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Are we going informal?

Diffusion and recognition of informal and non-formal
learning in Europe

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Validation of informal and non-formal learning in Europe, between new regulation paths and occupational transitions' organisation

The ancient terms of exchange in employment relationships – i.e. subordination for security — have broken down.

New terms of exchange need to be worked out in view to establish a new occupational status across the entire range of occupational transitions that people have to face (Supiot, 1998).

New legal tools must be created to secure these transitions.

Competencies individuation, development, recognition, and transferability are part of that new set of legal tools, but they are still NOT considered as a crucial element of employment relationship and as important terms on which a new exchange (at individual and collective level) can be built.



Contextual factors that are pushing governments in different part of the world and international institutions towards a growing attention to this topic:

- **demographic decline**
- **mismatch between demand and supply in the labour market**
- **growing difficulty in securing the labour market integration of young people**
- **geographical mobility and immigration flows**



WHAT WE MEAN with validating non formal and informal learning?

- **all competences are recognised** to access further qualifications and better job opportunities
- **labour market, education, training are connected**, based on the logic of *learning outcomes*
- **transparency in the labour market and in internal careers**
- **support to occupational and geographical mobility**

WHICH KEY ELEMENTS?

- Learning outcomes approach
- National Qualification Frameworks
- Stakeholders involvement
- Efficient implementation system



Notwithstanding efforts by EU institutions, progress in validation has been **uneven, irregular and slow** in EU countries (Cedefop, 2014):

Comprehensive strategy in place	Strategy in place but some elements missing
FI, FR, ES	CZ, DK, EE, IT, IS, LU, LV, NO, NL, PL, RO
AT, BE-Flanders, CH, CY, DE, EL, LI, LT, MT, PT, SI, SK, TR	BE-Wallonia, BG, HR, HU, IE, SE, UK- E&NI, UK-Scotland, UK-Wales
Strategy is in development	No strategy in place

- Low stakeholders involvement
- Lack of uniformity in procedures
- In 17 countries a link between validation practices and NQF had not yet been put in place



How the issue has been addressed till now by EU institutions?

Situated at the crossroad between different areas of regulation at a EU and at a national level (educational policies, labour market regulation, free movement of workers).

Lack of regulation? OMC, shift to to “individual discretionary policies”, risk of controversial results, inequality, low “conversion” by relevant actors at a national level.

Issue stuck in the frame of “discretionary” educational policies and in educational debate.

2001	2002	2004	2008	2009	2009	2012	2005 -2015
EC: lifelong learning defined as all activities in formal, non formal, informal sector	EU Social Partners Framework of actions for LLL	EC: Common principle for validation	EQF RECOMMENDATION	ECVET and EQAVET RECOMMENDATIONS	EU Guidelines for validation of non formal informal learning	RECOMMENDATION ON VALIDATION OF NON FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING	European Sectoral Social Dialogue Initiatives (Framework Agreements)



Council Recommendation of December 2012

Encourages a threefold process encompassing **individuation, validation and certification**, underlying the **role of publicly authorised bodies in the whole process towards the final formal recognition**, which importance is strongly emphasized.

Validation main purpose → access to higher educational credentials.

Promotion of an **individual use of “informative” EU tools by companies and citizens** for transparency purposes.

Recommendation points out that employers **should promote and facilitate** the identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired at work, but doesn't set precise role/responsibilities.



A LOOSE APPROACH



TRANSPPOSED INTO NATIONAL LEGISLATIONS



Limited participation by companies and social partners
Derive towards a formalistic logic

Primary interest of **EU institutions** is assuring formal qualification recognition (in view to create a EQF), more than promoting the value of validation of non-formal learning in itself.

Primary aim of **individuals** entering into a validation procedure is not necessarily to obtain a higher qualification but to make their skills visible, for careers' protection and personal development purposes.

Difference between **formative** and **summative** dimension of validation



FORMATIVE DIMENSION deals with the effects of validation on people employability, or the “value” that assessed skills can assume in the internal or in the external labour market: assessing competences as an important element of the employment relationship and of Active Labour Market Policies.

SUMMATIVE DIMENSION concerns the possibility that competences assessed can be recognised and referred to the formal qualification systems (EQF logic)

Both the dimensions are crucial and interrelated, but an excessive focus on final certification can lead to forget the importance of the formative dimension of validation in itself.



Considering identification, validation and certification as a single process has brought to a **disproportioned emphasis on final certification** (managed by public or authorized bodies) and to a few attention to the importance of individuation and assessment of competences, also in the workplace, **underestimating the role of companies and pushing validation outside the employment relationship.**

At the same time, **validation is not adequately valued in ALMP**, as they tend to promote an immediate insertion which rarely pass through the obtainement of a full qualification via validation procedures.



The approach to **National Qualification Frameworks** is also an issue

- According to Cedefop (2015), only 7 countries in Europe have a fully operational NQF
- In most cases NQFs are being implemented in response to EU institutions request to link national qualifications to EQF
- Most NQFs fail to cover qualifications resulting from informal and non formal learning

Also in this case an answer can be found in the approach to NQF. Young (2005) distinguishes between:

- “**frameworks of communication**” with a prevalent informative function
- “**transformative frameworks**” aimed at transforming educational systems and at linking them to labour market

EU NQFs set after EQF Recommendation of 2008 fall mostly into the first category, despite the definition of NQF in the Recommendation refers to *transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.*



Limits of the summative approach: interrelation with other policy areas and transitions' regulation.

a) Free movement of workers and professional qualification recognition (Directive 2013/55/EU of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC)

*“Any compensation measure foreseen for professional recognition in a Member State should be proportionate and, in particular, take account of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by the applicant in the course of his professional experience or through lifelong learning, **formally validated to that end by a relevant body**” (Art. 14)*

Possible imbalance between countries with different level of development of validation systems: professionals coming from advanced countries will have more chances of recognition without compensative measures. Inclusion of professional qualification in NQFs is also an issue.



b) Youth employment policies (EYS, EAfA, EYG)

2006 Council Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European Youth field and 2009 EU Strategy for Youth call for better recognition and validation of skills acquired through non-formal learning

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) calls for a system of recognised qualifications and competences which may allow access to higher education and life-long learning

Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee explicitly includes validation of informal and non-formal learning among policies suggested to member states

The role of validation is limited in all these policy fields: very few EYG national implementation plans include validation



c) ALMP for long term unemployed

2015 EC proposal for a Council recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed recommends employment services to provide **individual assessment** covering previous career and employability prospects. Also the proposal of a **job integration agreement**, aimed at setting explicit goals and obligations for unemployed and employment service, **should include validation of non formal and informal learning**.

As showed by the analysis carried out by the EC, in EU countries individualized services such as assessment and profiling are not always accessible to long-term unemployed.

On the other side a work-first approach seems to prevail when it comes to consider measures linked to access to unemployment benefits (OECD, 2015). In few systems previous work, skills and education are taken into account in demanding occupational mobility.

No use of validation for determining training offer or “suitable job offer” for unemployed.



Are we going informal? Actual barriers and (possible) future directions

1) Loose approach, low interconnection between policy fields and formalistic approach, pushing validation outside employment relationship and career's paths, could be overcome by the means of **amendments to the 2012 Recommendation** aiming at:

- enforcing and clarifying employers' and social partners role in the process and in the system
- supporting the creation of transformation/regulatory NQFs
- clearly distinguishing between validation and certification and supporting the formative dimension of validation
- promoting financial support dedicated for these policies
- promoting a stronger link with AMPL and initiatives in the field of youth employment

2) Low stakeholders' participation and separation between validation in enterprises and public system are determined not only by a formalistic regulatory approach, but also by mutual mistrust:



- most employers object to making the recognition procedure official because they are afraid of having to increase the remuneration of successful candidates
- on the side of employees, recognising non-formal and informal learning can be linked to the idea of a personal assessment, with the employer controlling who learns what, when and where
- public/private cooperation suffers the same prejudices, with employers fearing the public value of the certification and public control

Comparative analysis show that **collective agreements can have an important role**, as they can promote the use of validation, improve the transparency of its meaning and value, also pointing out the distinction between *validation, qualification and certification*.

Consequently, at a EU level, the **actions pursuit by Social partners in the frame of Sectoral dialogue** should be better evaluated to see if and in what measure these efforts are coordinated with EU institutions initiatives and can complement them and which impact they can have at a national level.

Social partners participation in public systems is also crucial but now limited.