[177] gives an idea of the state-of-the-art in guidance and validation policies across European countries. Practically all countries which offer validation also provide guidance and counselling services. In some cases, it is compulsory to have guidance for the candidates.[178] In **Switzerland**, before entering the validation procedure two compulsory information sessions must be attended. Guidance is normally offered on an individual

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[173] OECD, 'OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: The Netherlands 2017', 2017, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/publication/9789264287655-en, p.17.

[174] OECD, 'Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Portugal', 2018, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/publication/9789264298705-en, p.36.

[175] Ibid

[176] OECD, 'OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: Slovenia 2017', 2017, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/publication/9789264287709-en, p.9.

[177] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019, Op Cit

[178] Villalba, E. 2020, Support Structures. In: R. Duvekot, A. Karttunen, M. Noack and L. Van den Brande, eds., Making Policy Work: Validation of Prior Learning for Education and the Labour Market. Houten/Berlin: European Centre Valuation of Prior Learning & Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available at: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/it/node/162518 Accessed 8 Dec. 2021.

basis adapted to the specific needs of the individual.[179] In **France**, regional information centres provide personalised and free guidance and counselling in an integrated manner. Based on the advice given at the information centred, individuals can be encouraged to pursue validation or further education and training.[180]

Only 15 countries (of 19 respondents) provide information, advice, and guidance (IAG) about validation in the labour market area. The figure is much lower for the third sector (9 of 23 countries). As for the education and training sector, in the labour market most IAG provision is about the process of validation (16 countries). Twelve countries provide IAG about assessment, and 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). However, the Cedefop inventory does not provide specific information about IAG for transversal skills and competences in European countries.

Validation arrangements targeting disadvantaged groups (e.g., adults with low skills, including young adults not covered by the Youth Guarantee, and long-term unemployed people) already exist or are under development in most countries. Among targeted initiatives for long-term unemployed people are the most frequent, closely followed initiatives for adults with low skill levels. An interesting example is the Bridge project, that develops guidance services for adults with low skill levels by reaching out rather than waiting for people to come, and Cuben Education, a private Swedish school working mainly with immigrants with low skill levels connecting employers and employees through internship.[181] Moreover, the skill and competence 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. Digital, entrepreneurial, and transversal skills and competences receive less attention.

Practitioner profiles and (transversal) competences

A 2019 Cedefop study on coordinating guidance and validation[182] highlighted the importance of the guidance practitioners' competences to coordinate validation and guidance activities. The roles and competences of practitioners working in guidance and validation overlap to different degrees, especially in provision of information screening, profiling of clients, and skills assessments. All

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[179] Salini, D., Weber Guisan, S. and Tsandev, E. 2019, European Inventory on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning 2018 Update: Switzerland

[180] Mathou, C. 2019, European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018. Update: France. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_France.pdf

[181] EUCIS LLL 2015, http ://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/lllweek2015_report_guidance-and-counselling.pdf

[182] Cedefop 2019, Coordinating guidance and validation. Luxembourg: Publications. Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 75. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/801290

practitioners need to be adequately trained in their specific relevant roles, while gaining an understanding of the overall process and practice. This is also the case for the guidance practitioners.

In terms of competences and skills, some countries have highlighted the importance of transversal competences for guidance practitioners, such as empathy for clients, ability to motivate them, communication skills, ability to work in teams, and commitment. Technical and transversal skills and competences are equally important. Strengthening of transversal skills and competences may have a positive impact on flexible guidance provision.[183] For example, in Iceland practice, the transversal skills and competences of guidance practitioners include good communication skills and a positive attitude towards helping clients validate competences.[184]

Nevertheless, the desk research conducted for this study reveals a persistent gap in terms of the provision of professional development and training opportunities for guidance and validation practitioners.[185] In Europe, requirements are more usual in validation whereas in guidance there is a more diversified situation across countries. According to Cedefop (2019), training for guidance and validation practitioners is "somewhat patchy", although within the labour market and third sector areas there are some forms of training for practitioners.[186] In the education and training area, entitlement to training may include "paid time for training, cost of training covered, and financial assistance to cover the cost of training".[187] Although a small number of countries made some progress in this area between 2014-2018, about half of the countries (4 countries) that request qualifications specific to validation (8 countries) provide access to some type of training (i.e., Iceland, Italy, Switzerland and Turkey).[188] In the labour market, entitlement to training translates into fully covered costs in Belgium-Flanders, Iceland, and Slovakia, while in the third sector only Italy allows paid leave for information, advice, and guidance and assessment practitioners.[189]

In regard to guidance practitioners' skills in particular, the desk research conducted for this study shows that even if most countries have a four-stage validation process in place (in line with the 2012 Council recommendation), detailed definitions of the guidance practitioners' profiles, including expected knowledge and competences, are still in early stages of development. In some cases, expertise in the field of VNFIL is required, such as in the Netherlands.[190] In Portugal, orientation technicians in charge of recognition and validation of skills at Qualifica Centres must hold a university degree and have experience in at least one of the following areas: educational or professional guidance; methodologies for monitoring young people or adults in different types of training, as well

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[183] Cedefop 2019, Coordinating guidance and validation, Op cit.p. 8.
[184] Cedefop 2019, Coordinating guidance and validation Op cit.
[185] Ibid., p.39.
[186] Ibid., p.3.
[187] Ibid., p. 32.
[188] Ibid., p.32.
[189] Ibid., p.33.
[190] Duvekot, R. (2019). European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2018 Update: Netherlands. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Netherlands.pdf

as monitoring training in a work context; work methodologies with appropriate dynamics for people with disabilities and incapacity; adult education and training methodologies, including the balance of skills and the construction of portfolios.[191] Austria and Iceland indicated that expertise in the field of adult education and/or counselling is required to become a guidance and validation practitioner.[192] In countries such as Czechia, Italy, and Poland, knowledge of the identification phase of the VNFIL procedure and of the certification of competences, and the appropriate methods to ensure these procedures is required. In terms of transversal skills and competences, the desk research points to practitioners' abilities to use tools and methods for verification and to support the learner's reflection (e.g. interviews, portfolios, etc.), as well as interpersonal skills to work with the candidate (e.g. communication skills, impartiality, active listening, etc.).[193] Based on the country reports developed for Cedefop's VNFIL Inventory, only the Netherlands provides a detailed description of competences for guidance and validation practitioners, "the common set of competences", as shown in Box 3.2.

Box 3.2: Netherlands – The common set of competences for guidance practitioners

According to the Cedefop country report on VNFIL for the Netherlands, the following set of competences is required for guidance practitioners:

- Reviewing: the assessor/adviser is able to provide an appropriate assessment of the competences of the participant, using a number of common competence-based assessment forms, such as the portfolio, the criterion-based interview and practical simulations. They can integrate these different assessment forms within a VPL-procedure. The assessor/adviser is able to standard (competence-profile), to assess the provided evidence of the candidate on the basis of the prevailing assessment-criteria and to assess answers of a participant using the standard.
- Observing: the assessor/adviser is able to observe the participant and to develop an assessment-report based on this observation, in relation to the relevant standard(s).
- Interviewing: the assessor/adviser is able to use interview techniques in an assessment-situation in order to make the competences of the participant visible and to assess them in relation to the relevant standard(s). The assessor/adviser asks questions to investigate the value of the personal experiences (competences, knowledge and skills).
- Providing feedback: the assessor/adviser is able to provide feedback to the participant in a constructive and motivating way and to indicate the results of the summative assessment, customized for the purposes of the participant. The assessor/adviser can explain and substantiate the assessment decisions and indicate at which points the participant is competent. (Note: only if this is part of the procedure however it may also be done by the adviser).
- Written communication: the assessor/adviser is able to write a clear, detailed and structured assessment report. The assessor/adviser describes the competences of the participant that are valid for the used standard. Personal characteristics are only added when applicable.
- Technical competence (depending on a national learning culture, this competence can be added): the assessor/adviser is technically competent and has sufficient experience and qualifications in the appropriate discipline (professional). The assessor can prove that they have sufficient technical skills

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[191] TRANSVAL desk-based research
[192] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019.
[193] TRANSVAL-EU desk-based research, Italy and Poland Country Profiles.

> and is willing to keep abreast of developments in the sector. The technical level of the assessor must be at least as high as that of the participant. The assessor/adviser is familiar with the assessment (VPL) procedure and objectives, the assessment tools and the methodology. The assessor/adviser is familiar with the sector or company standards (job descriptions, qualification profiles) and has knowledge of the labour market and vocational education programmes for the sake of the assessment.

Source: Adapted from the Netherlands country report on VNFIL (2019)[194]

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate the different levels of development in terms of provision of professional development and training opportunities for guidance and validation practitioners, as well as an overview of existing practices across countries, according to the latest Cedefop inventory on VNFIL (2019).

Table 3.2: Level of development, profile definition, qualification requirements, and training and support for practitioners, by country

Category/Level of development	Low	Medium	High
Profile definition	AT, BG, HR, CZ, HU, LT, IE, LU, MT, NO, SE, SK, ES	BE-NL, BE-FR, CY, EE, DK, FI, GR, LV, SI	FR, IS, DE, IT, PT, NL, PL, RO
Qualification requirements	AT, BE-NL, BG, HR, DK, HU, LV, LT, IE, LU, MT, NO, SE, SK, ES	BE-FR, CY, EE, CZ, FI, GR, SI	FR, IS, DE, IT, PT, NL, PL, RO
Training and support for practitioners	BG, HR, CZ, GR, HU, LV, LT, IE, MT, PT, NO, SE, SK	AT, BE-NL, BE-FR, CY, EE, DK, FI, DE, LU, PL, SI, ES	FR, IS, IT, NL

Low: the category is present in at least one area (education and training, labour market, third sector) or there isn't any development in the country.
Medium: the category is present in at least two areas or there is a more advanced level of development in the country.
High: the category is present in all three areas, or each category is almost fully developed in the country

Source: Authors, adapted from Cedefop 2019[195]

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[194] Duvekot, R. 2019, Op cit.
[195] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019

Table 3.3: Examples of practices across countries, guidance practitioners' profiles

Practice	Countries
Guidance practitioners are expected to be well aware of how the validation system works in their national context	FR, IS
Guidance practitioners may be dedicated staff in charge of guidance and support (1). Practitioners can also be teachers, assessors, working life assessors, and tutors (2). In some countries, guidance practitioners are either civil servants or members of professional chambers (3).	FR, NL (1) AT, IS (2) LU (3)
The main role of the practitioner is to assist the individual in the process of identifying competences and provide support through the process of validation. This role is separate from that of the assessor.	IT, IS, NL, PT
Guidance practitioners are advised to participate in a (compulsory) training before taking on this role.	BE-NL, IS, IT, NL, SK
Regular information sessions (e.g., conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.) are offered to practitioners working in vocational guidance, labour market services, and social inclusion.	DK, FR, IS
Practitioners are part of or have access to professional networks in their field	DE
Guidance practitioners have a Masters' level diploma, in some cases specific to the guidance and validation field.	IS

Source: Authors, adapted from Cedefop (2019)[196]

State-of-the-art in quality assurance

Another critical issue emerging in our overview of country policies and practices is related to quality assurance. Although countries have started to develop quality assurance standards and/or frameworks specifically applied to VNFIL, according to the Cedefop Inventory (2018) more attention and more robust and transparent procedures are needed this area. As the synthesis report illustrates, the main trend since 2014 has been an increased development of quality assurance frameworks for validation in at least one education and training subsystem. This progress has been fostered by new legislation (e.g., Iceland, Italy, and Malta) and in some cases, by the improvement of national quality assurance systems. However, for validation services in the labour market and the third sector, findings from the country reports point to a rather different approach: in these two sectors, quality assurance procedures are not necessarily aligned with the existing frameworks in education and training.[197]

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[196] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, 2019
[197] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, Op cit. p. 29-30.

A connected issue is the scarcity of information about the impact of VNFIL within countries, mainly due to the lack of data collection mechanisms or publicly available data from validation providers across all sectors. In previous reporting cycles, Cedefop had stressed the need to improve data collection about validation processes, a persistent concern, especially because there isn't information specific to quality assurance in relation to transversal skills and competences. Information about participation rates, type of qualification or outcomes achieved, users, success rate, etc. is still unavailable in a number of countries (9 countries). The scarcity of information is more marked in the adult education sector; almost three-quarters of the country reports lacked information on the use of validation. Notwithstanding the absence of information, the report highlighted the "upward trend" in the number of validation users with regards to previous report cycles, especially in labour market subsectors.[198]

Some examples from our desk research illustrate the progress made in recent years with regards to quality assurance in validation, although none of them explicitly states an effort towards the inclusion of transversal skills and competences. In **Austria,** the National Validation Strategy (launched in 2017)[199] encompasses the professionalisation of practitioners through training and standardisation of competences required in accordance with the Catalogue of quality criteria. The Catalogue, developed in 2018, uses a bottom-up approach based on analyses of existing validation initiatives.[200] In **FR-Belgium**, the CVDC has developed strong quality procedures relying on the following mechanisms: i) referentials[201] (or profiles) are developed so that these are in line with the official training and certifications organism (SFMQ); ii) referentials are monitored often and feedback from the evaluators is integrated when reviewed; and iii) referentials are elaborated in collaboration with social partners (employers and trade unions).[202] In **Italy,** a decree from 2013 launched the development of a quality assurance framework to regulate all public entitled bodies and ensure the minimum quality standards are met. Moreover, a 2015 decree (National Framework of Regional Qualifications) further regulates this framework with the definition of indicators including the occupational description and requirements for the staff involved in validation procedures. At a regional level, specific quality assurance measures are consistent with funding and legal regulations.[203] And in **Poland,** the recently developed Integrated Qualification System (IQS) introduced in 2015, established and defined the main pillars of this framework, including principles of quality assurance.[204]

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[198] Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, p.33.

[199] Luomi-Messerer, K. 2019, European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update. Thematic report: How digital forms of assessment and self-assessment might place a new challenge and opportunity for assessment methodologies. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_digital.pdf p. 4.

[200] Luomi Messerer, K. 2019, Op cit., p. 38f.

[201] There are 2 types of CVDC "referentials": one is the competence profile for a specific occupation (list of competences required for the job) and the other is the evaluation profile (the practical test and the evaluation grid with indicators).

[202] TRANSVAL desk-based research.

[203] Cedefop 2018, Italy - European inventory on NQF, http://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Italy.pdf

[204] Gmaj, J., Grzeszczak, J., Kwiatosz, K., Pierwieniecka, R. and Walicka, S. 2019, Op cit.

CONCLUSIONS

This overview of country-level policies and practices described the progress made and some of the current challenges with regards to validation of transversal competences across European countries. Although there have been clear advances in some areas, some critical gaps remain regarding policy-level developments. Even if some policy frameworks provide fertile ground, more needs to be done to support recognition and assessment of transversal competences. In most countries with a 'holistic' approach to competences, transversal competences are found in policy frameworks; however, when it comes to validation this is still at a developing stage.

Moreover, throughout the last decade EU policies have increasingly connected guidance and validation as integrated processes in the context of lifelong learning. More needs to be done to encourage the dissemination of information about guidance, tailored to specific audiences, to promote take-up in general.

With regards to guidance and validation practitioner profiles, the roles and competences of practitioners working in guidance and validation tend to overlap in particular when providing information screening, profiling of clients, and skills assessments. A key finding of the desk research is that offering professional development and training opportunities for guidance and validation practitioners is a persistent concern.

A final critical issue is related to quality assurance in VNFIL. Although standards and/or frameworks specifically applied to VNFIL are in development, more attention should be given to this area to guarantee the transparency and effectiveness of the procedure.

CHAPTER 4 – INNOVATIVE TOOLS AND PRACTICES TO SUPPORT GUIDANCE AND VALIDATION OF TRANSVERSAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

This chapter explores selected innovative and good practices relevant to guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences. The aim of the chapter is to highlight cutting-edge approaches which are not currently widely practiced, but which have the potential to support effective practice.

The practices described, which have been contributed by TRANSVAL-EU partners, fall within three broad areas:

- **New approaches to professional learning and development.** Examples of collaborative professional learning through participatory action research (design thinking), as well as in multi-stakeholder networks are featured. In addition, the need for training on potential gender bias in performance reviews and guidance and validation processes is considered.

- **New approaches to assessment.** Examples of assessment to support refugee learners who have low foundation skills in the language of their host country (competence cards), an integrated approach to formative and summative assessment, and examples of digital assessment are included.

- **New approaches to quality assurance.** An example of a flexible model of quality assurance of guidance and validation, with the aim to support improvements at policy and practice levels and support effective, learner-centred provision is featured.

A common theme across these innovative good practices is the importance of empowering both learners and practitioners in the process of guidance and validation**.** For learners, validation processes that support reflection on prior experiences as well as the learner's personal life narrative set the foundation for further learning and development.[205, 206, 207, 208] Dialogue-based approaches to guidance and validation can support deeper reflection, and are also particularly appropriate in identification, documentation and assessment of transversal skills and competences.[209] For practitioners, empowerment means that they have access to opportunities for high-quality and relevant training, quality relationships and collaboration with peers, and supportive managers.[210]

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[205] Alheit, P. 1995, Biographical learning. In P. Alheit (Ed.), The biographical approach in European adult education. ESREA/ Verband Wiener Volksbildung.

[206] Alheit, P. 2018, Biographical learning – Within the new lifelong learning discourse. In K. Illeris (Ed.), Contemporary theories of learning (pp. 116–128). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315147277

[207] Bruner, J. 1990*,* Acts of meaning. Harvard University Press.

[208] Bruner, J. 2002, Making stories: Law, literature, life. Harvard University Press.

[209] Kolb, D. A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C. 2001, Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. Perspectives on Thinking, Learning, and Cognitive Styles, *1*(8), 227–247.

[210] Findings based on research on school education sector. See Johnson, S.M., Kraft, M.A. and Papay, J.P. 2012, How Context Matters in High-Need Schools: The Effects of Teachers' Working Conditions on Their Professional Satisfaction and Their Students' Achievement. Teachers College Record, Vol. 114, No. 10, pp. 1-39

The different contributions included in this chapter also point to gaps in support for transversal skills and competences. Greater coherence and across the four stages of validation, which may involve coordination among different practitioners working in different organisations, can help ensure that each of the four steps of the VNFIL process contribute to learner's personal development and validation of their competences.

New approaches to professional learning and development

While research on the impact of professional learning for guidance and validation practitioners is limited, we know from studies in the school education sector that formal professional development is correlated with a moderate to large impact on student outcomes.[211,212,213] Professional learning communities (PLCs) can be particularly effective when they focus both on research evidence and data gathered through practice as a starting point for joint inquiry, co-construction of shared understanding and artefacts. PLCs provide supportive environments for practitioner collaboration and mutual learning.[214]

The good and innovative practice examples included in this section include a participatory action research approach -- 'design thinking' - used by the Education Research Institute (IBE) in Poland (a TRANSVAL-EU project partner) to tailor guidance and validation practitioner training, and multi-stakeholder networks, which also provide opportunities for collaborative learning and development.

Participatory action research: A design thinking approach to tailoring training

Training offers on validation of transversal skills and competences can and should be developed in cooperation with practitioners, in the spirit of participatory action research. With a Design Thinking, approach (one type of participatory action research), scholars collaborate with community stakeholders at all stages of the research process with the aim of producing results that will be usable in the community and by scientists. In this way, the participants form a professional learning community.

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[211] Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. and Fung, I. 2007, Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES). Wellington. New Zealand Ministry of Education.

[212] Hattie, J. 2009, Visible Learning. A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement. London. Routledge.

[213] Yoon, K.S. et al. 2007, Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement, Issues & Answers Report, Vol. 33, pp. 1-62, online at https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED498548. Accessed March 27, 2017

[214] Donner, A., Mandzuk, D. and Clifton, R.A. 2008, Stages of Collaboration and the Realities of Professional Learning Communities, Teaching and Teacher Education, Vol. 24, pp. 564–574.

Thompson, S.C., Gregg, L. and Niska, J.M. 2004, Professional Learning Communities, Leadership, and Student Learning: Research in Middle Level Education Online, Vol. 28, pp. 1–15. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ807417.pdf

There are some basic principles that are common to this perspective and at the same time distinguish it from other types of research. Firstly, it places the emphasis on the active involvement of participants, their empowerment in the research process, and on valuing local knowledge and experiences in generating interpretations of social reality. The researcher becomes a facilitator or a researcher who is also a participant in given activities. The respondents on the other hand are also participants in these activities, but also co-researchers. Secondly, the action itself is also important. The studied community is not only a provider of data that the researcher methods, but a co-researcher and beneficiary of the generated knowledge and solutions.[215] In addition, participatory action research requires that people objectify their own experiences, as well as put the practices, ideas, and assumptions about institutions to the test. It also involves record-keeping and making critical analysis.[216] Participatory action research does not reject a priori any research methods or techniques, but appropriate data collection methods are established jointly by the researcher and the participants.

Depending on the specificity of the problem, the needs of the studied communities and the possibilities offered by the research context, participatory action research often uses focus groups, participant observation and field notes, interviews, diary and personal logs, questionnaires, and surveys. More innovative formats are also used, related to visual or performative methods and techniques, such as photovoice, drama, storytelling, community art, research walks, participatory creation of mental maps and community diagrams.[217]

As described in Box 4.1, design thinking processes in and of themselves draw on researchers' and practitioners' transversal skills and competences, including communication, creativity, problem-solving, and so on.

Box 4.1: The Design Thinking approach

Design Thinking was developed at the Stanford University in California as aimed at facilitating the transfer of creative and innovative ideas to the business environment of the Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. Commercial use of Design Thinking was initiated by IDEO, which used it as part of its strategic and business consulting process offered to companies. Today, Design Thinking is used in various sectors, including education and civic participation.

Source: Helman and Rosienkiewicz, 2016, p. 69[218]

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[215] Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, M. 2019, Badania partycypacyjne w działaniu (PAR), No. 46, pp. 91-101. https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/rrpr/article/view/23060]

[216] McDonald, C. 2012, Understanding participatory action research: A qualitative research methodology option, The Canadian Journal of Action Research, Volume 13, Issue 2, pp. 34-50. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274063607_Understanding_participatory_action_research_A_qualitative_research_methodology_option

[217] Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, 2019, Op cit.

[218] Helman, J., Rosienkiewicz, M. (2016), 'Design Thinking jako koncepcja pobudzania innowacji' in Knosal, Z. (ed.) Innowacje w Zarządzaniu i Inżynierii Produkcji. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Polskiego Towarzystwa Zarządzania Produkcją, pp.62-72.

At its core, design thinking is a structured approach to creating new products and services based on a deep understanding of the problems and the users' needs.

It is based on the following principles:

● User focus - in-depth understanding of his conscious and unconscious needs;
● Creative collaboration - looking at the problem from many perspectives, looking for new solutions, going beyond the usual patterns;
● Experimenting and testing hypotheses - building prototypes and gathering frequent feedback from users.

The process consists of five phases which support the guidance of project development from problem identification to solution search and development, that is empathizing, problem definition, generating ideas, building prototypes and testing (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Five phases of the design thinking approach
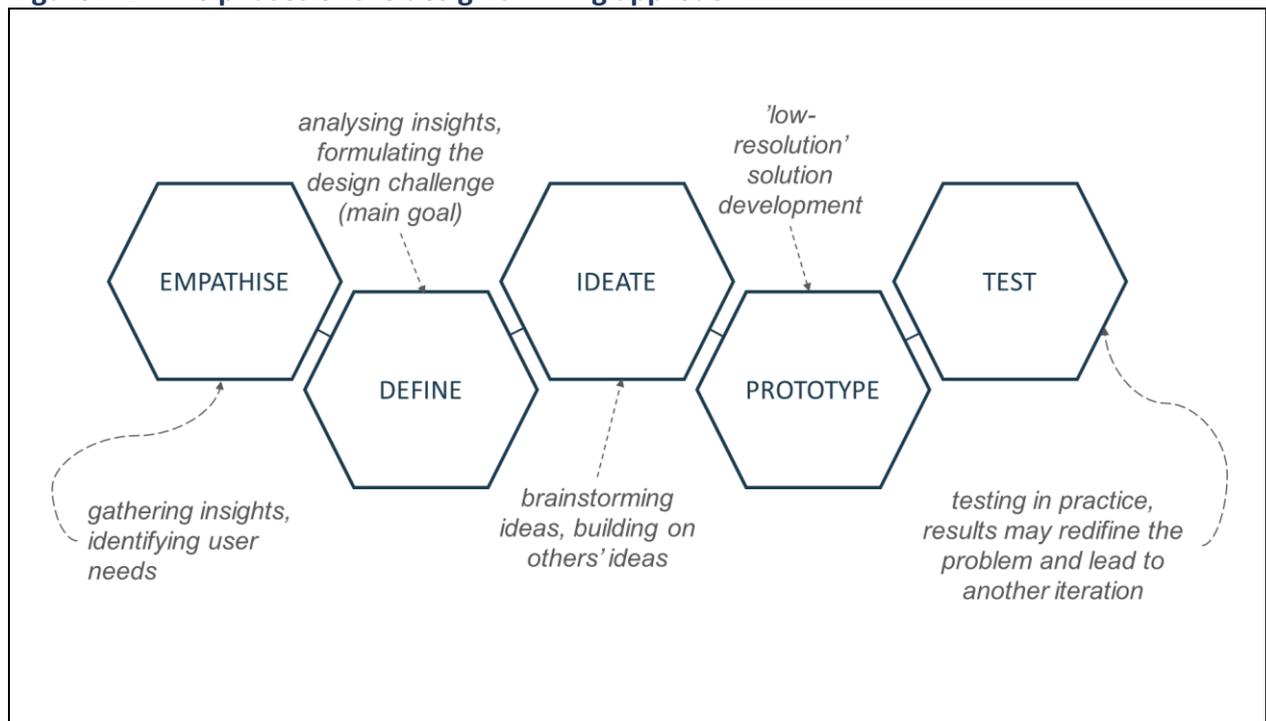
Source: Authors (IBE)

1) **Empathise** - This stage is used to learn more about the recipients for whom a given product or service is designed. The necessary step to achieve this is identifying who the user is and recognising what matters to that person, including "hidden motivations". Another important aspect to be taken into account is the market or technological conditions of the project.

2) **Define** - At this stage, the information collected during the empathising phase is synthesized to determine what the actual problem facing the developers consists of.

3) **Ideate -** This stage is aimed at generating as many creative ideas and potential solutions to the problem defined at the previous stage as possible. This requires not only substantive knowledge, but most of all creativity, courage in proposing new, out-of-the-box solutions, as well as refraining from assessing and criticising the ideas generated by other team members.

4) **Prototype -** At this stage, a physical prototype is created to show to others to quickly gather opinions on a given solution.

5) **Test** - The last step is to present the prototype of the solution to the original user to obtain an opinion on the generated product. At this stage, the design is tested in the environment in which the product will be used.

Good practice example

A design thinking approach can be used to develop training offers and support learning communities. In 2015, the Educational Research Institute (IBE) and the Regional Labour Office in Kraków, Poland developed a structured method of conducting a skills audit with adult learners, called simply the Skills Audit Method (*Metoda Bilansu Kompetencji*, MBK). Its aim was to enable vocational guidance counsellors to support their clients in identifying and organising competences, understood as "knowledge, skills and social competences", acquired throughout their lives, and to make plans based on this work. MBK is still being used by the Regional Labour Office in Kraków in different regional projects dedicated to supporting lifelong learning.[219]

In 2019-2020, IBE took on the task to modernise, develop further and possibly expand MBK to allow for its use in many different contexts, e.g. schools, higher education, HR departments, validation of non-formal and informal learning. The aim was threefold:

1) to verify if the method could be implemented outside of a labour office
2) to include input from various potential users
3) to develop the final version of MBK as tailored to their needs of as many target groups as possible

Therefore, a participatory action research that included elements of the design thinking approach was adopted. In September and October 2019, four 2-day workshops were organised with 63 counsellors from all over Poland, working in:

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[219] Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 2018, Skills audits. Tools to identify talent: final report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

- labour offices
- schools
- higher education institutions
- human resource departments
- commercial coaching services

Each workshop was facilitated by two experts in design thinking. The workshop facilitators and participants focused mainly on:

- identifying potential user groups: 16 personas representing different clients, from teenagers to 60+ learners
- identifying barriers to and benefits of using MBK for each person
- developing user pathways for each of them

As a result, workshop participants, expanded upon the skills audit process by proposing three different pathways and complementary informational materials. In addition, they developed a prototype of an internet-based tool which could be used in the process.

In the testing phase, which took place from October 2019 to February 2020, 12 counsellors were asked to conduct skills audits with 2 clients each (24 in total) using new materials and a digital prototype, to test the proposed pathways and materials. This phase was overseen by researchers who were gathering data via questionnaires and individual in-depth interviews (IDI's) with the participants, and who prepared conclusions. This phase concluded with a workshop with participating guidance counsellors and a report that included possible elements to be amended in the prototype.

Following the testing phase, IBE's team prepared a new version of MBK that allowed for more flexibility, and which therefore could be used in different contexts and with various end-users. The idea of many different pathways was abandoned as it proved too cumbersome for the guidance practitioners and users alike, in favour of a more overarching format. An existing digital tool for creating online portfolios, *My Portfolio*, was adapted to MBK to satisfy the main need of the participants identified during the workshops - digitising the results of the cooperation between the guidance practitioners and their clients. All the materials as well as the description of the MBK are available on a website dedicated to the project.[220]

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[220] Skills Audit Method, https://mbk.ibe.edu.pl/. The website is in Polish only, but the guidebook covering the Skills Audit Method Process is available in English here: https://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody/dobrepraktyki/index.php/en/praktyka/29

Multi-stakeholder cooperation and learning through international projects

Multi-stakeholder initiatives within and across European countries support innovation and development of new tools and approaches to guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences. These initiatives support professional learning among the participants. They also allow design and piloting of new approaches and tools. Typically, they involve social partners, the third sector, employment services, education and training institutions, and governmental bodies. Often these projects receive European funds (e.g. Erasmus+ programme, European Social Fund, etc.) to implement policy experimentations that aim to pilot new tools and approaches to validation of transversal skills and competences.

A range of good practice examples identified by TRANSVAL-EU partners during the desk research phase of the study are described in Box 4.2.

Box 4.2: Multi-stakeholder partnerships to support development of new tools and approaches, and professional learning

TRANSVAL-EU partners identified a number of national and international multi-stakeholder initiatives to support guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences. They include:

- **Career Direction, Krakow (Poland)**. Implemented since 2016, the project "Career Direction" ("Kierunek Kariera")[221] uses the skills audit method as the main validation tool. The project aims at identifying the various competences that a candidate can develop according to his/her needs and goals, potentially including transversal competences in the process such as language and digital skills. Partners included organisations from business, labour market, and higher education; the Educational Research Institute (IBE); and the Regional Labour Office in Krakow, and it's financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

- **CLAN (Collaborative Learning Action Networks)**. Implemented in France, Spain, and the UK[222] and focused on the use of technological tools, this Erasmus+ project developed an app and a web platform containing a 'serious game' of cards through which adults with low skill levels could identify competences acquired through informal learning. The tool offers support to learners, under the supervision of a trainer, to select a past activity, project, work experience, voluntary experience, etc. and then identify from a list of 108 competences the ones they think fit best their experience. The list of competences was elaborated based on ESCO and aligned to the Europass CV.[223]

- **KEY4 (Key competences and solution for the effectiveness of internships).**[224] Focusing on testing didactic devices and solutions to enhance transparency in the development, learning, assessment and recognition of professional and key competences, this Erasmus+ project developed a Key Competences Framework, including transversal skills and competences such as: 1) communication, 2) work in a team structure, 3) make decisions and solve problems, and 4) plan, organise and prioritise work. The Framework also defines the competences in terms of content, resources,

[221] Kierunek Kariera, https://kierunek.pociagdokariery.pl/

[222] REBELED, https://rebeled.org/

[223] TRANSVAL desk-based research

[224] Erasmus, Key 4, http://www.key4erasmusplus.eu

context, indicators, and evidence[225] and it was created to pilot the acquisition of the identified four key competences. Partners included IF Italia Forma; Iter (lead partner); Confartigianato Lombardy, Confcommercio Umbria, E.L.F.I, Fidia, Provincia di Perugia, Sataedu (FI), 3s (AT), ECAP (CH).

1. **InnoVal.[226]** This Erasmus+ project aimed to address the need to offer valid and reliable assessment methods that allow all learners to have a chance at validation, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups (i.e., migrants, long-term unemployed, and those who have had an adverse experience with formal education including with school-based assessments). As part of this project, a training programme and a Toolbox displaying case studies from Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, and Portugal illustrate the different approaches to guidance and validation targeting disadvantaged groups, and in some cases, including transversal competences. Partners included ANESPO (PT); Dafni Kek (GR); EIESP (FR); EUCEN (BE); LLLP (BE); and UCLL (BE).

Gender implications in guidance and validation processes

Guidance and validation practitioners need transversal skills and competences to support gender equality. Better training on the role of gender bias in assessment of candidates' work experiences and profiles, and better frameworks and tools are needed.

Research has shown that performance assessments - whether in the workplace or as part of a VNFIL process - are highly influenced by gender stereotypes. For example, Cecchi-Dimeglio found that annual workplace evaluations are often based on subjective methods; similar performances may receive positive or negative feedback depending on the employee's gender (Cecchi-Dimeglio, 2017).[227] Women themselves tend to set (or have set for them) fewer challenging objectives and to receive less feedback on their performance than men. This could affect the extent to which training needs are identified during appraisal (Strebler et al., 1997).[228]

Career counselling processes need to be rethought and differentiated tools and approaches that are appropriate for women's needs provided (Bimrose et al., 2014).[229] Strebler and colleagues (1997) found that gender, age, and ethnicity shape labour market experiences and learning pathways. Alternative, holistic approaches are more aligned with women's needs. Strebler and colleagues invited women to share stories of their most significant transition was particularly effective. They noted that:

> …*women disclosed objective stories of labour market discrimination brought about by labour laws, such as those related to employment contracts and pay, as well as subjective stories of their feelings and reactions to their experiences. Additionally, the women's stories, [of]*

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[225] Various proofs that the person can collect to demonstrate their own acting in a competent manner while solving specific tasks.

[226] Innoval, http://inno-val.eu/

[227] Paola Cecchi-Dimeglio, How Gender Bias Corrupts Performance Reviews, and What to Do About It, - Harvard Business Review, April 12, 2017, https://hbr.org/2017/04/how-gender-bias-corrupts-performance-reviews-and-what-to-do-about-it

[228] M. Strebler, M. Thompson and P. Heron, Skills, Competencies and Gender: Issues for pay and training, Institute for Employment Studies, 1997.

[229] Jenny Bimrose, Mark Watson, Mary McMahon, Simone Haasler, Massimo Tomassini, Pamela A. Suzanne, The problem with women? Challenges posed by gender for career guidance practice, International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance (2014) 14:77–88 DOI 10.1007/s10775-013-9256-9

sometimes [being] marginalised or silenced, illustrate the need for theory that values their contextual, lived experiences and accommodates subjectivity.

Strebler and colleagues also found that self- assessment can be useful. Even though women tend to undervalue their skills more often than men, they also tend to be more accurate in their assessments. They also found that guidance and validation practitioners' use of multiple and varied assessment tools may also reduce the impact of gender bias and stereotypes.[230]

Some organisations are concerned that their competence frameworks and the behaviours attached to their competence descriptors may not apply equally to both genders. Isaacs (1997) has noted that the language used to describe different dimensions of competence may reinforce stereotypes of performance and behaviour.[231]

These different research findings imply the ongoing need to raise awareness on how gender bias may affect the whole process of competence assessment and to develop appropriate training for career guidance and validation practitioners.

Good practice example

The European Get Up[232] project (funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) programme) developed the European Minimum Standard of Competences on Gender Equality for professionals to support learners in transition phases. It describes the importance of attitudes and sensitivity, language use and attentiveness to crucial aspects, depending on the tasks and on the beneficiaries. Thus, so far, the Italian National Repertoire of Labour and Qualifications on which this work is based, considers gender issues that professionals face during they work by introducing the words "making sure of", which clearly underlines that the indicators used to gauge competences levels refer to details on *how* specific activities are executed, and to value differences and strengths between genders. The indicators listed in the "making sure of" section add a qualitative descriptor to competences described in the Italian National Repertoire of Labour and Qualifications for targeted professions. The National Agency in charge of its updating has also started to introduce more gender-sensitive language in the sample "cases forms" as well, which detail effective performance of specific tasks.[233]

While, as highlighted above, the research shows that gender significantly affects pathways and labour market opportunities, more research and opportunities to develop innovative tools and practices are needed on the overall topic of gender equality and career guidance and validation. Many implications are still not well understood or appropriately addressed.

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[230] M. Strebler, M. Thompson and P. Heron, Skills, Competencies and Gender: Issues for pay and training, Institute for Employment Studies, 1997.

[231] Isaacs m p Sex role stereotyping and the evaluation of the performance of women: changing trends, 1981, Psychology of Women Quarterly, Vol.6, pp. 187-195

[232] http://www.getupproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/EMSC_rev02_EN_2017-09-26.pdf

[233] https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/dettaglio_ada.php?id_ada=583&id_sequenza=180&id_processo=63

Good practice example

The "European Minimum Standard of Competencies on Gender Equality" was introduced through the Gender Equality Training to overcome Unfair discrimination Practices (GETUP) in education and labour market funded by Erasmus+.[234]

The project aimed included support awareness of gender equality at all points in the guidance processes, to support effective relationships with stakeholders as well as with dedicated networks and services and ensure effective information management and documentation. The standards developed through the project outlined the "knowledge skills and behaviours required to combat gender stereotypes and discrimination in education, training and at the workplace" as way to support up-to-date training and support equality of treatment for all.

In addition, the project highlighted the need to:

- track gender discrimination in the labour market by Identifying, researching and providing information based on the latest statistical data that highlight gender differences in the access to the labour market, as well as to education and training opportunities
- plan individual and / or group meetings in accordance with the needs of both men and women (e.g. timing, location and other organisational aspects)
- adopt non-discriminatory language regarding gender, sex, family situation, gender stereotypes
- refer to positions and professions using both masculine and feminine forms, in particular in languages such as Spanish, Polish, French or Italian which are gender sensitive
- not "select" the information provided based on preconceptions and gender stereotypes related to the composition of the user group
- encourage the recruitment of women in positions and sectors in which they are underrepresented
- provide information and data disaggregated by gender.

New approaches to assessment

Throughout this report, the importance of supporting more holistic approaches to guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences has been emphasised. Within the VNFIL process, approaches to formative assessment in the identification and documentation phases, and summative assessment in the formal assessment and certification phases may either support or undermine the way in which transversal skills and competences are made visible and valued.

Assessment tools and approaches that allow for non-standardised responses – and that can be used at both formative (identification and documentation) and summative stages (formal assessment and

234 Liuti, S., Campanella T., Palazzetti C. (2015). European Minimum Standard of Competencies on Gender Equality, http://www.getupproject.eu/outputs/, http://www.getupproject.eu

certification) – are needed. Tools for learner self- and peer-assessment can be useful. In addition, the role of guidance and validation practitioners in supporting learners to reflect on past experiences, build their efficacy and consider their motivations (and that they do not merely use a tick box approach to identifying transversal skills and competences) – should be supported.

Guidance and validation practitioners need training and support the use of approaches and tools that are fit for their specific purposes, and to be sure they have a good understanding of the overall VNFIL system. In addition, training can support practitioners to develop transversal skills and competences related to empathy, communication, customer orientation, supporting, advising, instructing, motivating and leading others (as outlined in ESCO's mapping of transversal skills and competences)[235].

Greater coordination between guidance and validation practitioners is needed to ensure coherence across the different phases.[236] In some cases, learners may be confronted with a very different approach in the formal assessment of their competences, particularly if standardised assessments are required.[237] However, if combined with portfolios (including digital portfolios), a more complete picture of the learners' competences, including transversal skills and competences, can be developed, and the stress associated with a single high-stakes assessment lowered. Communication among different practitioners can ensure that the learner's full dossier is taken into account. Digital assessments which may be easily transferred across organisations and users may also support improved communication.

The good practice examples below highlight selected assessment tools and processes to support learners in the different VNFIL phases. A first brief example describes the use of competence cards to support refugee learners to identify transversal (and other) skills and competences. A second example describes a model for guidance and validation practitioners to coordinate their work, including formative and summative assessments. Innovative digital assessments are then explored at some length.

Good practice examples

A first good practice example is the **Guidance Toolbox**, developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung (2015)[238] to support labour market integration of refugees who do not yet speak the language of their new country of residence (although it has been translated into 5 other languages in addition to German). The Toolbox includes Competence Cards with images portraying individuals engaged in a variety of

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[235] ESCO; https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/s

[236] Cedefop 2019, Coordinating guidance and validation. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper No 75. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/801290

[237] In spite of their acknowledged shortcomings in relation to assessment of competences in VNFIL processes, standardised assessments are still frequently required because they are more reliable (i.e., the consistency and stability of test results across learners and over time)

[238] Noack, M. 2015, A Toolbox for Guidance: Identifying Competences in Migrants and Refugees. Competences for Germany. Brussels. Accessed 2 December. https://pdfslide.net/documents/a-toolbox-for-guidance-identifying-competences-in-migrants-and-refugees-dr.html

activities where they would be required to use different competences. There are 46 competences cards, with 10 portraying social or interpersonal situations (e.g. teamwork, leadership), 18 focused on personal competences or qualities, 18 focused on specific professional and personal competences (e.g. digital competences, crafts, languages, personal interests such as music, theatre, and so on).[239]

A second good practice example is the **LEVER UP model** (Valuing informal learning and transversal competences acquired through volunteering to increase employability, social responsibility and mobility – LEVER UP")[240], developed through an Erasmus+ project. LEVER UP follows each of the four phases of the VNFIL process**.** Fifteen different competences are identified - including teamwork, communication, problem solving, adaptability, critical thinking, creativity and taking initiative. Each competence is described in terms of learning outcomes.

As shown in Figure 4.2, the process defines the main steps for guiding the learners through the validation process, firstly raising self-awareness, then identifying and documenting their own competences, and finally assessing and certifying them. The LEVER UP model also sets out standards that are coherent with the major reference frameworks.[241] Criteria to assess achievement of standards in real-life contexts are included. The model also defines a process for guiding the learner through the validation process and offers a full set of resources and tools to support steps towards validation.

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[239] EUCIS LLL Platform 2015, Op cit.
[240] Lever Up Training, http://www.leverproject.eu/about/project/
[241] These include the EQF, the EU frameworks supporting key competences for lifelong learning, as well as the ECVET and EUROPASS frameworks supporting learner mobility.

Figure 4.2: LEVER UP Model
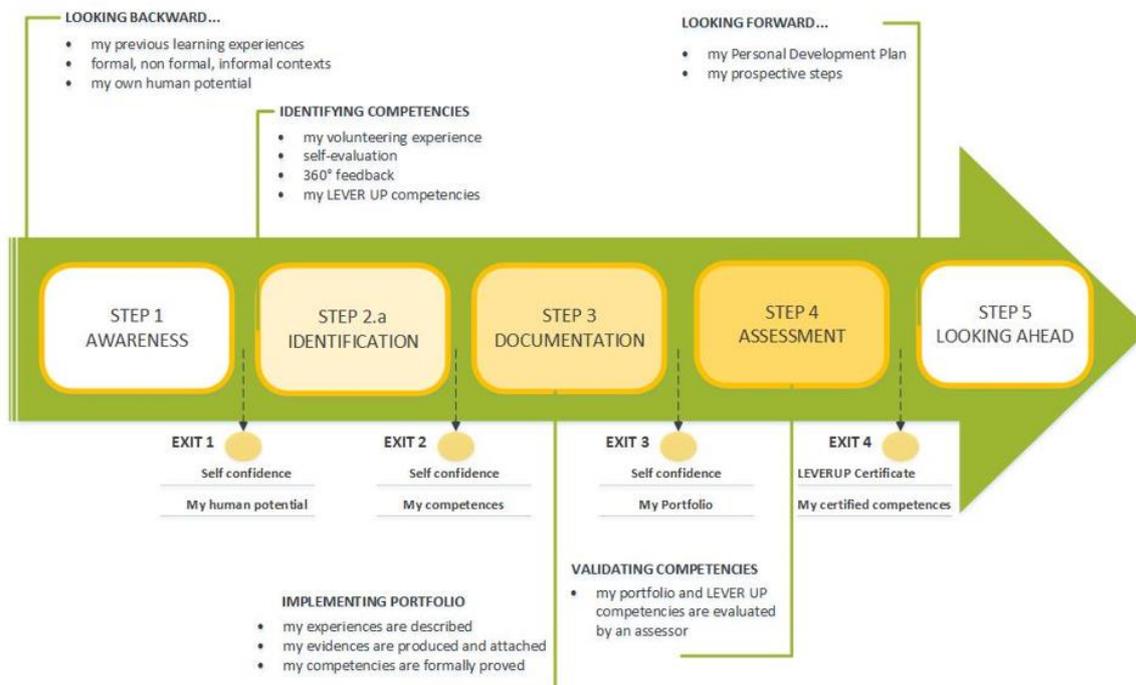
Figure 2: LEVER UP process

Source: Fondazione Politecnico di Milano, et al.[242]

LEVER UP also developed specialist training for guidance practitioners as well as for assessors, tutors and trainers who are involved in the validation process of transversal skills and competences.[243] A specialist certification may be awarded to practitioners. Practitioners who have participated in the training may earn certification in the form of an Open Badges.

The model and resources are provided on a digital platform which may be adapted to needs in different countries and contexts and introduces a quality mechanism to ensure that the awareness and assessment tools are used effectively.

Digital tools to support validation of transversal competences

There is evidence of increased use of digital tools to support validation procedures and career guidance services, which has already begun before the Covid-19 pandemic.[244] [245] Digital tools can provide easy, usually free (for users) and unlimited access to services for a large number of users in a relatively short

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[242] Fondazione Politecnico di Milano et al. http://www.leverproject.eu/lever-model/process/
[243] LEVER UP Specialist Training, https://youtu.be/Uewp_93mUKk or http://www.leverproject.eu/e-learning/
[244] Kettunen, J., and Sampson, J.P. 2019, Challenges in implementing ICT in career services: perspectives from career development experts. International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance 19, no. 1, pp 1-18.
[245] Luomi-Messerer, K. 2019, Op cit.

time. These tools also enable the use of more types of materials for documenting competences gained through experience (such as scans or photos of certificates, audio/video files of work done).

Of the 48 innovative/good cases identified by TRANSVAL-EU partners (based on country reports and EU-level research), 22 use digital tools to support the validation of transversal competences (in addition to other competences). While most of them support the **identification** and **documentation** stages, these tools are rarely used for summative assessment (except for self-assessment) in a validation context. Fahrenbach and Luomi-Messerer (2021)[246] point out that ICT is used mainly to provide information on validation practices and arrangements, store qualification registers online and identify and document acquired learning outcomes.[247]

Current trends in using digital tools for validation of transversal competences

Based on secondary research carried out in the state-of-the-art TRANSVAL-EU project stage, the following may be concluded:

o The identified practices using digital tools to support the validation process cover a wide range of different **target groups**: while some are rather universally targeted (to all citizens), others are very specific, e.g. low-skilled and/or educated adults, migrants and refugees, young people, volunteers, service or education providers (including teachers, trainers and assessors).

o In terms of types of **transversal competences**, the practices typically focus on personal and/or social competences and/or selected key competences (such as digital competences, literacy, numeracy). It should be noted that the terminology is not very consistently used in the different practices, i.e. different terminology may be used to refer to the same competences in the different examples.

o The **methods and the types of tools** used vary according to the context and purpose of their application, as well as the specificities of the target group. In some cases, additional support measures are needed (e.g. translation of self-assessment questionnaires for migrants). The use of digital tools to support validation, in general, mostly takes place at the identification and documentation stages and very rarely at the assessment stage (except for self-assessment). In relation to transversal competences this may be due to difficulties in finding a reliable digital tool to assess transversal competences.

o For specific target groups, a **close cooperation** between guidance and validation practitioners and validation candidates is particularly needed during the identification phase. This may also

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[246] Fahrenbach, F. and Luomi-Messerer, K. 2021, Adopting a socio-technical perspective to rethink the use of ICT in VNFIL. European Journal of Training and development. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJTD-06-2020-0097/full/html

[247] This finding is based on qualitative content analysis of 43 country reports of the 'European inventory on validation' published by Cedefop in 2019.

include a process of trust-building and motivational work resulting in empowerment and increased self-awareness (in terms of transversal competences) of validation candidates.

o In some **national contexts,** the wider acceptance of digital tools for validation and especially assessment (of transversal competences) might require more time. For instance, in countries where validation procedures have been recently introduced: 'a particular challenge of digital forms of assessment and self-assessment is the question of whether they are trusted by third parties (e.g. employers and education and training institutions). For example, the accuracy of results that are not verified or approved by an external assessor might be doubted or the value of approaches that are not based on specific standards or do not include occupation- or job-specific competences in a sufficient way might be scrutinized.'[248]

o There are some indications that the current **Covid-19** pandemic has placed a greater emphasis on digital-based approaches to learning and teaching, which may be transferred to the validation context in the coming years, which itself is also seeing further digitisation moves.

An understandable (for users) terminology for transversal competences is crucial for the further development of digital tools for validation. Difficult-to-understand names of occupations and competences are a major challenge for users. In addition, as there is no specific focus on transversal competences in the identified practices (i.e. transversal competences are always combined with occupational ones), it would be beneficial to investigate which other digital tools used for validating occupational competences can be easily transferred into the context of validating transversal competences.

Good practice examples

The good practice examples included below have been selected to show a variety of practices in terms of target groups, types of transversal competences covered, and types of digital tools used. They include an app which learners may use to identify competences and match them to different occupational profiles, an online platform to support guidance and validation processes for migrant learners, and a digital portfolio**.**

Du kannst was! (You have skills), Austria

'Du kannst was!' supports people to acquire formal qualifications belonging to the qualification type 'Apprenticeship certificate'. The initiative covers a number of apprenticeship occupations that have a

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[248] Luomi-Messerer 2019, Op cit. p. 34

high proportion of unskilled workers in a given region.[249] The main target group of the initiative are low-qualified adults with substantial work experience (related to a specific apprenticeship occupation).

Since September 2021, 'Du kannst was!' has used SkillLab[250] - an app for collecting occupational as well as transversal competences based on the ESCO framework.[251] The app is subject to a user license fee of €30 for each person. SkillLab works in two ways:

1. SkillLab app provides support in professional orientation, i.e. in identifying the target or desired occupation. For instance, learning experiences (from jobs, training, other activities) can be documented in a CV-like form and matched with competences.

2. SkillLab app also allows users to identify a target/desired occupation. The procedure for documenting learning experiences is the same as described above. However, users receive feedback related to the desired occupation: whether they already have sufficient skills for it and which skills are still missing. This complements the initial oral interview conducted in the framework of 'Du kannst was!'. Although the initiative focuses primarily on the recording of occupational competences, SkillLab could contribute to a more systematic recording of transversal competences as it enables an assessment of these competences (from an administrator's point of view) and makes them visible.

One advantage of the tool is that it draws on around 453 transversal competences (of a total of 13.485 competences) defined in ESCO[252]. In a personal (career counselling) consultation it would not be possible to 'think along' so many competences. Furthermore, SkillLab shows very clearly where users stand with their own competences in relation to certain professions or other experiences, and possible alternatives are also shown directly.[253]

In addition, 'Du kannst was!' is currently testing forms for the digitisation of the portfolio documents.[254] Through online questionnaires (with single-choice answers) participants will be able to self-assess their competences; they will also be given the opportunity to describe in their own words where and how a competence was acquired. The e-portfolio will be based on the legally prescribed job profiles, which - as mentioned above - primarily describe professional skills. Although the portfolios will not systematically ask about transversal competences, this feature can be added in the future.[255]

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[249] The occupations targeted in this project depend on the regional structure of the economy and regional demand for upskilling, for example, in the region of Salzburg such as: retail, wholesale, clerk, metal working, cook, waiter/waitress, logistic, professional driver https://sbg.arbeiterkammer.at/dukannstwas

[250] Skill Lab, https://skilllab.io/en-us

[251] ESCO, https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/skill

[252] ESCO, https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/howtouse/21da6a9a-02d1-4533-8057-dea0a824a17a (also includes cross-sectoral skills)

[253] Based on an input by the project management of the initiative 'Du kannst was', Salzburg.

[254] The e-portfolio hasn't been already used in practice; there are also data protection issues that still need to be clarified.

[255] Based on an input of the project management of the initiative 'Du kannst was', Salzburg.

NADINE project – innovative skills assessment approaches (Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom)

The NADINE project (2018-2021) is a Horizon 2020 innovation project[256], which aimed to develop a digital platform using open data to gain a better understanding of migrant realities and the challenges associated with their integration (in particular, access to employment). On the one hand, the platform allows public authorities and guidance professionals to offer a personalised service to migrants, and on the other hand, it assists migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in discovering and assessing their hard and soft skills by employing Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies.[257] Transversal skills and competences can potentially be included in the identification stage of a validation process. These different tools need to be complemented by dialogue-based approaches in order to effectively support the project's target group.

The platform works as follows:

- It prompts migrants and refugees to create an e-portfolio guiding them step-by-step through a wizard or videos to fill in their skills and competences. The e-portfolio showcases skills obtained via work and extra-occupational experiences. Users can upload evidence, such as photos and videos, to testify the experience done;

- Participants can also answer a psychometric self-assessment questionnaire, freely available on the project platform in English, French, Spanish, Greek, Farsi and Arabic. It evaluates soft and hard skills with soft skills including interpersonal skills (social interaction, team working, intercultural competence), organisational skills (work efficiency, time management, independent work), personal skills (adaptability, reliability, willingness to learn) and entrepreneurial skills (creativity, managerial skills, initiative, risk tolerance, leadership). To use the questionnaire, registration is required, and the self-assessment takes about an hour.

- A set of 'serious games' ('Tetris' and '2048') were also used to calculate, with a machine learning algorithm, the similarity of the scores from the self-assessment questionnaires with the way users play the two games. This led to an innovative skills assessment process that is

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[256] The consortium is comprised of 13 partners from France, Spain, the UK, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg and Greece, Nadine Project: https://nadine-project.eu/

[257] The platform has multiple target groups, but here, we will focus on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The target groups include: a) refugees which are seeking for asylum, b) migrants who are seeking a better life, c) vulnerable migrants (e.g. suffering diseases), d) host authorities which are trying to improve their offerings and facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees, e) non-governmental organisations and f) organisations that consider migrants as receivers or target groups of their services.

now able to determine a person's overall skills profile based on just fifteen minutes of playing the two games and without answering self- assessment questionnaires.

- Once the skills assessment is completed, users receive recommendations for personalised training measures (specific to the project partner countries).

Moje Portfolio online tool (My Portfolio), Poland

As validation of non-formal and informal learning is a fairly new concept in Poland, introduced in 2015 with the Integrated Qualification System[258], implementing non-traditional or less widespread validation methods such as the portfolio method has proved challenging.

My Portfolio is a free of charge web application for creating digital portfolios to evidence one's competences and achievements. It applies to all citizens, especially adult learners and potentially may be used for all validation stages covering also transversal competences, i.e. the portfolio enables the collection of everything that proves a person's competences (scans or photos of certificates or badges, photos of works made) and the alignment of this evidence to competences.[259] The key aim of the tool is to promote the portfolio method by facilitating its use for various awarding bodies – validation providers within the 'Integrated Qualification System'. My Portfolio is targeted at guidance counsellors; it also tries to bridge the gap between diagnosing competences within one system (in public employment services) and their assessment within another awarding bodies.[260]

My Portfolio can be used amongst others in the following scenarios:

- **Self-assessment** using the questionnaire, systematically adding to the person's digital portfolio and creating dedicated folders for job-seeking, retraining, planning a career or educational path, acquiring qualifications, gaining access to learning programmes in higher education or general self-development;

- **Assisted identification, documentation** in collaboration with a guidance counsellor as part of a counselling process;

- **Summative assessment** in collaboration with an assessor as part of acquiring qualifications or gaining access to learning programmes in higher education;

- **Continuous identification**, **documentation** and **assessment** of the employees' competences as part of recruitment and human resources management.

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[258] Gmaj, I., Grzeszczak, J., Kwiatosz, K., Pierwieniecka, R., Walicka, S. 2019, The validation of non-formal and informal learning in Poland. Implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych.
[259] MOJE, https://mojeportfolio.ibe.edu.pl/about-moje-portfolio
[260] Gmaj et al., Ibid.

New approaches to quality assurance

Effective quality assurance processes can support improvement at system and provider levels. Regular monitoring of key indicators on guidance and validation – including of transversal skills and competences – can provide valuable data on implementation of policies and on their impact. Quality assurance at the provider level is important for tracking implementation of organisational priorities and identifying areas for further improvement.

Nordic quality model for VPL

The Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) supports cooperation and peer learning across the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). While adult learning and validation systems are different in each country, network participants learn from their peers' experiences, and support each other's development. Network members also identify common interests and areas where countries may cooperate.

Quality assurance to support improvement has been an important area of work for the NVL network. Indeed, transparent quality assurance supports trust in the quality of VPL provision. Effective quality assurance requires the consistent support and commitment of practitioners, providers and policy makers in the VPL system.[261]

During 2012-2013 the NVL initiated a project to develop joint quality Nordic model. The model was piloted in all countries. During 2016-2018 the usefulness of the Nordic Quality Model for validation as a comprehensive structure for developing the validation system in vocational education and training was piloted and adapted based on experiences from a joint research project in Denmark, Finland and Sweden.[262] It is now being implemented across the partner countries.

The Nordic countries have a lasting tradition of funding and supporting adult learning, and validation of prior learning in this context is an important link to further development and a motivating factor. The aim of guidance and validation process is to help the individual to make their competences visible, and to reach their full potential as employees as well as active, open-minded and responsible citizens. Competences are defined in terms of learning outcomes and take into account the labour market needs[263] as well as support learners' personal and social development.

[261] NVL, Policy Brief on Validation of Prior Learning in the Nordic Region, https://nvl.org/Content/Policy-Brief-on-Validation-of-Prior-Learning-in-the-Nordic-Region

[262] NVL, Quality in Validation of Prior Learning, https://nvl.org/Content/Quality-in-Validation-of-Prior-Learning

[263] NVL 2015, Validation and the value of competences – Road Map 2018. https://nvl.org/Content/Validation-and-the-value-of-competences-Road-Map-2018

As shown in Figure 4.3, the individual is at the centre of VPL processes. The model sets out eight quality factors: information, preconditions, documentation, coordination, guidance, mapping, assessment, and follow-up.[264]

Figure 4.3
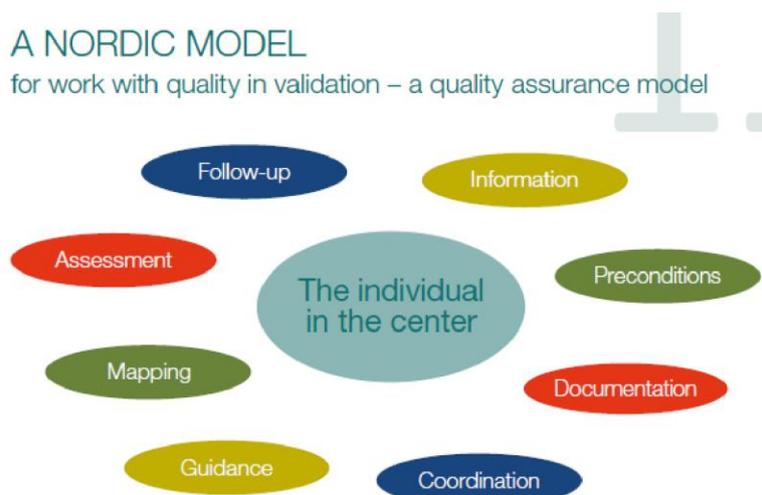
Source: NVL

The quality factors and indicators are reviewed on a regular basis, and areas for improvement are identified and addressed at the provider level. In this way, the quality assurance becomes part of the professionally based, regular review of all aspects involved in the validation process. The approach to implementation of this model varies from country to country according to the policy context, governance and ways of working with VPL.

The flexibility of the quality model has been important for implementation in the different country contexts. This quality model is used in the Nordic countries, and in several countries outside the EU (Russia, Ukraine, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Egypt) via European Training Foundation (ETF) cooperation, especially in the VET sector. The model has also been disseminated in several national, Nordic and European conferences and national workshops.

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[264] Andersson, P. 2021, Quality in validation from a Nordic perspective. European Journal of Education, 56, pp 380–390. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12463

Further steps to enhance quality in VPL and links to transversal competences

In 2020, the Nordic Expert Network on Validation collected the various quality tools developed by network participants in an online platform, the Nordic Quality Compass on Validation of Prior Learning (VPL).[265] The platform can be used for free following an online registration.

The Compass addresses quality in VPL and provides tools for evaluation and self-assessment at three levels:
- Governance of validation policies and practices (policy-makers).
- Quality assurance of validation procedures (VPL developers and service providers)
- Competence development of practitioners (VPL practitioners – assessors, counsellors and coordinators)

It is more user friendly (as compared to previous pdf-versions) as users at different levels can create a personal account in order to save, edit and update their development plan.

There are tools for:
- system evaluation,
- process and quality evaluation,
- and three self-assessment tools (for VPL practitioners – assessors, counsellors, and coordinators).

All tools available in English, and in 2022 will also be available in the five Nordic languages.

Quality assurance to support guidance and validation of transversal competences

The Nordic quality model also provides a solid basis for a high-quality process for validation of transversal competences. The tools emphasise clear descriptions of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, transparency of the validation system, practitioner competences in terms of fair and objective guidance and assessment procedures as well as systematic documentation systems. Learners cannot have their transversal competences validated if they are not explicit within the learning objectives. However, guidance counsellors can help learners to make the link between their transversal competences and specific learning objectives for which they are seeking validation.

In 2021, the NVL Validation Expert Network formulated a set of recommendations[266] for the future development of VPL quality assurance processes, two of which are strongly linked to transversal competences:

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[265] Quality Compass, https://qualitycompass.eu

[266] NVL Policy Brief on Quality in Validation of Prior Learning in the Nordic Countries, 2021. https://nvl.org/Portals/0/DigArticle/16633/NVL-Policy-brief-on-Validation-Final.pdf (The Brief provides an overview of the quality work over years and depicts the state-of-the-art in the Nordic countries including a set of recommendations for the future work on VPL.)

- Support for systematic validation of transversal competences gained in working life, outside of the formal education system (e.g. leadership, teamwork and collaboration, and other transversal competences].
- Encouragement of co-operation and dialogue between stakeholders (i.e. between employers, social partners and education systems) to guarantee quality in VPL and to uncover latent talent (i.e. transversal competences that had not previously been explicitly identified) in the workforce (including micro-credentials).

CONCLUSIONS

The cutting-edge practices featured in this chapter emphasise the important role of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers at all levels (including regional and local) in experimenting with new approaches to supporting guidance and validation. Collaborative efforts have led to opportunities for cross-fertilisation and new learning. Given the relative newness of VNFIL in the education sector, and particularly of guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences in validation processes, further cooperation and sharing can help to accelerate progress.

CHAPTER 5 – POTENTIAL WAYS FORWARD

As noted at the beginning of the report, good and innovative practices exist despite the lack of clear support within existing international and national policy frameworks. In this final chapter, we first analyse barriers and enablers to effective validation of transversal skills and competences in validation and guidance practices. We then set out suggestions for policy at EU and national levels to support good guidance and assessment practices – with the ultimate aim of empowering learners.

Analysis of barriers and enablers

This section outlines barriers and enablers to effective guidance and assessment of transversal skills and competences within validation processes. Most respondents to the TRANSVAL Stakeholder Survey, conducted as an online consultation, agreed on the importance of transversal skills and competences in both work and personal lives. The survey and the results of desk research conducted by TRANSVAL partners also identified a relatively small number of good guidance and assessment practices with potential for scale-up.

Barriers to the validation of transversal skills and competences in guidance and validation practices point to a lack of alignment across various frameworks and tools, a lack of coherence across different stages of validation processes and across providers), and the need for investments in opportunities for practitioner professional development and for a broader range of assessment tools.

The enablers highlighted reinforce the need for ongoing international peer learning within the EU. A stronger focus on peer networks can support professional learning, innovation and broader take-up of good practices. Within countries, a stronger emphasis on cross-sector collaboration and agreement on the importance of transversal skills and competences may also support peer learning and development.

Finally, further investments in research are needed. This includes a closer look at current guidance and assessment of transversal skills and competences within validation processes, validation practitioners competence needs, and the views of individual learners as well as employers on transversal skills and competence needs.

Barriers

Respondents to TRANSVAL-EU's European Stakeholder Survey were asked to list what they consider to be the top three challenges to the validation of transversal skills and competences (open response format). Of the 307 responses listed (138 respondents), some general common concerns emerged. The most frequently noted challenges were the lack of recognition of the added value of transversal skills

and competences (14.7% of responses), the need for clear definitions and common understanding of transversal skills and competences across sectors (8.8%), the need for a reference framework at local, regional levels, with clearer links to national and European qualifications frameworks (7.8%), and the need for greater visibility and awareness of the importance of transversal competences (6.2%).

Other challenges include the need to develop practitioners' competences for the validation of transversal skills and competences (5.5%), the need for transversal competences to address both life and work contexts (5.2%), and the need to take learner motivation into account (4.6%). Only a small percentage of respondents viewed measurement of transversal competences (3.9%), the need for clear guidance instructions (3.6%) or for standards and assessment tools (3.3%) as top challenges.

Challenges identified through desk research conducted for this report include:

- **Poor alignment between broad policy aims which support transversal competences and the frameworks and tools supporting guidance and validation.** While policies for lifelong learning increasingly take a holistic approach, emphasising personal, social and economic priorities for lifelong learning, the underpinning frameworks and tools may limit these broad aims. There is a need to examine frameworks, approaches, and tools to ensure they support a more holistic approach, including for validation of transversal competences.

- **Insufficient opportunities for training and professional development for guidance and validation practitioners on transversal competences.** According to the 2018 European Inventory on non-formal and informal learning, 21 countries now require validation practitioners to participate in relevant professional training. The Inventory does not, however, provide information on the content and focus of training. Given that only a minority of countries have implemented initiatives to support the validation of transversal competences in guidance and validation processes, targeted training is likely to be limited.

Enablers

Enablers of progress toward validation of transversal competences set out below include growing European-level attention to the importance of transversal competences, opportunities to share good practices and support peer learning among countries.

- **European-level attention to transversal competences.** Recent Council Recommendations such as the Upskilling Pathways (2016), the 2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, and the 2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, the 2020 Osnabrück Declaration and the New Skills Agenda for Europe (2020) all recognise transversal

competences as essential for addressing complex modern challenges in a lifelong and life-wide perspective.

- **Peer learning across countries.** Europe supports the sharing of good practices and peer learning across countries through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). In addition, the Erasmus+ programme, supports innovation and policy experimentation across countries. This cross-fertilisation of ideas allows countries to adapt models to their own contexts and potentially to introduce further innovations.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY FACTSHEETS

Country Factsheet: Austria

Country Factsheet:	Austria
Conceptual approaches and specific national/regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:	
Lifelong-Learning Strategy LLL:2020 (issued in 2011) [267]	In July 2011, four federal ministries (Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; Ministry for Science and Research; Ministry for Economy, Family and Youth; Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs) supported by social partners and all key stakeholders, agreed on a joint strategy.[268] Its rationale is based upon five pillars: life phase orientation (all ages), placing learners at the centre (flexibility of learning), lifelong guidance (facilitating the learning process), competence orientation (recognition of informal learning), and promotion of participation in lifelong learning (enhancing the motivation to learn).[269] The approach encompasses the eight key competences as a point of reference for all guiding principles of the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning of the Council and the Commission. Four of those are transversal competences: interpersonal skills and the ability to adopt new competences / active citizenship / entrepreneurship / cultural awareness and expression.[270] As overarching strategy, LLL:2020 was the context in which the national validation strategy was developed.
Validation Strategy (issued in 2017)	The national validation strategy notes as the first strategic key objective to increase the value of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning, followed by better accessibility of validation arrangements by providing low-threshold, central information and advisory services as well as the strengthening of validation as an integral part of the Austrian education and training system - strategic goals also coincide with the aims of TRANSVAL-EU. [271] The national strategy introduces four thematic working groups, one of which addresses the professionalization of practitioners, "as there is no specific profile of professionals carrying out validation processes in Austria. Depending on the specific measures and the sector it belongs to, the validation practitioners are teachers, career counsellors, experienced professionals and members of the respective authorities, ministries or social partners."[272] The envisioned focus therefore lies on the standardisation of competences in a consolidated practitioner profile and developing respective training offers, a strategic goal in alignment with the goals of TRANSVAL-EU. Training offers are to be aligned with the catalogue of quality criteria for validation (2018)[273], which encompasses general quality criteria, e.g., making individual competences explicit, and

[267] Republik Österreich (2011): Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich. LLL:2020. Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich (qualifikationsregister.at). last consulted 15/06/2021

[268] Luomi Messerer, K. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Austria. p.3. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Austria.pdf

[269] Austria: Strategy for Lifelong Learning LLL:2020 issued in 2011 | UIL (unesco.org). last consulted 15/06/2021

[270] Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning | Education and Training (europa.eu). last consulted 15/06/2021

[271] Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 4.

[272] Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 36.

[273] Kriterienkatalog zur Förderung der Qualität von Validierungsverfahren im Bereich der Berufs- und Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich (qualifikationsregister.at); last consulted 15/06/2021

	specific quality criteria, e.g., staff and their competences as well as regular further training. The catalogue of quality criteria is developed as a bottom-up approach based on analyses of existing validation initiatives.[274] Validation in Austria is generally based on a bottom-up approach with specific projects for example in the sphere of apprenticeships and adult education. There is no legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, there is also no individual right for individuals to access validation initiatives.[275] With regard to the validation of transversal competences, there is no specific framework in Austria and the aim is therefore to gain valuable insights for good and innovative practices in the course of the policy experimentation.
NQF-Act (issued in 2016)	One element of the validation strategy is the linking to the NQF, especially regarding the approach on learning outcomes fostering transparency and therefore being a key success factor for building trust in validation. Efforts to develop the NQF in Austria were pushed ahead based on the 2008 EQF Recommendation. The adoption of the federal law on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF-Act) was an important step towards full implementation of the NQF. The act regulates the mapping of Austrian qualifications based on learning outcomes to one of the eight qualification levels of the NQF which correspond to the levels of the EQF. This process culminates in the publication of the results of the mapping process for information purposes in the NQF-Register. The objective of the NQF-Act is to use the NQF as a tool for encouraging the transparency and comparability of qualifications in Austria and Europe and to promote lifelong learning, which comprises formal, non-formal, and informal learning. The NQF therefore is open for qualifications recognized through validation and for transversal competencies included in qualifications. Transversal competences can be found/are considered in two areas of the EQF and in the NQF and therefore: a) Can be found in the descriptors and explanations of the levels: The descriptions ('descriptors') of the individual EQF levels are formulated in a rather general manner. The descriptors of the levels are further specified by explanations: To ensure EQF descriptors can be understood and applied more easily, these formulations aim to specify the abstract descriptions in greater detail. b) Are considered in the mapping process of the individual qualifications and their learning outcomes.

Framework (figures, diagrams, or rubrics) setting out transversal competences	
Situation in Austria	In Austria, there are no commonly used frameworks for transversal competences in place. The existing framework in place is the EQF, hence NQF, focusing on qualifications and transversal competences within those qualifications (see above).

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[274] Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 38f.
[275] Luomi Messerer, K. (2019), p. 5f.

Users (providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
What type of organisations/initiatives/ projects offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of guidance and validation processes?	Overall, validation of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning encompasses transversal competences, e.g. the dimensions of social and personal competences, but there is no dedicated mentioning of transversal competences. In many cases, the guidance and validation processes reside in the identification and documentation stages. Yet implicitly, transversal competences gain attention and are to be found also in classical validation processes within the phases of assessment and certification. There are various types of organisations, initiatives, and projects that offer VNFIL that might also cover transversal competences. These organizations include, for example, educational institutions – schools, higher education institutions, adult education institutions (the Austrian Academy of continuing education, wba, for example, is supported by all ten major Austrian adult education umbrella organizations), apprenticeship offices of the competent Economic Chambers, the Austrian Public Employment Service as well as organizations operating in the third sector. Educational counselling and career guidance is, for example, also provided by the Chamber of Labor. There are national initiatives and others with a regional focus (an example of the latter is the initiative 'Du kannst was!'). There are also initiatives specifically designed for certain target groups, e.g. migrants/refugees/asylum seekers (such as ZEP, Competence Kaleidoscope), supporting low-qualified people in obtaining a qualification from outside the formal system (such as KOMKOM) or empowering women who return to the labour market after parental leave (such as Kompetenzbilanz/ProfilPass).
How are practitioners made aware of the focus on validation of transversal competences?	Awareness raising and information provision has a broader scope and is not limited or explicitly used related to transversal competences.
Do practitioners have access to training and guidelines on the use of frameworks and tools setting out transversal competences?	There is no standardized training for practitioners on transversal competences.
How are employers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders and users (e.g., in helping to define relevant transversal competences)?	For relevant qualifications, employers are involved in validation processes in Austria. As social partner, they are generally involved in educational policies, which is also the case for the employee representation. Explicitly, in specific qualifications employer representatives are actively involved in the validation processes: These validation initiatives may include the validation of transversal competences but are usually not explicitly designed to do so. For example, the initiative 'Du kannst was!', a project initiated by the Austrian social partners, validates competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts and leads to the award of an apprenticeship diploma. The examinations are taken at the respective Apprenticeship Office of the Economic Chamber, the awarding body for apprenticeship diplomas in Austria.

	Another example is the engineer qualification (Ingenieur). It can be awarded based on a validation and certification process to graduates of VET colleges of engineering and in the agricultural and forestry/environmental sector who have a minimum of three years of professional experience. The certification bodies are accredited by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and several of them are located at regional Economic Chambers.
How are educators/trainers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders (e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences or in supporting learners to develop these competences).	Validation initiatives in Austria are developed by practitioners and experts with different backgrounds and offered in a variety of settings. In some cases, educators and trainers are involved, in particular in the adult education context: These validation initiatives may include the validation of transversal competences. For example, the validation process of the Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (wba) uses templates for the self-description of candidates for personal social competences and digital skills / media literacy. Another example to be named is the European project ZEP, co-funded by the European Social Fund and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, that vises to identify and document digital basic competences with a self-evaluation questionnaire. Other initiatives use biography-oriented procedures and methods (e.g. Kompetenz+, Competence Kaleidoscope) or holistic portfolio approaches (e.g. competence profile CH-Q); yet, the validation initiatives in the realm of education are usually not explicitly designed to include transversal skills, yet they can be involved in all four stages of the validation process and can also support candidates in developing competences or finding relevant courses to do so.
How are learners engaged in VNFIL processes that include the validation of transversal competences (e.g. self-assessment, peer assessment)?	Depending on the initiative, learners may carry out self-assessment, e.g. by filling in templates/questionnaires or compiling portfolios to show the competences they have already achieved, including transversal competences. This can also be done with support or in group settings (workshops). In some cases, learners can also demonstrate their transversal competences in formal assessment situations.
General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?	There are no centralized national campaigns to promote VNFIL services, however there are platforms like erwachsenenbildung.at or Euroguidance that disseminate information on activities as well as the National Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria as contact point for validation in Austria.

Country Factsheet: Belgium

Country Factsheet:	Belgium
Conceptual approaches and specific national/regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:	
Situation in Belgium	The 2019 Cooperation Agreement (signed by all 3 French-speaking Belgian governments) setting the mandate of CVDC uses the following definition of a competence : "la compétence : l'aptitude, mesurable, à mettre en œuvre les savoirs - savoir, savoir-faire, savoir-faire comportemental - strictement nécessaires à l'accomplissement d'une tâche dans une situation de travail". Translation: competence: the –measurable- ability to make use of one's knowledge – knowledge, know-how and behavioural know-how- strictly necessary to perform a task in a working situation). This definition explicitly includes transversal skills in the scope of CVDC's action. However, transversal competences are most of the time implicit in CVDC referential framework in that they are not explicitly addressed in the evaluation grids but are still necessary to pass the tests. As such, transversal competences are not assessed *per se* and not certified either. In education, the 2013 document from Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles listing the "socles de compétences[276]" (learning objectives in terms of competences) for primary and first-level of secondary education lists transversal competences that will be developed in schools. These transversal competences are however not assessed. In its Notice n°99 of February 22nd, 2008, the Education and Training Council (French speaking Belgium) recommends that VET "organises the mobilisation of non-technical skills and make them operational, without them becoming social control elements or social selection of labourers". [277] Bruxelles Formation has elaborated a transversal competences framework that serves as a tool for trainers to identify the TCs that need to be mobilised in a specific training. It explicitly stipulates that "Not all TCs can be assessed using objective indicators, but they can be mobilised in a training context with a view to formative assessment [...][278]. This framework distinguishes social TCs, methodological TCs and contributional TCs.

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[276] http://reajustonslecole.be/textes/SoclesDeCompetences.pdf , pp. 8-9, last visited on 25-05-2021
[277] https://step4-sfc.eu/IMG/pdf/cef_avis_099.pdf, last consulted on 08/06/2021
[278] https://step4-sfc.eu/IMG/pdf/triptyque_bruxelles_formation_competences_transversales.pdf, last consulted on 08/06/2021

Users (providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
What type of organisations offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of guidance and validation processes?	Missions Locales (Local Missions) are local initiatives funded by the CPAS (Social Action Public Centres) in every Brussels commune. The LM offer support to candidates to CVDC VNFIL tests. The majority of the LM's public is composed of people that have very low qualifications (if any) and are usually in the process of (re-) integrating the labour market from which they often were apart. LM are involved in guidance (including) personalised support phase. LM practitioners conduct an individual interview using a positioning tool (created by CVDC). This tool consists in a list of questions aiming at assessing whether the candidate has the technical competences necessary to pass the test. During this interview, LM practitioners also address the candidates' soft skills (such as punctuality, interpersonal skills, etc.), but without any tools or reference; it is very much done on an intuitive basis.
How are practitioners made aware of the focus on validation of transversal competences?	The RECTEC project and results have been presented in June 2019. It was attended by (amongst others) validation and guidance practitioners. The information remains available on the RECTEC project website.
Do practitioners have access to training and guidelines on the use of frameworks and tools setting out transversal competences?	To the extent of CDVC knowledge, there is no specific training on transversal competences; the practitioners operate on an intuitive manner.
How are employers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders and users (e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences)?	Employers take part in the elaboration of CVDC referentials. As mentioned before, these most of the time do not explicitly include transversal competences but are nonetheless present. One particular referential can however be mentioned as interesting because it is intrinsically transversal: Production Operator on Industrial lines. This referential encompasses different sectors (textile, wood, food and technology industry), all of which were around the table. The competences listed in the referential are therefore all transversal to these sectors.
How are educators/trainers engaged in validation of transversal competences as	As mentioned here above, guidance practitioners operate on an intuitive basis, they are solely in charge of defining the transversal competences they will be addressing.

stakeholders (e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences or in supporting learners to develop these competences).	
How are learners engaged in VNFIL processes that include the validation of transversal competences (e.g. self-assessment, peer assessment)?	Candidates to VNFIL have the ability to conduct a self-assessment of their competences using the guidance tool that CVDC produces for every VNFIL test.
General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?	Information can be found at the Cité des Métiers, a joint entity in Brussels founded by Actiris[279], Bruxelles Formation[280] and VDAB[281], available to anyone wishing to have information on education, training, labour and VNFIL. In Wallonia, there are also Cités des Métiers that offer the same services. CVDC also organises national campaigns to promote VNFIL system, but not with a focus on transversal competences.

Quality assurance	
Are quality assurance arrangements focused on VNFIL process (and supporting the implementation of relevant national strategies) in place? Is a specific organisation in charge of conducting quality assurance?	CVDC has a very strong quality process in place. It relies on several mechanisms: i) referentials are developed so they are in line with the official training and certifications organism (SFMQ), ii) they are continuously monitored and feedback from the evaluators is integrated when referentials are reviewed, iii) they are elaborated in collaboration with social partners (employers and trade unions). However, there is no official assessment of transversal competences (as mentioned here above), so no quality process specifically for them.

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[279] Brussels public labour service
[280] Brussels public training provider
[281] Flanders public labour service

How are validity and reliability of assessments ensured?	The assessment is conducted with the use of an assessment grid that is the same for every test (regardless of the centre), an exterior observer is also part of the jury that decides at the end of the test whether the candidates have been successful. Once more, it is important to note that transversal competences are not part of the grids.
Are there any evaluations on the use of competence frameworks you have identified? On their impact?	An impact study on CVDC VNFIL has been conducted in 2012 and another one has been launched in 2021. They will not address transversal competences, as they are not explicitly part of CVDC referentials.

Country Factsheet: Italy

Country Factsheet:	Italy
Framework (figures, diagrams or rubrics): If there are diagrams or rubrics setting out transversal competences, please include them here, and provide the source	
Situation in Italy	In Italy, the necessity to provide actions finalized to the recognition of formative credits and the certification of the non-formal and informal learnings acquired has been introduced by the law *92/2012, art. 4 c. 55* in 2012. The following legislative decree *D.Lgs 13/2013* states that the Republic:

- promotes lifelong learning as a personal right.
- Guarantees the recognition, the transparency and the exploitation of such learning, however acquired, to everybody.
- Defines the general norms and the essential levels of performance to obtain certification. The formal recognition is due to the Regions that are responsible of the process of certification.
- Provides a National System of Competences' Certification (SNCC).

The common reference framework for the operation of the services of identification, validation and certification of competences has been set in the **Ministerial Decree of the Ministry of Labor, together with the Ministry of Education, of the 30th of June 2015**, which aims to achieve the following objectives:

a) to promote the transparency of learning and the coherence of training to the needs of companies and professions in order to facilitate the matching of labor supply and demand and to increase the productivity and competitiveness of the production system;

b) to broaden the use of qualifications at National and European level in order to facilitate geographical and professional mobility, also with a view to internationalization of companies and professions.

It also specifies the minimum standards for 2 key processes, operationally defined as follows:

a. the "identification and validation process", intended as a service provided by a body entitled in accordance with the National Decree – *D.Lgs 13/2013* and aimed at the recognition of the competences acquired by the person through a mapping and verification of formal learning evidences, even in the event of interruption of the training, non-formal and informal learning. The "**Support document for the identification of acquired competences**" (art. 6) has to include the following:

- Personal information;
- Competences to be validated;
- Working experiences and formal, non-formal and informal learning relevant to the competences identified in step b).

b. the "skills certification procedure", understood as a service aimed at issuing a "**Certificate**" relating to the competences acquired by the person in formal contexts or validated as acquired in non-formal or informal contexts. The «Certificate» is a third-party certificate, an officially recognized certification.

In 2018, the **National Qualification Framework (NQF) has been set up** so as to reference the Italian national qualifications to the EQF, ensuring their comparability

and reciprocal connections, and at the same time representing the appropriate tool to describe and classify all the qualifications released within the National System of Competences Certification (formally set up in 2013 with the Decree n.13, but effectively put into force in January 2021 with the with the Interministerial Decree "Provisions for the adoption of guidelines for the interoperability of public bodies entitled in the national skills certification system").

In Italy, the process of competences' certification is exclusively referred to the competences that lead to qualifications included and described in the National/Regional repertoires of Qualifications. So far, this means that the transversal competences are not considered a per se relevant object of the VNFIL process, although they are somehow mentioned in the NQF. So as to ensure coherence and continuity with the EQF, the overall structure of the Italian NQF is developed through a common reference table, including the 8 levels foreseen in the EQF, detailed in terms of learning outcomes corresponding to the increasing level of capacity and complexity. According to the EQF, the learning outcomes are the reference element for describing the competences based on three dimensions: knowledge, ability, autonomy and responsibility (as a unique dimension). The descriptors detail what an individual should be able to do, with a certain level of autonomy and responsibility in relation to the acquisition of a specific qualification. Since transversal competences cannot be formally validated and certified per se, because they are not described as an autonomous set of competences, until now, there isn't a legal Framework in Italy that allows the identification, validation and certification process for transversal competences, but only as a sub-descriptor of general and technical competences.

Conceptual approaches and specific national /regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:

National Strategic Plan of Adults competences

As regards to the adult population, the "**National Strategic Plan of Adults competences**" of 2021 has as its main objectives the creation of a strengthened coordination infrastructure between the various national policies and measures in this sector and the definition of new lines of action for the first three years of the implementation period.

The Plan is built starting from the centrality of 3 guiding principles:

1. **Universality of policies, selectivity of aid and centrality of the person**. This means that the interventions of the Plan aim at the progressive construction of a stable and permanent system of services accessible to all;

2. **Subsidiarity of governance, concentration of resources and diversification and proximity of services.** The interventions of the Plan are the result of the institutional partnership method and promote integrated networks as a model of organization and delivery of services;

3. **Gradualism, progressiveness and incrementalism in the development of systems and services**. It aims to promote a bottom-up approach that starts from the enhancement of current experiences to promote both territorial mainstreaming and progressive connection and coordination through a unitary and shared strategy.

Users (Providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
1 **What type of organizations/initiatives/ projects offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of guidance and validation processes?**	The National Qualification Framework defines *abilities* as a cognitive component that entail the capacity to apply knowledge and know how to fulfill tasks, and recall transversal skills: - Cognitive, which allow a correct interpretation and integration of the reality; - Of social interactions, linked to interacting with other individuals; - Of activation, in relation to the capacity of facing and solving problems Currently, assessment of transversal skills has been experimented mainly within the formal scholastic path. With the **Law 107/2015**, a new approach to teaching, aimed at all students of the second two years and the last year of upper secondary schools, obligatorily provides for **guidance pathways, called "Pathways for transversal skills and guidance" (PCTO)**. These pathways happen in the form of courses, which integrate education, training and work systems through a productive collaboration between the different areas, with the aim of creating a place dedicated to learning where pupils are able to concretely learn how to approach the world of work in the targeted economic sectors, in a responsible and autonomous way. The courses are intended to provide young people, in addition to basic knowledge, with the skills necessary to enter the labor market, alternating "traditional" study hours with classroom training hours and hours spent within companies, to guarantee them experience "in the field" and overcome the "training" gap between the world of work and the academic world in terms of skills and preparation. Opening the world of school to the outside world allows more generally to transform the concept of learning into permanent activity (lifelong learning, opportunities for growth and work throughout the lifespan), giving equal dignity to school education and the experience of work. At the beginning of 2022, a law proposal has been approved, aiming at introducing the recognition of "non cognitive competences" (also known as soft or life skills) in the Italian public school system through a three-year experimentation. The experimentation will happen in schools at all levels – from ECEC to adult learning centers – and teachers will be train in parallel. It is worth to mention the MASTER Erasmus+ project carried out in the Umbria Region, which aims at introducing low-skilled adults to training and educational opportunities that can improve their situation in the labor market, by developing their self-assessment skills and their personal, social and learning competence [PSL]. The piloting foreseen by the MASTER project is intended as a part of the guidance process for allowing the user to gain specific information about strengths and competences to be improved with reference to PSL, and its functional to the identification stage of the VNFIL process. The piloting has been provided in cooperation with Public Employment Services (PES) and social enterprises dealing with active labor policies. The first experimentation of the self-assessment process involved 40 adults (13 women, 27 men), low skilled, long-term unemployed.
2 **How are practitioners made aware of the focus**	In the framework of the experimentation conducted in Umbria Region through the MASTER project, the practitioners have been involved in Peer Learning Activities about PSL, then in building the testing procedure and in adapting and

on validation of transversal competences?	selecting the tools for self-assessment for each users. In the framework of the MASTER self-assessment, they shared a common online procedure for administering the tools, they administrate the tools and they constantly share a feedback about the testing implementation and results. The cooperation between a private adult learning organization and the Public Employment Services represented the application of the subsidiarity principle to a practical case, on the basis of a bottom-up approach.
3 **Do practitioners have access to training and guidelines on the use of frameworks and tools setting out transversal competences?**	Since the validation process cannot be applied to transversal competences per se, the guidelines for practitioners refer to validation of specific job related competences in correspondence with the National Atlas (Atlante del Lavoro e delle Qualificazioni). Each Italian Region developed its own training path for validation practitioners. Differences among the Validation systems in place in the Italian Regions are mainly ascribed to how professionals are trained and certified as well as to practical aspects on how the identification and validation systems are implemented, evaluated and digitized. Here are the examples from Umbria and Tuscany – Regions involved by the TRANSVAL-EU project – and Piedmont, which, in 2019, was awarded the first prize in the category "Policy" within the third edition of the "Biennale on VPL" held in Berlin. In Umbria Region, **2 Units of Competences** are in force: ● "To exercise the accompaniment and support to competences identification and prior learning transparency, according to the Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 30th June 2015, also for the purpose of the recognition of the training credits in the Umbria Region". ● "To exercise the planning and implementation of validation activities according to the Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 30th June 2015, also for the purpose of recognition of training credits in the Umbria Region". The training programme planned and implemented by ARPAL Umbria has been designed according to the 2 Unit of Competences, above mentioned, so as to certify at the end of the training and the related exams, the mentioned competences. Only individuals with one of the following pre-requisites, can access the training: ● educational diploma or a qualification at least equal to level 4 EQF, accompanied by professional experience - documented through contracts of work in compliance with the legislation in force at the time of the service - relating to one or more of the following roles: career guidance, job supply-demand matching, selection of personnel, selection of participants in formal and non-formal learning paths, evaluation of learning, developed for at least five years, even if not continuous in last ten; ● three-year, or specialist/master's degree in psychological, sociological and pedagogical disciplines, accompanied by professional experience, in the terms of which the previous paragraph, developed for at least one year, even if not continuous, in the last five; ● academic courses in the context of degree or master courses provided by public universities on the transparency and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The training and the related exams are the basic requirements for IVC practitioners to be enrolled in the open public list of Practitioners authorized to execute the functions overseeing the provision of identification and validation services, recognition of training credits and certification of skills. The training courses are voluntary and they do not represent either an obligation or a right to access the certification sessions.

In Tuscany, the Tuscany Regional Employment Agency (ARTI) promotes agreements with the Regional Scholastic Office, so that the Provincial Centers for Adult Education (CPIA) support, also from a logistical point of view, the Employment Centers (CPI) in the provision of services.

For the implementation of the services of identification, validation and certification of skills, the following professional roles are envisaged, which implement the national functions identified by the Legislative Decree 30 June 2015:

● Expert in the Identification and Transparency of Skills (EITC) who performs the "Function of accompaniment and support in the identification and transparency of skills".

● Responsible for the process of identification and validation of competences (RIV), who supervises and is responsible for the identification, validation and certification of competences.

● Expert in Evaluation of Learning and Skills (EVAC), who is the technical-methodological manager and carries out the "Planning and implementation of evaluation activities ".

● Professional Sector Expert (ESP), who represents the technical-professional referent of specific Professional Figures as described in the Regional Directory of Professional Figures, and who covers the function of implementation of the assessment activities for the aspects of curricular and professional content.

Regione Piemonte provides operators with specific training in order to create a **Register of Experts** responsible for the whole process, also by setting out the phases of the validation process (identification, validation and certification) and determining standards for intermediate and final certification.

These are the two competence profiles and the related training:

Expert responsible of the certification process (Esperto in Tecniche di Certificazione). The Expert has the main role in the process and is registered in the official regional register. The training is programmed directly by regional officers and concerns the following elements:

• European, National and Regional regulations framework.
• Regional regulations, actors, procedures, instruments on validation services.
• Case study, focus group and simulations on validation.
• Final exam. Passing the exam is a condition for being registered in the official register and authorized to the computer system and release certifications.

Operator trained on certification (Operatore Adeguatamente Formato). The operator has the role of keeping relations and direct contact with the citizens

	supporting them in the collection of evidences and in the compositions of all the experiences. The core elements of the training are: • Knowing the Regional repertoire of professional profiles and competences; • Management of computer system instruments to track the services and its outputs; • Tailor made solutions for the citizens' expectations.
4 **How are employers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders and users (e.g., in helping to define relevant transversal competences).**	In the case of PCTO, the training courses are implemented by the schools on the basis of special agreements with companies, chambers of commerce, social enterprises that are willing to host the students for this learning period. In this way, employers are sensitized to the topic of identifying and assessing transversal competences, through an assessment moment at the end of the experience.
5 **How are educators/trainers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences or in supporting learners to develop these competences)?**	In the case of PCTO, the educational institution, with the collaboration of the external tutors designated by the host / company, evaluates the path taken and certifies the skills acquired by the students during the course (the internal teacher-tutor is responsible for preparing what is necessary for a complete and accurate assessment). This means that it isn't upon teachers alone to carry out this kind of path. Nevertheless, one or more teachers from the scholastic institutions are dedicated to the "Pathways for transversal skills and guidance": He/She is the connecting point for the activities envisaged in the learning pathway. He/She prepares the material needed by the pupils' tutors for the evaluation of the courses, monitors the regular implementation of the activities. Furthermore, as mentioned above, thanks to the new experimentation to be started in 2022 in the Italian public school system, teachers will be trained on the identification and assessment of the so-called non-cognitive competences
6 **How are learners engaged in VNFIL processes that include the validation of transversal competences (e.g. self-assessment, peer assessment)?**	In the case of PCTO, the skills acquired constitute credits and at the end of the course, certificates of attendance, certificates of skills and credits are issued. The guidelines detail all the documents required to assess the skills and issue the related credits and certificates.
7 **General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?**	At national level, activities are carried out on a Regional basis. In the specificity of Regione Piemonte, the Region is currently investing in validation with a new measure in order to increase the target group and to spread knowledge of these services to more stakeholders.

Quality Assurance	
Are quality assurance arrangements focused on the VNFIL process (and supporting the implementation of relevant national strategies) in place? Is a specific organization in charge of conducting quality assurance?	In Italy, the Quality Assurance system is based on a general framework established at National level through 2015 Interministerial Decree defining the operative framework for validation, and implemented accordingly by each Validation body at Regional level. This framework aimed at ensuring system reliability as it asks the entitled public bodies to ensure the adoption of mechanisms, to define criteria, thresholds and methods of verification, monitoring and control able to guarantee the services' coherence with the National Decree. In January **2021**, with the **Interministerial Decree of the 5th of January "Provisions for the adoption of guidelines for the interoperability of public bodies entitled in the national skills certification system"**, the National System for the Competences' certification entered into force (following what established with the D.Lgs 13/2013), defining minimum standards and expected conformity. The guidelines bring together and systematize different operational provisions mainly aimed at: a) identifying indicators, thresholds and methods of checking, evaluating and assessing minimum standards, for both professionals and the overall service level of performance, also with the aim to establish essential performance levels and services guarantee; b) defining criteria for the Implementation of the National repertoire of Education and Vocational training qualifications and professional qualifications as for the Legislative Decree 13/2013 art. 8, also in light of the European education and Vocational education and Training credits and for its periodic updating, to be done at least every three years. c) progressive implementation and functional connection of the unique informative backbone as for the national Law 92/2012 art. 4 c. 51 which development will ensure the interoperability among National and local data centers, allowing the diffusion, monitoring, evaluation and tracking of validated learning and of the issued certificates. Furthermore, the Regional VNFIL systems foresee the creation of a Regional Register of practitioners, that have undergone the training for validation practitioners and are certified to deliver the practice to users. Through this tool, it is ensured that the quality of the service is maintained coherently with the regional and national provisions.
How are validity and reliability of assessments ensured?	At Regional level, the VNFIL process foresees the creation of a Certification Commission that completes the practice and issues the certification of competences for the user. The certification commissions are perfect bodies and operate in compliance with the principles of third party, independence and objectivity of the evaluation process. The commissions are composed of three members: • the President, expressed by the Region and drawn from a special list of resources authorized for this purpose; • two commissioners taken from the open public list, for the professional economic sector object to which the qualification subject to certification refers, qualified to exercise the function "Provision of evaluation activities for aspects of curricular and professional content"; • a professional qualified to perform the function "Planning and carrying out assessment activities", with methodological support functions and recording secretary, without voting rights. The commissioners are identified through a public draw, according to the principle of rotation, without prejudice to the right of renunciation for objective impediment. The appointment of the Commissions and the administrative management of the

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	procedure, including the release and preservation of the qualifications issued, is under the responsibility of the Region.
Are there any evaluations on the use of competence frameworks you have identified? On their impact?	The National Qualification Framework is continuously monitored by INAPP and by a national commission that includes ANPAL (National Agency for Active Labor Policy), MIUR (Ministry for Education, University and Research) and Regional Administrations. This aims to have a continuous update on the National Atlas.

Country Factsheet: Lithuania

Country Factsheet:	Lithuania
Conceptual approaches and specific national/regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:	
Situation in Lithuania	Even though so far there are not yet an official policy on validation of transversal competences (Lith. Perkeliamosios kompetencijos, perkeliamieji gebėjimai) in Lithuania, there are some EU funded projects in which Lithuanian organisations took part in: - Lifelong project "ATS2020" (mainly in the sector of secondary schools and gymnasiums) that has a goal to contribute to the development of policies of education. Assessment of transferable skills for the school kids (2020): http://www.ats2020.eu/images/promotion/ATS_brosura_A4_lit_print.pdf; link of the project website: www.ats2020.eu - Erasmus+ Strategic partnership project "Problem based learning in training of veterinarian nurses" (2014) where it was planned to validate the transversal competences of students in veterinary nursing (Nr. 2014-1-LT01-KA202-000541): https://www.viko.lt/vilniaus-kolegijos-agrotechnologiju-fakultetas-diegia-didaktines-inovacijas-veterinarijos-studiju-programoje/ Conceptual approaches are being discussed in several publications, like: - Valūnaitė-Oleškevičienė G., Development of Transversal Skills in University Studies: Student Experience//Social Education (2019) Vytautas Magnus University https://www.vdu.lt/cris/bitstream/20.500.12259/103316/1/ISSN2351-6011_2019_V_51_N_1.PG_61-74.pdf - Links of LQF and EQF. The report (2011). https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/LKA_tyrimas_LT.pdf Some of the educational institutions are mentioning the development of transversal competences as priority for improvement strategy of their study programmes. However, the VNFIL of particularly transferable skills is not planned. - University of Applied sciences (SMK). Strategy of improvement of study processes: https://www.smk.lt/file/manual/Dokumentai/SMK_Strategija_LT_46psl.pdf

Users (providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
What type of organisations offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of	Having analysed the practices for validation of transversal competences (lith. perkeliamosios kompetencijos, perkeliamieji gebėjimai) in Lithuania shows that the most of initiatives are coming from the secondary schools. In most cases these are EU funded projects that are referred both to development and assessment of transversal competences.

guidance and validation processes?	Regulations on the Attestation of Heads of State (Excluding Higher Education Institutions) and Municipal Schools, their Deputies for Education, Heads of Departments Organizing Education (2014), provide the criterion on assessment and validation of transversal competences for the candidates to become the headmasters of the State Schools. There are only two transversal competences listed: communication and IT. Regulations state that the transversal competences are to be validated once a lifetime. During regular periodic attestations, the managerial and subject competences are being assessed: http://www.nmva.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/1-2_priedai.pdf. In 2018 due to change of the VET law this regulation was repealed. Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences as well as VET schools are offering the VNFIL procedure for the sector-based competences, gained in non-formal and informal ways, as well as during the work practice. The VNFIL procedures are described in the Orders by each institution. However, the VNFIL for transversal competences is not included. Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences are presenting their revised strategic development plans according to the recommendations of external experts. In most of the plans it is foreseen to strengthen the development of transversal competences within the study programmes. However, validation of transversal competences is not yet planned.
Do practitioners have access to training and guidelines on the use of frameworks and tools setting out transversal competences?	Speaking not directly about the VFNIL for transversal skills, but about the VNFIL in general, practitioners receive the consultations, explanations about the learning outcomes, learning achievements, assessment methods and tools as well as all stages of preparations.
How are employers engaged in validation of transversal competences as stakeholders and users (e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences)?	So far, they could not find any working practices of validation of transversal skills engaging employers. However, the below mentioned Master-PRO ESF project foresees the VNFIL within enterprises, carried out by the associated structures by employees, where the validation of transversal competences is planned.
How are educators/trainers engaged in validation of transversal competences as	Those educational institutions that are implementing the VNFIL engage educators into the counselling process (so called pre-VNFIL).

stakeholders (e.g. in helping to define relevant transversal competences or in supporting learners to develop these competences)?	
General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?	There is a lack of national campaigns in Lithuania to promote VNFIL service in general for wide population. Unemployed persons can find information and received financing by the Employment service, but for wider population there is no concreate information provided. Candidates only can find information in the VNFIL providers websites. However, there are number of various initiatives at Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences, VET schools. Information is provided for those, coming with work experience and requesting recognition of previous learning achievements. The research report explains the concept and theoretical background of competences as well as transversal competences: https://www.vdu.lt/cris/bitstream/20.500.12259/116524/1/viktorija_raudoniute_md.pdf

Quality assurance	
Are quality assurance arrangements focused on VNFIL process (and supporting the implementation of relevant national strategies) in place? Is a specific organisation in charge of conducting quality assurance?	Lithuania lacks a nationwide quality assurance and monitoring system for non-formal education and training, which may limit the government's capacity to maximise the impact of its investments and inhibit the recognition of non-formally gained skills. A national audit in 2015 found that the quality of non-formal education of school children was not sufficient. For example, municipalities were not carrying out external performance assessments, and some were delivering low-quality non-formal education programmes (owing to the lack of specific national quality standards and/or insufficient resources). Lithuania has taken important steps towards creating a national system of RPL over the past few years; however, the quality of processes to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning is still unequal between providers. (OECD Skills Strategy Lithuania: Assessment and Recommendations 2021)

Country Factsheet: Poland

Country Factsheet:	Poland

Conceptual approaches and specific national/regional policies promoting transversal competences in validation and guidance processes:	
Situation in Poland	There are no national or regional systemic policies in Poland promoting specifically transversal competences as they are understood in the TRANSVAL-EU project. But there are national policies that can potentially support validation of such competences and their transfer between different qualification subsystems and qualifications themselves. They include: 1. attaining 'market qualifications' introduced by the Integrated Qualification System (IQS), 2. confirming learning outcomes and ECTS within higher education, 3. extramural examinations in general education and VET, 4. vocational guidance as part of public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market. The Integrated Qualification System (Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji) is a national qualification system developed in Poland in accordance with the principles of the Council recommendation of 23 April 2008 on the European Qualifications Framework (Council of the European Union 2017). It was introduced with the adoption of the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System in December 2015 by the Polish parliament (IQS Act). The IQS Act establishes and defines, among other: ● the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF), ● the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR); ● a typology of qualifications and relevant terminology; ● principles of describing and registering qualifications in the IQR, including validation requirements; ● principles of quality assurance. As the name suggest, the IQS integrates several qualification subsystems functioning in Poland, including formal education (general, vocational and higher education) established by the acts on the Education System and Higher Education, as well as other state-regulated qualifications defined by separate legal provisions, usually involving licencing (e.g. lawyer, nurse, driver's licence). The system also introduced a new type of non-state regulated qualifications: the so-called 'market qualifications' that function on the labour market and are developed by training providers, corporations, social organisations, industry associations etc. This new type of qualifications can be formally included in the IQS provided they meet the conditions and successfully pass the procedure defined by the IQS Act. In practice, the integration of these subsystems means all qualifications mentioned above are referenced to the PQF, as well as included in the publicly available IQR. This happens by law in the case of qualifications from formal education, by the relevant minister's choice in case of other state- regulated qualifications, and upon request of a

qualification developer and then a decision of a relevant minister in the case of market qualifications. Other than that, different types of qualifications maintain their legal identity, which translates into different arrangements for awarding them. Therefore, these arrangements will be described separately, beginning with market qualifications. Vocational guidance provided by public employment services are not part of the IQS.

1. **Attaining 'market qualifications' introduced by the Integrated Qualification System (IQS)**

According to the IQS Act, market qualifications have to be described in terms of learning outcomes and according to a predefined form, that also includes a section dedicated to validation requirements (stages of the process, methods used, competences of the staff conducting the process etc.). Learning outcomes are most commonly formulated with the use of Bloom's taxonomy and action verbs, although this is not formally required. While they are developed by various organisations, once a market qualification is included in the IQS it becomes public property and their awarding is supervised by relevant ministries.

Market qualifications are awarded as a result of the 'validation of learning outcomes' defined as:

> [validation is] *assessing whether a person seeking to have a qualification awarded has attained a distinct part or all of the learning outcomes required for that qualification, regardless of the person's learning path.* (IQS Act 2016, s. 1)

It is worth noting that this definition does not include the identification and documentation stages and treats the certification stage as a separate process described as:

> *the process by which a learner, after having achieved a positive validation result, receives a formal document from an authorised awarding body stating that a qualification has been awarded* (IQS Act 2016, s. 1).

Apart from the validation of learning outcomes, the IQS Act also allows for the accumulation and transfer of 'achievements' that can be compared to non-numerical 'credits'. These achievements are defined as:

> *…distinguished sets of learning outcomes whose attainment has been confirmed through validation, and are part of the requirements for a given market qualification* (IQS Act 2016, s. 1).

Accumulation of sets of learning outcomes means that they can be acquired and validated at different places and times. Their transfer is to be understood as the possibility to have them recognised as equivalent to the requirements for a different market qualification by an authorised awarding body. But it is up to the awarding body whether it will consider recognising sets of learning outcomes at all or in any given individual case.

Transferring learning outcomes is easier when they are part of another qualification included in the IQS, as this can be done on the basis of a document confirming they have already been awarded. It is a certificate issued after acquiring a market

qualification. Such a process could be considered an 'automatic' transfer. Recognising learning outcomes other than those from an already awarded qualification included in the IQS is possible but has to be based on an interview with the person undergoing validation, as well as separate assessment of the documentation presented by this person to prove their achievements. Such a transfer is closer to a full validation process.

The arrangements presented above make it possible to include transversal competences described in terms of learning outcomes in any market qualification, accumulate them via validation and then transfer them 'between' these qualifications fairly easily. But it is worth noting, that as of today, market qualifications are rarely developed with transversal competences in mind. They are meant to be tailored to very specific needs of an industry or economic sector and as such tend to include mainly technical skills or occupation-specific skills (Markowska & Sobestjański 2020).

Furthermore, awarding bodies are not obligated to recognise sets of learning outcomes and their primary motive for offering validation is economic in nature. According to the IQS Act awarding bodies for market qualifications have to be entities conducting business activities, which is one of the requirements while applying for this role. As such, they can charge the candidates for validation regardless of its result and set the amount of the fee autonomously. These fees can be fairly significant and amount to ca. 330 EUR (Rostworowski 2020). There can also be more than one awarding body for a given market qualification. Therefore, while the market qualifications themselves are public property, the process of validation and certification for these types of qualifications is privatised. Competing awarding bodies are not prone to consider the formal possibility to develop sets of learning outcomes that can be utilised by their competitors as well as transfer something that is part of a commercial service they offer, at least at this stage of the implementation of the IQS. The entities developing qualifications, as well as awarding bodies themselves, rarely consider including the identification and documentation stages as well as guidance as part of the validation process (Markowska & Sobestjański 2020).

Another factor to be considered when analysing the potential of these legal provisions in relation to transversal competences is the number of market qualifications developed by now. As of 31th of January 2022, 462 applications for including a market qualification have been submitted, of which 144 have been formally included in the system but only 92 can be considered as 'functioning' qualifications, that is qualifications that can be already awarded (have an awarding body and a quality assurance entity assigned). Furthermore, most of the certificates issued comprise of only two qualifications: Programming and operation of the 3D printing process and Assembly of construction joinery, both of which are awarded by the same institution (VCC Foundation). For example, in the 4th quarter of 2021 a total of 2544 market qualifications have been awarded, of which 578 is the first one and 454 – the second one mentioned above. Therefore, the incentive to find links or common learning outcomes for market qualifications and provide the possibility to transfer them is yet scarce.

2. **Gaining access to study programmes by confirming learning outcomes in higher education**

Since a 2014 amendment to the law on Higher Education, all higher education institutions in Poland must pass a resolution that specifies how the institution will

provide access to study programmes on the basis of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, or more specifically 'confirmation of learning outcomes. The process must follow several general rules, one of which refers to the requirements a person must fulfil in order to apply for such a path. It is open to:

- persons who have a secondary school diploma and at least five years of professional experience – when applying for a first cycle or a uniform master's degree programme;
- persons who have a licence("licencjat") or equivalent degree and at least three years of professional experience after completing first cycle studies – when applying for a second cycle degree programme;
- persons who have a full qualification at level 5 of the Polish Qualifications Framework or a qualification referenced to level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework and was awarded by a foreign higher education system – when applying for a second cycle degree programme;
- persons who have a master's degree ("magister") or equivalent and at least two years of professional experience after completing the second cycle or uniform master's degree studies – when applying for the next field of study in a first cycle or second cycle programme or a uniform master's degree programme (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 14).

Furthermore, the process cannot grant the whole diploma, as no more than 50% of ECTS points assigned to a given education programme in a specific field, level and profile of studies may be awarded as the result of the validation. The number of students admitted this way cannot exceed 20% of the total number of students in a given field, level and profile of education as well (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 14).

3. **Extramural examinations in general education and VET**

As of 2008, it has been possible to obtain most qualifications awarded in general and vocational education by way of extramural examinations based on core curricula. Additionally, as a result of several amendments to the law on National Education implemented in the 2010s, the core curricula for general and vocational education have been described in terms of learning outcomes. These reforms were intended as a solution for adults who want to raise their level of qualifications without going back to school. Same as in the case of external examinations for regular students, the extramural examinations are organised by Regional Examination Boards (Okręgowe Komisje Egzaminacyjne), which are supervised by the Central Examination Board (Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna). The exams involve only the assessment stage in oral, written and - in VET - also practical form. Again, the learner must meet certain requirements in order to take these exams. The most important ones include:

- In general education – for qualifications at the lower secondary and secondary school levels one must present a school leaving certificate from the previous school level or a document confirming promotion to the ultimate or penultimate year of school, including from schools for adults (Gmaj et al., p. 12);
- In VET – if an adult has completed lower secondary school or an eight-year primary school and attended out-of-school forms of education, e.g. a vocational qualifying course, the appropriate vocational examinations can be taken with regular students. If an adult worked in an occupation or attended

a vocational school (or other form of education) to prepare for the relevant qualification for at least two years, the examination may be taken extramurally (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 13).

The fees for taking extramural examinations are more affordable than in the case of market qualifications. In 2018, they amounted to ca. 40 EUR, and when the exam is re-taken, the fees become lower.

4. **Vocational guidance as part of public activities promoting employment and supporting the labour market**

Public employment services in Poland, regulated by the Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions, are established by employment agencies together with county and regional labour offices. Vocational guidance consists in this case of providing assistance in choosing the right profession or place of work and in planning one's career development. Guidance counsellors provide:

● information about occupations, the national and European labour market, training and education;
● counselling on the use of standardised methods of facilitating the choice of a profession, starting or changing jobs, including identifying one's learning outcomes, interests and professional talents;
● directing people to specialised psychological and medical exams to secure opinions on one's suitability for work in a profession or direction of training (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 22).

The most important principles of public employment services are:

● accessibility;
● its voluntary nature;
● equal treatment;
● freedom to choose a profession and place of employment (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 22).

The guidance is free-of-charge, confidential and can be provided in an individual or group setting. The network of agencies is extensive - in 2016, there were 340 county labour offices and 16 regional labour offices with branches. Each regional labour office has a career information and planning centre, supporting the county labour offices in conducting vocational guidance, including the provision of remote counselling services using tele-information systems (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 23).

Groups eligible to benefit from vocational guidance are:

● unemployed persons registered in labour offices
● unregistered persons (eligible for a slightly narrower scope of services)
● national employers (eligible for assistance in selecting job candidates and conducting the professional development for their employees)
● persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

Users (providers and beneficiaries) and uses (purposes) of validation of transversal competences	
What type of organisations offer VNFIL for transversal competences and at which stages of guidance and validation processes?	There are no organisations offering specifically validation of transversal competences in Poland. Within the IQS, awarding bodies for market qualifications have the biggest potential to provide assessment of transversal competences, although there are several barriers for that to take place (see section 1., point 1.). In higher education, individual institutions committed to offering access to their study programmes via validation of non-formal and informal learning could also be interested in incorporating transversal competences into their processes (see section 1., point 2.). Schools have little to offer in respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning in general, although they do incorporate transversal competences in their teaching programmes based on core curricula (see section 1., point 3.). Guidance counsellors, especially those working within the public employment services, do provide identification and documentation of transversal competencies, although do not use frameworks, tools or methodologies dedicated specifically to this notion.
General awareness: Are there national campaigns to promote VNFIL service? How and where people can find information on this service?	Awareness raising activities related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning are conducted as part of the promotion of the IQS in general by the ministry coordinating the system, that is the Minister of Education and Science, the Educational Research Institute tasked by the minister coordinator with supporting the implementation of the IQS, and by individual awarding bodies for market qualification promoting validation services they offer.

Quality assurance	
Are quality assurance arrangements focused on VNFIL process (and supporting the implementation of relevant national strategies) in place? Is a specific organisation in charge of conducting quality assurance?	This section is structured according to the description of the four main legal provisions and policies functioning in Poland related to validation of non-formal and informal learning. 1. **Attaining 'market qualifications' introduced by the Integrated Qualification System (IQS)** The IQS includes internal and external quality assurance arrangements. Every awarding body for a market qualification must have an internal quality assurance system of validation and certification in place, which is then evaluated alongside other aspects as part of external quality assurance. The latter is conducted by institutions chosen to perform this task for a given market qualification by the relevant minister. These institutions are selected from a list of authorised external quality assurance entities. The list is managed by the minister coordinator of the IQS, who announces a call for accepting applications from institutions that would like to join this list at least once every three years. The relevant minister for a given qualification appoints an external quality assurance entity by signing an agreement. When choosing an entity, the minister takes into account the effectiveness and rationality of the use of existing resources and the principle of evenly dividing duties among the entities on the list. Additionally, a maximum of five entities from the list can be appointed as the external quality assurance entity for one market qualification. These institutions are required to

cooperate in order to ensure a consistent standard of quality for the certification of a given market qualification. An external quality assurance entity can be an institution or an individual conducting business activity that has at least 10 years of experience in conducting organised activities in a field of the economy, the labour market, in education or training. The entity cannot be an awarding body for the qualification whose quality it will be assessing, and it must have an internal quality assurance system in place as well as adequately trained personnel (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 35-35).

2. **Gaining access to study programmes by confirming learning outcomes in higher education**

Higher education institutions are directly responsible for the quality of the awarded qualifications and the study programmes leading to them. They are legally required to operate an internal quality assurance system. The purpose of the external quality assurance system in higher education is primarily to verify the functioning of the internal one. (...) As part of the external quality assurance higher education institutions are required by law to be assessed ex ante and ex post by the Polish Accreditation Committee (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna), which submits the results of its assessments to the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The Committee performs its activities in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015). Assessments can also be performed by institutions established by the academic community or by an international accreditation body (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 32).

3. **Extramural examinations in general education and VET**

Extramural examinations are supervised by the Central Examination Board. Its tasks include preparing examination materials, setting assessment guidelines, printing and distributing the materials and examination sheets, analysing examination results for the purpose of further research, and submitting reports on the aggregated results to the Minister of Education and Science on an annual basis. Detailed information about the organisation of examinations and necessary provisions, such as examination timetables, additional supplies or equipment, approved computer software or adaptations to the special needs of students, are updated annually and publicly available on the Central Examination Board's website. The Board prepares and publishes data from the examinations, which can be then used to evaluate the results and teaching effectiveness of a given school (e.g. by applying the educational value added method – EVA) (Gmaj et al. 2019, p. 31). Regional Education Authorities ensure compliance with these requirements.

ANNEX 2: GOOD PRACTICE CASES

1. **NADINE project** (Italy, Belgium, Greece, and Spain).

Focusing on the inclusion of migrants and refugees, the NADINE project[282] uses ICT-based solutions that will automatically adapt to the specificities of each person regarding his/her hard and soft skills. The project developed a comprehensive model of skills assessment and profile-building for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through an assessment procedure based on standardised tests, easily up-scaled and not too resource intensive, ensuring the validity and reliability of results. The project developed a comprehensive model of skills assessment and profiling, identifying the hard and soft skills needed in the labour market; as a result, the NADINE Universal Skills Framework for migrants and refugees was designed (see figure below).

Tools were created in 6 languages to measure selected hard and transferable soft skills, such as: 1) Work independently, 2) Make decisions independently, 3) Work in a structured way, 4) Solve problems, 5) Work with others / collaborate / network, 6) Work with people of different cultures / backgrounds, 7) Work with customers / clients, 8) Work as a leader / manager / supervisor, 9) Manage projects, 10) Work in stressful conditions / under time pressure, 11) Develop new ideas and turn them into action, 12) Inspire and enthuse others, and 13) Take responsibility for my own learning / development. Along with the standardised questionnaire, the project developed and tested the use of a set of serious games to measure, using artificial intelligence, the same skills measured with the questionnaire. Tetris and 2048 games were used to calculate with machine learning algorithm the similarity of the questionnaire skills results with the way users play the two games. This resulted in a new skills assessment procedure which is now able to report the entire skills profile without asking migrants to respond to the questionnaire skills assessment, with only few minutes of playing the two games.

Accuracy levels of the predicted skills scores based on the games are plus/minus 1 point (out of 10) of the questionnaire skills scores. One of the key innovations of NADINE is that it offers further development of transversal competences through a complete training/learning module for users; once the skills assessment is completed, users receive recommendations for personalised further training, and have access to a platform with all training/learning modules (21 trainings). The platform also includes an e-portfolio that permits to collect and value past experiences (education, work experience, extra work experience, skills, languages, digital skills), and to upload files in different formats to document also informal and non-formal experiences. The e-portfolio permits to generate a CV in pdf format, with the possibility to flexibly add and remove fields when printing the CV. As a further service to promote migrants' inclusion, NADINE offers personalised recommendations on job vacancies based on the skills profile obtained with either the games or the questionnaires.[283]

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[282] Nadine Project, https://platform.nadine-project.eu/
[283] TRANSVAL desk-based research

OVERVIEW OF THE NADINE FRAMEWORK FOR MIGRANTS' AND REFUGEES' UNIVERSAL SKILLS
1. **Language learning aptitude & literacy skills**
2. **Numeracy skills**
3. **Mechanical skills**
4. **ICT skills**
5. **Technical skills:** Dexterity, Accuracy, Spatial ability
6. **Interpersonal skills:** Social interaction/communication, Team working, Conscientiousness, Coping with authority, Intercultural competence, Extraversion
7. **Organisational skills:** Independent work, Organization, Work efficiency, Time management
8. **Cognitive/Analytical skills:** Decision making, Problem solving, Observational skills
9. **Personal skills:** Adaptability, Reliability, Willingness to learn, Stress tolerance
10. **Entrepreneurial – Intrapreneurial skills:** Creativity, Initiative, Managerial skills, Risk tolerance, Leadership

Source: TRANSVAL desk-based research

2. Competence Kaleidoscope (Austria)

Using Competence Cards as an assessment tool to work with migrants Competence Kaleidoscope,[284] based in Linz, **Austria**, started as a strategic partnership project implemented by four non-governmental European organisations – Akropolis (CZ), Genderove informacni centrum NORA (CZ), Migrare Zentrum für MigrantInnen (AT), and Miesto pod Slnkom (SK). The project was launched in 2015 and has been in place ever since. The main objective of the project is to develop, pilot and disseminate a new method of competence mapping which will benefit socially disadvantaged people and consequently, help them improve their situation on the labour market. Seen as a new method of competence mapping, the project showcases eight different modules covering a wide range of topics, from working on one's own biography and the self- and public image, to formulating goals and planning steps towards them. The greatest benefit of the method is to minimise the amount of written work for

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[284] Competence Kaleidoscope, www.competence-kaleidoscope.eu

clients which is crucial in working with the target group. The course consists of 32 hours divided into eight blocks of face-to-face sessions with homework based on the activities in the modules.

Module 1 (discover): This module introduces the topic of competences. Participants review their personal biographies, identify important life situations and derive certain competences and abilities from them.

Module 2 (explore): Formal and informal learning contexts are closely examined. The "competence cards" (© Bertelsmann-Stiftung) are introduced and the participants learn to work with them. Important terms for describing competences are introduced.

Module 3 (investigate): Participants identify their own personal core competences with the aid of the competence cards. Connecting abstract terms of competences with concrete actions helps in the understanding of these terms.

Module 4 (evolve): The chosen core competences are illustrated by achievements from the personal learning biographies.

Module 5 (develop): Based on the five core competences, matching professions and job profiles are identified by the group.

Module 6 (elaborate): Based on job research, professional goals are elaborated. Important aspects of goal achievement are discussed and steps to the goal are planned. Participants develop a career path and plan all necessary steps accordingly.

Module 7 (apply): This module is about job interviews. Common mistakes in CVs and job interviews are discussed.

Module 8 (celebrate): Participants present themselves and their competences and abilities. They get feedback from the group and the trainers. Together, they reflect on the whole process.

Among the methods and tools used in the modules, there is formative assessment focussed on individual development and personal learning biography; peer learning; biographical learning; etc.[285]

3. MOVE-EU (Belgium)

Also focussing on assessing transversal competences of migrants arriving in **FR-Belgium**, the project MOVE-EU[286] uses the RECTEC framework as the basis for their methodology and tools. Using peer-, guided-, and self-assessment, the project also offers guidance and counselling to candidates. This practice is intended for all professionals who are called upon to support the professional integration pathways of "new arrivals" or migrants: job seekers, trainers, assessors, etc. For practitioners, there are three main competences to develop: Evaluate to orientate; Recognise the skills of a migrant audience; and Train to develop targeted skills, notably language skills. For the migrant audience, which is also a group that benefits from this framework, the main potential uses are: Clarify the professional project; access (pre)qualifying training; and access employment directly. The practice is conducted in three steps:

1. During an individual interview with a guidance advisor, a pre-assessment of the transversal competences of the candidate takes place. It is followed by an initial assessment conducted by

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[285] TRANSVAL desk-based research
[286] MOVE EU, https://www.move-eu.org/index.php

the trainer in charge of the prequalifying training the candidate wants to follow. Both assessments use the same tool and reference issued from RECTEC. This approach makes it possible to define the priority individual objectives once each of the learners is assessed, for each of the skills envisaged, at a level of mastery that is specific to them.

2. An intermediate evaluation and assessment (during the training process). Assessment of the skill level during training is used to verify and adjust the learning dynamic, with a view to the objectives set out. It also makes it possible to quickly inform learners of their progress and to adapt the programme, methods, content, and timing of the training.

3. Final evaluation and assessment (at the end of the training process). It measures the achievement of the training objectives and the skill levels acquired by the learners at the end of the training. The final assessment takes place via the learner's self-assessment, the trainer's assessment and, where applicable, the assessment of a professional third party. The combination of the different final assessments and an action plan allows a course orientation for each trainee, according to the defined professional project, the skills acquired and those still to be developed in order to achieve the target professional objective.

MOVE-EU was financed through Erasmus+ and it's free of charge and available in the whole region of Wallonia.

4. "A Chance" (Poland)

"A Chance" comprises three stages of educational support. On stage 1, participants will benefit from an individual diagnosis of competences that includes an initial interview, competence tests to determine the candidate's level of basic skills, and a needs assessment. At this stage social competences, motivating factors, and possible barriers to participation in the project should be considered. Once the counsellor gives feedback and a plan for further action, the first stage ends with the preparation of an individual report. On stage 2, the participant receives educational support tailored to their needs and aiming at developing selected competences. As part of the project, models of educational support for selected target groups have been developed, based on selected standards of requirements for basic skills – i.e., ten sets of learning outcomes developed within the project (see box below); requirements standards developed by the grantee. After completing the educational support stage, the participant will have the opportunity to proceed to stage 3, validation of the learning outcomes. At this last stage, validation is used to check what the participant has learned in the previous process, as well as orientate his further professional, educational, and personal development. Throughout the project, the four stages of validation are covered: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification. A variety of methods could be used at each stage; the basic methods include tests, interviews, debate, presentations, observation, simulation, analysis of evidence and statements, skills audit. However, the methods should be accurately adjusted to the learning outcomes and adequately matched to the goals, needs, and abilities of candidates undergoing validation. They should also ensure that the results of validation carried out at different times and among different people are comparable.

"A Chance" project - Sets of learning outcomes

Ten sets of learning outcomes and their assessment criteria, as well as the requirements for the entities performing validation were developed by project experts. The sets of learning outcomes will be used by grantees. Based on the selected set, grant recipients will be able to diagnose a person's competences, determine a learning offer, and validate learning outcomes. The sets of learning outcomes were developed for levels 1 to 4 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF). Each set was formulated with a view to develop at least one of three basic skills. Moreover, all sets consider the development of social competences.

Sets developing literacy
- Set 1: Handling business and personal e-mail correspondence, PQF level 2
- Set 2: Writing official letters and completing official forms, PQF level 3
- Set 3: Writing cover letters for job applications and developing a CV, PQF level 3
- Set 4: Obtaining and processing useful information from various sources, PQF level 3
- Set 5: Obtaining and processing information from advertisements and promotions from various sources, PQF level 3

Sets developing digital skills
- Set 6: Using internet sites and social media, PQF level 3
- Set 7: Using internet services and platforms, PQF level 4
- Set 8: Using smartphones and/or tablets, PQF level 2

Sets developing digital numeracy
- Set 9: Planning and maintaining a household budget, PQF level 3
- Set 10: Calculating repair/construction costs and preparing for renovations, PQF level 3

Each set of learning outcomes can be modified and adapted to the needs of the selected institution and target group.

Source: TRANSVAL desk-based research

5. Regional examples of training for guidance and counselling practitioners (Italy)

Umbria region

In the Umbria Region, the CERTUM – Sistema di certificazione delle competenze e riconoscimento dei crediti formativi (System for the certification of competences and the recognition of credits) defined two units of competences that are at the basis of the training programme for practitioners developed by ARPAL Umbria:
- "To exercise the accompaniment and support to competences identification and prior learning transparency, according to the Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 30th June 2015, also for the purpose of the recognition of the training credits in the Umbria Region".
- "To exercise the planning and implementation of validation activities according to the Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 30th June 2015, also for the purpose of recognition of training credits in the Umbria Region".

The training and the related exams are the basic requirements for validation and guidance practitioners to be enrolled in the open public list of Practitioners authorised to undertake the functions overseeing the provision of identification and validation services, recognition of training

credits, and certification of skills.[287] The training courses are voluntary, and they do not represent either an obligation or a right to access the certification sessions. Some of the main topics covered in the training course are: Legislative Framework of Competences certification at Regional, National and European level; the guidance and validation process; the National/Regional repertoire; Principles and practices of training designing through unit of competences approach; Principle and trans-active techniques of formal, non-formal and informal learning identification; Role of the guidance and validation practitioners and the enabling procedures; Deontology principles and related behaviour with the candidates; Designing the evaluation process; Exams and tests designing; Practical exercise on the key phases of the process; Preparation to the qualifying examination. By directly experiencing this process, validation and guidance practitioners are able to consolidate or acquire the transversal competences required to better interact with candidates in the VNFIL process, especially if they have to conduct a formative assessment of non-formal and informal learning. Interpersonal communication skills, active listening, interviewing techniques, and positive attitudes towards people are some of the expected soft skills that are strengthened with this didactical approach.[288]

Piemonte Region

Under the current regional system, there are two competence profiles addressing guidance and validation practitioners:

- The Expert responsible of the certification process (Esperto in Tecniche di Certificazione) has the main role in the process and is registered in the official regional Register of Experts. The training comprises similar topics to the one in Umbria – e.g. European, national, and regional regulations framework; regional regulations, actors, procedures, instruments on validation services; case study, focus group, and simulations on validation; etc. Passing the final exam is a condition for becoming part of the Register and be authorised to release certifications.
- The Operator trained on certification (Operatore Adeguatamente Formato) has the role of keeping relations and direct contact with the candidates to validation, supporting them in the collection of documentation and in the tracing of their experience. The training for the Operator is up to the Expert's responsibility and includes knowing the regional repertory of professional profiles and competences; management of computer system instruments to track the services and its outputs; tailor-made solutions for the candidates' expectations.

While there are selected good practices, the Cedefop inventory highlights that in Italy the "need for fast and homogeneous training of operators involved in services for setting and maintaining good

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[287] In order to access training, individuals should fulfil the following conditions: • educational diploma or a qualification at least equal to level 4 EQF, along with relevant professional experience (of at least five consecutive years) documented through contracts in compliance with the legislation in force at the time of the service, relating to one or more of the following roles: career guidance, job supply-demand matching, selection of personnel, selection of participants in formal and non-formal learning paths, and evaluation of learning. • three-year, or specialist/master's degree in psychological, sociological, and pedagogical disciplines, along with professional experience as stated previously, carried for at least one year; or even if not continuous, in the last five. • academic courses in the context of degree or master courses provided by public universities on transparency and validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning.
[288] TRANSVAL desk-based research

quality standards at a national level"[289] is a critical issue to address in order to strengthen the VNFIL system.

6. Iceland – validation of general employability competences in adult education

The validation process is described in the report "Criteria for assessing Transversal Competences", published under the VISKA project.[290]

Before starting the validation process, a screening interview allows counsellors to interview individuals beforehand to inform them about the project and the process so they can make informed decision (Source: TRANSVAL desk-based research).

1. **Introduction of project and Portfolio /documentation** (Teamwork 1) – The purpose of the process is explained, and the quality framework and competence standards are introduced. There is always access to a counsellor who can guide and support through the whole process. Exercises and group work that help the participants to reflect on diverse experiences are utilised.

2. **Documentation – worksheet** (Teamwork 2) – In the documentation stage, participants write down experience from work, private life, and leisure activities to document competences. Appropriate documents are also gathered e.g., recommendations from employers, job descriptions, diplomas, certificates, samples, and project work. Preparation for the competence standards/self-assessment. This part is formative and divergent (open and inclusive with regard to documentation of overall experience and competences) in nature.

3. **Self-assessment** (Teamwork 3) – competence standards introduced one by one, participants identify their competences according to the standards, both in groups and individually. Two workbooks are used with detailed description of the competencies, linked with examples from work life and personal life. Examples are drawn from context-related competences. The participants describe own experiences to link with the competences, to figure out their level. This part is convergent in nature, meaning that the candidates assess themselves against specific criteria.

4. **Self-assessment** (Teamwork 4) – self-assessment form is completed, which is used by assessors in the assessment interview. Preparations for the final interview.

5. **Final assessment interview** (individually with the counsellor). Assessors read the participant's documentation. They have also been involved in guiding people in the documentation phase at group meetings, so they have an insight into where people stand. Often there are two assessors, one who has been extensive labour market experience (possibly HR or middle manager) and knowledge of the labour market and standards and one who is an expert in soft skills, often a career counsellor (methods and tools – focus on active listening, open questions). Participants

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[289] Perulli, E. (2018). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, Update Country Report: Italy. Cedefop. Available at:
https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Italy.pdf
[290] Criteria for Assessing Transversal Skills, 2018, https://viskaproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/D3.2-Criteria-for-assessing-TS.pdf.

are guided in preparing case studies from own experience as preparation for the assessment interview. This is a formative assessment, in which the discussion with the candidates will lead them to find ways forward either for competence development or towards job applications.

As for certification/recognition of results, participants receive a description of competences assessed certificate along with a diploma. Finally, a follow-up interview is conducted individually by a career guidance personnel (individually with 1 or 2 as needed). The interview focuses on the participant's strengths and interests; the results are reviewed, along with goal setting and action planning. For example, educational information is provided, guidance regarding job search, communicational skills discussed if needed. Referral to other systems may be provided, e.g., Jobseeker into rehabilitation system.

7. "Career Direction" project (Poland)

The Regional Labour Office in Krakow (Małopolska Voivodeship) has implemented since 2016 the project "Career Direction" ("Kierunek Kariera")[291] using the skills audit method as the main validation tool. The project aims to identify the various competences that a candidate can develop according to their needs and goals, potentially including transversal competences in the process such as language and digital skills.

People in employment can benefit from this initiative, provided that they are in some way connected to the Małopolska Voivodeship (living, working or being educated within its territory). Moreover, participants must either have completed primary or secondary education if they are between the ages of 25-50, or be over 50 years of age to be able to take part in the project, regardless of the level of education. Although there are no fees involved in the provision of advisory services, if the candidates desire to move forward onto the training stage of the project they will have to partly cover the cost of it.[292]

During the first stage, biographical and behavioural interviews are the main tools used according to the skills audit method with the support of an experienced guidance counsellor.[293] While working with a career counsellor, the participant has the opportunity to systematise their own educational and professional experience, identify their strengths in the labour market, analyse their current professional life and determine which further actions should be taken to improve their professional situation. The participant can also create a portfolio to document their learning outcomes, as an additional diagnostic activity in this process. The Career Audit consists of three stages:

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[291] Kierunek Kariera, https://kierunek.pociagdokariery.pl/
[292] TRANSVAL desk-based research
[293] Bodzińska-Guzik, E et al., 2015, Metoda Bilansu Kompetencji [Skills Audit Method], Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych), https://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/publikacje/PDF/METODA_BILANSU_KOMPETENCJI.pdf

- An initial stage, where the candidate registers in the system and takes part in the advisory and recruitment discussion. A Project Participant Card is filled out, including information about the person's educational background, completed courses and training, professional experience, non-business activities, and interests.

- A research stage, where the counsellor conducts a diagnosis based on the Skills Audit Method, supplemented with additional tools in the form of questionnaires or tests (e.g. Competence Test Tool (CTT), Questionnaire on Professional Interests (QPI), Schein's Career Anchors questionnaire or other analogous tool for testing the client's system of values and sources of motivation). The audit lasts about 4.5–5 hours and is most often held over 2 to 4 meetings (not including the advisory and recruitment discussion). Sometimes, however, even 6 meetings are held.

- The summary stage, where the results of the joint work are discussed, and the candidate receives their documentation. This discussion, lasting from 1 to 1.5 hours, is a summary of the conclusions drawn from the interviews and tests taken. At this stage, an Individual Development Plan is made, and the client is provided with a document called Feedback, summarising the in-depth Career Audit.

Once the in-depth analysis phase is completed, the counsellor will provide feedback and an Individual Development Plan of further action for professional and/or personal development, including further education, a change of jobs, starting a business, etc. A highlight of this initiative is the emphasis put on having qualified career counsellors. All of them have had a training of about 35 hours of group classes and, on average, from two to three individual meetings with the coordinator of the project. During the training, counsellors were thoroughly acquainted with the process of conducting the Career Audit. Counsellors also obtained the necessary authorisation required to use additional diagnostic tools for the Career Audit.[294]

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[294] TRANSVAL desk-based research

ANNEX 3: METHODOLOGY OF EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

METHODOLOGY OF EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

In order to cross-validate the desk research, an online survey of European professionals in validation of skills or competences was conducted. The survey focuses on the approach to and importance of VNFIL of transversal skills or competences. 179 professionals in validation of skills and competences completed the European stakeholder survey.

As outlined in Table 1, most of the respondents were VET providers, schools, private sector employers, non-profit sector employers or higher education institutions. More than half of the respondents work as a manager or educator, teacher, trainer or coach (see table 2). Table 3 shows that respondents working in 28 different countries in Europe responded to the survey.

Table 1: Types of organisations of respondents (N = 179)

Kind of organisation	Number of responses (in %)
Private sector employer	10.1
Public sector employer	5.6
Non-profit / 3rd sector employer	10.1
Guidance service provider	3.9
Public authority	3.9
School	11.2
Adult education centre	6.7
Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider	15.6
Higher education institution	10.1
National or regional agency for validation, certification or accreditation	3.9
Local or regional authority / policy maker	1.7
Other	17.3

Table 2: Occupations of respondents (N = 179)

Kind of occupation	Number of responses (in %)
Manager	27.9
Career guidance counsellor	9.5
VNFIL counsellor	1.1
Educator / teacher / trainer / coach	27.9
Examiner / assessor	1.1
Policy maker	2.2
Advisor	7.8
Employee for a social partner	2.2
Employee for a trade union	0.6
Other	19.6

Table 3: Countries (of respondents N = 179)

Country	Number of responses (in %)
Austria	12.9
Belgium	4.5
Bulgaria	0.6
Croatia	0.6
Czech Republic	0.6
Denmark	1.7
Finland	3.9
France	4.5
Germany	1.7

Greece	5.6
Ireland	0.6
Italy	12.6
Lithuania	1.1
Luxembourg	0.6
Malta	1.1
Netherlands	10.6
North Macedonia	0.6
Norway	0.6
Poland	4.5
Portugal	19.6
Romania	0.6
Russia	0.6
Serbia	0.6
Slovakia	0.6
Spain	7.3
Sweden	0.6
Switzerland	0.6
United Kingdom	1.7

Recognition and focus of VNFIL on Transversal skills or competences

Based on the results of the European Stakeholder Survey it becomes clear that most of the professionals (circa 68%) in Europe do not think sufficient attention has been paid to VNFIL of transversal competences (see table 4). On the contrary most of the professionals themselves (circa 68%) do pay attention to the development of transversal skills or competences during guidance of learners (see table 5).

Table 4: Sufficient attention for VNFIL of transversal skills or competences in one's country (N = 179)

	Number of responses (in %)
Yes	18.4
No	68.2
I don't know	13.4

Table 5: Support of development of transversal skills or competences during guidance of learners (N = 179)

	Number of responses (in %)
Yes	68.2
No	5.0
I do not guide learners	26.8

Most of the professionals responding to the survey agree that validation of transversal skills and competences is important for both working life and the learner's personal development (circa 77%) (table 6). Likewise, most professionals (57%) agree that the focus on transversal skills an competences is important both to meet labour market needs as well as to support the learner's personal development (see table 7).

Table 6: Most important reason of validation of transversal skills or competences (N = 179)

	Number of responses (in %)
For the learner's personal development	8.9
In order to use specific transversal skills or competences in a working life context	14.0

	Number of responses (in %)
Both reasons	77.1

Table 7: Focus of transversal skills or competences (N = 179)

	Number of responses (in %)
In order to meet labour market needs	10.1
In order to support learner's personal development	16.2
Both perspectives	57.0
Not applicable	16.8

To summarise, based on the results of the European Stakeholder Survey, there is broad agreement on the necessity to pay more attention to guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences. Furthermore, most professionals underline the importance of VNFIL of transversal or competences for both working life and personal development.

Challenges

Respondents indicated that most of the challenges related to guidance and validation of transversal skills and competences focus on recognition, the need for clear definitions and a common understanding of transversal skills and competences across sectors, and the need for visibility and awareness (table 8).

Table 8: Top 10 challenges concerning providing validation of transversal skills / competences (N = 307 answers)

Kind of challenge	Number of responses (in %)
Recognition of added value	14.7
Definitions and common understanding (among sectors)	8.8
Policy and reference framework (local, regional, national, European)	7.8

Visibility and awareness in addition to promotion	**6.2**
Competences of practitioners	**5.5**
Transferability and adaptability to context of life and work	**5.2**
Motivation of learners	**4.6**
Measurability of data	**3.9**
Validation process and belonging instructions	**3.6**
Assessment standards and tools	**3.3**