



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training



# Monitoring the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning

Thematic report for the 2016 update  
of the European inventory on validation



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# Foreword

There is an overwhelming consensus on the importance of making visible the knowledge, skills and competences gained through life and work experience. To value what they have learned, people should be able to demonstrate what they have learned in all settings in life and to use this in their career and for further education and training.

This is why validation of non-formal and informal learning can make an essential contribution to the EU ambition of achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as set by the Europe 2020 strategy. Its impact can be significant in better matching of skills and labour demand, promoting transferability of skills between companies and sectors and supporting mobility across the European labour market. It can also contribute to fighting social exclusion by providing a way for early school leavers, unemployed individuals and other groups at risk, particularly low-skilled adults, to improve their employability.

This is one of a series of four thematic reports prepared within the framework of the 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory, together with the European guidelines, is a major tool supporting the implementation of the 2012 recommendation on validation that calls on Member States to establish, by 2018, validation arrangements allowing individuals to identify, document, assess and certify their competences to obtain a qualification (or parts of it).

The thematic reports take a closer look at specific aspects that are particularly relevant for the development of validation arrangements in Europe. They have contributed to the development of the country report updates, which will be available at Cedefop's webpage at the end of 2016. The reports treat the following themes:

- (a) validation in the care and youth work sectors: this looks into how validation arrangements link to specific sectors of care and youth work;
- (b) monitoring validation: this provides an overview of the way the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning is recorded across Europe;
- (c) funding validation: this presents an overview of funding sources for validation of non-formal and informal learning and discusses associated issues such as sustainability and accessibility of validation arrangements;
- (d) validation and open educational resources (OER): this focuses on validation of learning acquired through OER, for instance through participation in massive open online courses.

The thematic reports are a source of information to support dialogue between the different stakeholders in developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to assist Member States in thinking European but acting locally, so that more learners and workers provide new skills to support competitiveness.

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# Introduction

This is one of a series of thematic reports prepared for the 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning ('the inventory'). Its purpose is to provide a picture of the monitoring of the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) <sup>(1)</sup> across Europe and to explore the extent to which data are available on different aspects of validation in different education sectors.

## 1.1. Monitoring to support effective implementation

In the context of this report, the monitoring of VNFIL refers to the arrangements in place to provide an overview of the take-up of VNFIL at regional and/or national level: comprehensive statistics, based on aggregated data collected by all providers of VNFIL.

Collection of statistical information and monitoring of VNFIL arrangements fulfils several objectives. One of these is to take stock of, and support progress in, establishing VNFIL arrangements. Another objective is to improve understanding of the impact of VNFIL on individual participants and evaluate to what extent VNFIL arrangements contribute to desired goals, such as reducing skills mismatches, support employment and improving the qualification levels of the workforce.

The Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the EU, 2012) recalls the importance of these aspects as it urges Member States to report on progress in VNFIL, although it does not provide specific guidance on data collection and monitoring systems.

In a similar vein, the Unesco guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (Unesco, 2012) recommend putting in place effective administrative processes to

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<sup>(1)</sup> The report does not cover the recognition of prior formal learning, including the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad.

support the implementation of recognition, validation and accreditation, as well as recording results. The Unesco guidelines also recommend the use of cost-benefit analyses to develop evidence on the benefits of recognition, validation and accreditation for individuals, enterprises, education institutions and for society as a whole.

While measuring the number of users and achievements linked to VNFIL is important, previous editions of the European inventory, as well as other sources of comparative literature in the field (OECD, 2010), agreed that evidence on the use of VNFIL remained scarce and patchy.

According to the national reports produced for the 2014 edition of the inventory, limited evidence is collected and published on the take-up of VNFIL in most countries. Where available, information often referred to a particular validation arrangement; the overall level of implementation of VNFIL across the country could not be easily monitored due to the fragmentation of VNFIL arrangements.

## 1.2. Remit of the report and sources

The purpose of this report is to address gaps in evidence highlighted by previous versions of the inventory and improve understanding of national arrangements for the monitoring of VNFIL. The report focuses on process and systems for data collection and centralisation, and does not describe actual trends in the take-up of VNFIL (to be covered in the 2016 synthesis report of the inventory).

The report builds on previous editions of the inventory (2010, 2014) and synthesises information provided by national experts working on the 2016 edition. National experts were asked to report whether data on the take-up of VNFIL arrangements are compiled at national level (or regional level, where relevant) to support the monitoring of VNFIL, and, where relevant, which type of data and in which sectors. National experts also investigated factors impeding comprehensive monitoring of VNFIL, as well as developments since publication of the 2014 European inventory. The structure of the questionnaire used by national experts to collect information is available in Annex 2.

Research focused on monitoring systems at national (or regional) level, rather than data collection at the level of the individual VNFIL provider. Given the variety of VNFIL arrangements in place across Europe, it is not possible within the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive description of how data are collected on the ground. A few examples describing what type of data

are collected at provider level for some forms of VNFIL arrangements are given in Annex 1.

Information on monitoring arrangements for VNFIL is not always available through desk research; some was collected through interviews and exchange of emails with representatives of authorities and institutions in charge of VNFIL, especially in relation to recent developments. Reasonable care has been used to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information supplied. However, the report should not be seen as a comprehensive overview of VNFIL monitoring systems but an indicative mapping of existing arrangements and deficiencies. Evidence is particularly scarce on obstacles impeding the development of monitoring arrangements and the use made of available data and monitoring systems.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 describes existing monitoring arrangements (at regional or national level) as identified by national experts by levels of education. Past editions of the inventory showed clearly that VNFIL arrangements leading to the award of a formal qualification, part of a formal qualification, or access to a formal education and training programme, tend to differ from sector to sector. Therefore, this section describes developments by level of education (general education, initial vocational education and training (VET), continuing VET and higher education (HE)). It highlights examples of how data are being compiled in each sector and/or recent developments. Chapter 2 also covers VNFIL procedures not linked to formal education and training programmes (processes such as skills audits or competence portfolios).

Chapter 3 discusses the main gaps identified so far in relation to the monitoring of VNFIL procedures across Europe (both VNFIL arrangements linked to formal qualifications and education and training programmes, and not related to formal qualifications). The main factors impeding the centralisation of data are also discussed in this section and illustrated with country examples. Assessing the impact of VNFIL on users poses particular challenges which are also examined. This section also provides includes a discussion on the use of indicators to measure performance.

Chapter 4 outlines identified barriers and enablers in relation to the development of monitoring systems for VNFIL. Chapter 5 summarises the conclusions and key messages and makes recommendations for VNFIL stakeholders for monitoring system development.

### 1.2.1. Terminology

For the purpose of clarity, in this report the following definitions are used:

- (a) general education (GE): general compulsory/upper secondary;
- (b) IVET: vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life. Vocational education is defined as education and training that aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market. Some training undertaken after entry into working life may be considered as initial training (e.g. retraining); initial education and training can be carried out at any level in general or vocational education (full-time school-based or alternance training) pathways or apprenticeship (Cedefop, 2014);
- (c) CVET: education or training after initial education and training, or after entry into working life, aimed at helping individuals to improve or update their knowledge and/or skills, acquire new skills for a career move or retraining, or continue their personal or professional development (Cedefop, 2014);
- (d) adult education: general or vocational education provided for adults after initial education and training for professional and/or personal purposes: general education for adults in topics of particular interest to them (as in open universities); compensatory learning in basic skills which individuals may not have acquired earlier in their initial education or training (such as literacy, numeracy); access to qualifications not gained, for various reasons, in initial education and training; acquire, improve or update knowledge, skills or competences in a specific field, which is continuing education and training. Adult education is close to, but not synonymous with, continuing education and training (Cedefop, 2014).

# VNFIL monitoring across education levels

This section provides an overview of existing monitoring arrangements across Member States, based on the information collected by national experts. Section 2.1 provides a general overview. The remaining subsections explore monitoring systems in general education, vocational education and training (initial and continuing), adult education and higher education, and other forms of VNFIL arrangements not linked to formal education and training such as competence portfolios and skills audits.

The data presented in Section 2.2 are based on country expert responses to two separate questions:

- (a) in relation to each validation procedure, please describe what indicators are available, such as participation by number of applicants, gender, highest level of education achieved;
- (b) how is validation success measured in your country?

## 2.1. Current national and regional monitoring

Table 1 summarises where data on the take-up of VNFIL are currently compiled at either the national or regional level. Table 2 provides a more detailed overview and also indicates the name of the VNFIL arrangements concerned.

For each of the education sectors considered, data centralisation only occurs in a few countries with relevant VNFIL arrangements. Monitoring systems are most developed in relation to VNFIL procedures in place in IVET, general education (secondary level) and higher education.

**Table 1. Countries with VNFIL arrangements by sector of education and for which centralised data are available**

	Number of countries with VNFIL arrangements in place in this sector	Number of countries with VNFIL procedures in place in this sector and for which centralised data are available
General education (secondary level)	16	8 (BE-FL, DE, DK, IS, NL, NO, PL, PT)
Initial VET	27	12 (AT, BE-FL, CH, DE, FI, FR, LI, LU, LV, NO, PL, PT)
Continuing VET	25	8 (BE-FR, CZ, DK, FI, LV, MT (childcare sector only), NO, ES)
Adult education	15	5 (AT, BE-FR, IE, IS, LV)
Higher education	23	7 (AT, FR, BE-FR, LV, NO, UK-England and Northern Ireland, UK-Wales)

NB: The number of countries refers to the number of reports produced for the inventory (for Belgium, two different country reports are produced covering French and Flemish speaking communities; in the UK, three country reports are produced, covering England and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales; 35 country reports are produced in total).

Source: Cedefop, based on national experts' input.

Table 2 shows that, in most countries, data are not compiled in all sectors for which VNFIL arrangements are in place but only in specific sectors. As examples, in England and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland and Wales, VNFIL arrangements are in place in all five sectors of education considered, but mechanisms for centralised data collection are only in place for HE. In Finland, data are collected on the use of the competence-based qualifications system (which embeds validation as the prior learning of participants is systematically assessed) but no data centralisation occurs in HE. In Latvia, information collected by the State Service of Education Quality is not comprehensive, so levels are not covered to the same extent.

In contrast, France has a comprehensive monitoring system covering multiple sectors. A single type of arrangement called VAE (*validation des acquis de l'expérience*) is applicable to different types of qualifications. A similar approach is used to aggregate national-level statistics for the different forms of qualifications covered; however, current statistics do not capture all users of VAE and attempts are being made to develop more comprehensive databases. The current monitoring system and recent developments in France are presented in more detail in Box 1.



**Box 1. *Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)* for qualifications listed in the national repertory of vocational qualifications, France****The scope of *validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)***

France's current legal framework in relation to VNFIL dates back to 2002 and its VNFIL system can be characterised as a mature system. The procedure known as VAE (*validation des acquis de l'expérience*) can lead to the award of a full qualification or credits. It is possible to undertake VAE for any qualification listed in the national repertory of vocational qualifications <sup>(2)</sup>, provided that the candidate fulfils the minimum requirements for eligibility. The national repertory covers the following types of qualification:

- initial VET;
- post-secondary VET;
- sectoral professional certificates delivered by chambers of commerce and trade;
- higher education.

**National statistics on VAE and exchange of information among ministries**

An inter-ministerial committee for the development of VAE (CIDVAE) manages a range of promotional activities relating to VAE, including coordination of statistical data collection.

The prime responsibility for data collection falls to the different institutions acting as VAE providers. Each body which may award a qualification through VAE is responsible for collecting and compiling data on it. However, to provide an overview of the number of users at the national level, data transmission protocols have been established since 2007 between the Ministry of Employment and other key ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministries of Health and Social Affairs, Department for Employment, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, and Ministry of Youth and Sports). A major gap in the current statistical system is the fact that, so far, data on qualifications awarded by chambers of commerce and trade through VAE are not centralised.

DARES <sup>(3)</sup>, a research institute within the Ministry of Employment, compiles annual data received from various ministries and also prepares summary tables.



<sup>(2)</sup> Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles: <http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/>

<sup>(3)</sup> DARES: <http://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/dares-etudes-et-statistiques/>

Data sets based on the information collected by ministries and covering 2007-13 are publicly available on the DARES website, while the national information portal of VAE also provides links to available statistics. National data sets currently available are:

- participation (total and by ministry, per year): number of eligible candidates (those who fulfil the required conditions to apply for VAE); number of candidates assessed by socioeconomic characteristics (sex, age, labour market status); and level of qualifications in the French qualification framework that is the object of the VAE procedure;
- achievement (total and by ministry, per year): number of candidates who have received full qualification; partial awards are not covered.

DARES also publishes annual reports (including more detailed information including data on validation users by qualification for the most common qualifications). The latest available annual report (2014) covers 2012.

### **Recent developments linked to the Law of 12 March 2014 and decree of 12 November 2014**

Currently, national statistics on VAE do not allow detailed analysis of pathways followed by VAE candidates (for example, time spent to obtain a qualification or cost of the procedure), but it is expected that the validation monitoring should be developed and harmonised at regional level. A working group including key VAE stakeholders from three regions (Rhône-Alpes, Bretagne and Lorraine) and the Ministry of Employment met three times in 2013 to discuss technical solutions which have been implemented to develop regional databases on use of VAE.

A legal basis for VAE monitoring, defining clearer responsibilities, has recently been adopted. Article 6 of the law of 12 March 2014 introduced new provisions in the Labour Code, according to which the regional committees on employment, training and vocational guidance (Crefop) and the national council for employment, training and vocational guidance (Cnefop) are in charge of statistical monitoring of VAE use. The decree of 12 November 2014 has also introduced provisions in the regulatory part of the Labour Code. As part of their responsibilities mentioned in articles L. 6423-1 and L. 6423-2 of the Labour Code, the regional committees of employment, training and vocational guidance and the national council on employment, training and vocational guidance are tasked to undertake statistical monitoring of VAE candidates from the beginning to the end of the procedure (in case of partial validation, until awarded credits remain valid). Anonymous data have to be submitted by VAE providers



(both public and private organisations). The national council for employment, training and vocational guidance ensures harmonisation of categories of data collected, to allow the monitoring of candidates and their pathways.

Source: Cedefop, based on: DARES publications on VAE (<http://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/dares-etudes-et-statistiques/>); VAE online portal (<http://www.vae.gouv.fr/>); annex to the preparatory document for the adoption of the 2015 national budget (République Française, 2015, p. 55); exchange of emails with the French Ministry of Employment.

Table 2. **Availability of centralised data across different sectors/validation procedures**

Country	General/ secondary education	Initial VET (secondary and post- secondary)	Continuing VET	Adult education	Higher education	Competence portfolios, skills audits
AT		Apprentice- ship-leave exam		Validation at the Academy of Continuing Education	Access: 'non- traditional HE entrance exams'	
BE-F	Access to secondary education		No validation			
BE-W	No validation	No validation	Data from the Consortium for the Validation of Competences		VAE at Hautes Ecoles	
BG	No validation			No validation	No validation	
CH	No validation	Only in the canton of Geneva				
CY	No validation		No validation	No validation		
CZ	No validation	No validation	Certificates awarded in relation to NSK vocational qualifications	No validation	No validation	

Country	General/ secondary education	Initial VET (secondary and post- secondary)	Continuing VET	Adult education	Higher education	Competence portfolios, skills audits
DE	External examinations	External examination		No validation		ProfilPASS
DK		No validation		No validation		
EE	No validation		No validation	No validation		
EL	No validation				No validation	
ES	No validation		Validation calls from the National Institute for Qualifications	No validation		
FI			Competence based qualifications system or CBQ			
FR	No validation	VAE	No validation	No validation	VAE in HE; Access: VAP	Skills audit
HR	No validation				No validation	
HU	No validation	No validation	No validation	No validation		
IE	No validation			Writeon		
IS			No validation		No validation	
IT	No validation	No validation	No validation	No validation	No validation	Libretto formativo
LI	No validation		No validation	No validation		
LT	No validation			No validation	No validation	
LU	No validation	VAE	No validation		No validation	Skills audit for jobseekers
LV	N/A	Validation for professional qualifications	Validation for professional qualifications	Validation for professional qualifications	Validation for professional qualifications	Validation for professional qualifications

Country	General/ secondary education	Initial VET (secondary and post- secondary)	Continuing VET	Adult education	Higher education	Competence portfolios, skills audits
<b>MT</b>	No validation	No validation		No validation	No validation	
<b>NL</b>		Some data available on EVC from one-off reports	Some data available on EVC from one-off reports	No validation	Some data available on EVC from one-off reports	
<b>NO</b>	Upper secondary education	Upper secondary education	Post-secondary: admission only	No validation	Access and exemptions	
<b>PL</b>		Extramural exams		No validation		
<b>PT</b>	Access to secondary education	Access to secondary education	No data available	No data available	No data available	
<b>RO</b>		No validation		No validation	No validation	
<b>SE</b>						
<b>SI</b>				No validation		
<b>SK</b>	No validation	No validation		No validation	No validation	
<b>UK-ENI</b>					APEL	
<b>UK-S</b>					APEL	
<b>UK-W</b>	No validation				APEL	

NB: Cells with no data mean validation arrangements are in place but information on availability of centralised data is not reported/available.

Source: Cedefop, based on data from country experts.

## 2.2. Compulsory and secondary general education

According to the information collected, 16 of the countries reviewed as part of the inventory have some validation arrangements in place at this level. Eight countries compile data on take-up at regional or national level (BE-Flanders, DE, DK, IS, NL, NO, PL, PT).

Countries with some form of monitoring system are Belgium-Flanders (validation giving access to credits/qualifications), Germany ('external' examinations), Iceland, Norway (for validation procedures supporting access to secondary education), Poland and Portugal. Typically, the number of (successful) candidates and achievement is recorded; in some cases indicators are also collected on the characteristics of participants or of the procedure.

In Belgium-Flanders, the central examination commission for secondary education can award a recognised qualification or credits based on VNFIL or allow access to external examinations. The Flemish Department of Education collects data on participation (number of applications, by individual characteristics such as gender, age, city, field of study) and achievement (number of certificates or diplomas), which is compiled into annual reports; the latest available report covers 2014 <sup>(4)</sup>.

In Germany, the *Externenprüfung* (external exam) is managed by the education ministries of the Länder. Data are collected every year by the Länder on the number of persons taking this examination and successfully completing it, broken down by gender.

In Iceland, validation arrangements overseen by the national education and training service centre (ETSC) focus on individuals without completed upper secondary education. Data are gathered by the ETSC on the number of people who undergo validation, number of recognised units, number of subjects validated, number of hours used by assessors in assessment interviews, and number of interviews with counsellors. Information is also gathered on gender, age, workplace/work situation, ethnicity and education level of beneficiaries. The data collected offer a clear picture of the use of validation opportunities. The data are used to review the allocation of funding to validation activities and to measure the cost-effectiveness of the validation process.

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(<sup>4</sup>) Jaarverslag 2014 [Annual report 2014]:  
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/secundair/examencommissie/publicaties/>  
In addition to annual reports, a multiannual report for the period 2005-10 was published.

In Poland, ‘extramural’ (external) exams are organised at the level of primary and lower secondary school, upper secondary school and basic vocational school (ISCED 3). The central examination board has collected national level data since 2012, on the number of participants in these external examinations such as the number of applicants, the number of absences, the number of candidates undertaking the external examinations (for the first time or not) and the results, i.e. the pass rate per individual subject.

In Portugal, data on the RVCC process (*reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências*) leading to the award of a recognised qualification or credits, are collected by the national agency for vocational education and qualification (Agência nacional para a qualificação e ensino profissional). Data are collected in relation to participation, achievement and success rates and on the length of the procedure.

In Norway, the Directorate for Education and Training and the Agency for Lifelong Learning collect data on validation procedures which allow adults to access lower and upper secondary education. Assessment centres collect data on the candidates; these are incorporated into a national register. Some recent improvements have been made in the data collection system, as described in Box 2.

### Box 2. Improvements in collection of data at upper secondary level in Norway

In Norway, all regional education authorities have set up one or more assessment centres for validation of prior learning in upper secondary education, often located at upper secondary schools. Collection of data on the use of validation at upper secondary level has recently been improved. Previously, based on the data collected, it was possible to count how many individuals had taken part in a validation procedure, but not possible to count the number of validations per year in upper secondary education. The new statistical basis provides information on how many subjects have been validated. In the academic year 2013/14, 6 300 validations were carried out, according to the Directorate for Education and Training.

Source: Cedefop, based on interview, by the writer, with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

The success of validation in general education is measured in Denmark by individual education institutions which are obliged to have an evaluation system; some operate at national level. In Latvia, validation in general

education is decentralised: some data on the applicant success and the level of education attained are collected, though these data are not publicly available.

## 2.3. Vocational education and training and adult education

### 2.3.1. Initial VET

In countries reviewed as part of the inventory, 27 have VNFIL arrangements related to initial VET, of which 12 (AT, BE-Flanders, CH, DE, FI, FR, LI, LU, LV, NO) (Table 2), PL, PT (Section 2.2) compile some national data on take-up.

Countries such as Austria, Germany and Poland record data at the national level on the use of external examinations to obtain an initial VET qualification, which can be considered as a form of VNFIL. In Austria, the Chamber of Commerce publishes annual data on the apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP) or exceptional admission to the apprenticeship examination across the country (Dornmayr and Nowak, 2014). Data concern the number of successful and unsuccessful candidates by economic sector, compared to the rest of candidates taking this exam through the standard route (apprenticeship training).

In Germany, data on the number of candidates taking an external examination in initial VET (*Externenprüfung*) are centralised at national level by the Federal institute for vocational education and training (BIBB) and is available in an annual report (BIBB, 2015). In this case, data are collected on the number of people approved to take the external examination (by gender, basis for admission in external examination, prior qualification, and type of sectors) and the share of people successfully completing the external examination.

In Poland, the central examination board is in charge of the examinations confirming a qualification in a profession, including extramural exams for people who have completed basic education and have been trained or worked for at least two years in a profession. Annual data are available for 2013 and 2014 <sup>(5)</sup> on the number who took the external exam and passed or failed, for the written part, the practical part and the whole exam.

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<sup>(5)</sup> Central examination board: <http://www.cke.edu.pl/index.php/egzamin-y-zawodowe-left/nowy-egzamin-y-zawodowy/25-egzamin-y-zawodowe/396-informacje-em>



Centralised data collation is not common for validation processes leading to the awards of credits or full IVET qualifications. According to the information provided by the country experts, this only takes place in France, Luxembourg, Latvia and Switzerland. In France, statistics on the take-up of the VAE procedure (*validation des acquis de l'expérience*) also covers initial VET qualifications.

In Luxembourg, the Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth compiles data on the take-up of VAE in initial VET, which has been operational since 2010. The ministry's 2013 annual activity report presents annual and cumulative data on the use of VAE between 2010 and the end of 2013 (Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth, 2014). Data was collected at different stages of the procedures: number of requests submitted (first step of the application); number of applications considered eligible; number of candidates who submitted the second part of the application which had been assessed by a validation commission; number of candidates entitled to validation of their learning outcomes (full qualification or partial validation) and number of candidates entitled to validation of their learning outcomes by type of diploma. Cumulative data covering the period between 2010 and 2014 are also available from the ministry <sup>(6)</sup>.

In Latvia, the State Service of Education Quality delegates responsibility for validation to education institutions and examination centres which oversee data collection. The latest available report from the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014) provides data on the number of persons successfully acquiring professional qualifications (in IVET, CVET, adult education and HE) through assessment of the professional competences acquired in non-formal learning activities. It also details the number of professional qualifications that can be acquired through validation and the number of institutions authorised to perform validation.

Some cantons in Switzerland have developed indicators and systematically collect data which are available on request. At national level, two working groups (one each for the German- and French-speaking communities) of the Swiss conference of VET offices <sup>(7)</sup> follow the evolution of validation practice, but the data are not released to the general public. Currently, validation in initial VET is possible for 16 titles of the Federal diploma

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<sup>(6)</sup> Information on Luxembourg was provided by the Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth: <http://www.men.public.lu/home/index.html>

<sup>(7)</sup> Swiss conference of VET offices: *Conférence suisse des offices de la formation professionnelle* ([www.csfp.ch](http://www.csfp.ch)) and *Schweizerische Berufsbildungsämter-Konferenz* ([www.sbbk.ch](http://www.sbbk.ch)).

of vocational education and training. Though centralised statistics regarding validation are not available, information has been collected by the validation service from the canton of Geneva, concerning the number of users and successful validation procedures, and the characteristics of users (years of professional experience, language, gender and age, nationality and occupational status).

The question on measuring validation success in IVET provides information several additional countries. Data are collected centrally on the number of certificates/diplomas/qualifications issued as a result of the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Belgium-Flanders, Finland), and on the number of learners using the validation approach (Liechtenstein, Norway).

In Estonia, validation in IVET has grown over the years. A survey conducted in 2014 (Kose, 2014) to monitor implementation of validation in IVET reported that 28 of the institutions surveyed were implementing validation and had developed validation procedures. Most institutions reported having validation professionals for guidance and assessment and half of them collected statistics on validation, though the data are not centralised. Similarly, Bulgaria, has data on the number of documents they have issued as a result of validation of non-formal and informal learning though this is not centralised.

### 2.3.2. Continuing VET

In continuing VET, 25 countries are currently offering VNFIL procedures. Mechanisms for the collation of data at the regional or national level on the take-up of VNFIL have been identified in eight countries as part of this thematic review: BE-Wallonia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Malta (in relation to childcare) described above, Norway, and Spain.

In these contexts, data are generally collected on the characteristics of participants, number of qualifications or credits awarded. In Belgium-Wallonia, the consortium for the validation of competences (*validation des compétences* (VDC)) gathers and releases data on validation in continuing VET through publication of annual reports. Data are collected in relation to the number of sessions organised, participation, characteristics of participants, achievement and success rate (Box 3).

The national institute for education in the Czech Republic collects data on the number of applicants and certificates awarded in relation to the national qualifications framework (*narodni soustava kvalifikaci* (NSK)) vocational qualifications (recognised qualifications which differ from those awarded through formal education and training). Data on the applicants differentiates

between different types and levels of qualifications (levels 2 to 7 NSK/EQF) but is not broken down by gender or prior qualification of applicants. Success rate (percentage of applicants succeeding in the certification) is also measured. Data are collected on the number of entities (ministries) which can authorise persons/entities to provide assessment and certification and the number of individual persons and/or organisations authorised to provide examination, assessment and certification.

In the continuing training system in Finland (competence-based qualifications system (CBQ)), validation is embedded within the training model. All participants start with an assessment of their prior learning; they can gain credits or a full qualification directly through validation. The national board of education collects data on the number of applicants, gender, region, qualification and partial qualifications achieved, but no data are collected on the number of credits achieved through validation.

In Norway, annual data on the number of individuals admitted to post-secondary VET on the basis of prior non-formal and informal learning have been released since 2011 by the Ministry of Education and Research, as part of annual reports on post-secondary VET <sup>(8)</sup>. In Spain, the National Institute for Qualifications (*Instituto nacional de cualificaciones* (INCUAL)) gathers annual data on calls for validation across the country. Data are collected on the number of positions opened, the number of calls launched by type of administration, the professional field targeted by the call, and the length of the procedure. Data are also collected on the characteristics of applicants (age, level of educational attainment and employment status).

### Box 3. **Belgium-Wallonia: the consortium for the validation of competences in continuing VET**

The consortium for the validation of competences (VDC) collects annual data on validation which are available in reports (for the years 2011, 2012 and 2013). The data collected concern the following aspects:

- the number of validation sessions organised each year and the type of occupations they cover;



<sup>(8)</sup> Reports are based on the *DBH-Fagskolestatistikk*, a national database that provides statistics on post-secondary VET (Level 5); this is part of the broad DBH database on higher education set-up by the Norwegian social science data services:

[http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Fagskoleutd/Fagskoler\\_F-4395\\_Hele.pdf](http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Fagskoleutd/Fagskoler_F-4395_Hele.pdf)

- participation: number of candidates registered to attend the sessions, attending sessions or not showing up; profile of candidate (sex, employment status, age, level of education);
- achievement: number of certificates awarded (by type of occupation) and share of successful candidates (by type of occupation).

The consortium, which manages the funding dedicated to validation sessions, also keeps track of the cost of validation. The cost of validation sessions varies from EUR 110 to EUR 390, depending on the competence unit of the occupation in question. For the occupations that led to the highest number of validation sessions in 2012, the cost varied between EUR 110 and EUR 180.

Data on the length of the validation procedure are also available in the latest report (2015) distinguishing between the periods between first registration and guidance, between guidance and testing, and between registration and testing.

*Source:* Cedefop, based on the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Belgium (FR) (European Commission et al., 2014a).

There is no evidence of other countries with centralised data systems covering post-secondary VET, although validation providers collect data at institution level. One example is in Switzerland, where data are collected by individual providers in relation to specific vocational qualifications with a validation process. This includes the SVEB or Swiss federation for adult learning in relation to the federal professional education and training (PET) diploma for trainers in adult education, the PET diploma in family SME managers and the certification for occupational, educational and career guidance counsellor. The Swiss Federal Institute for vocational education and training (SFIVET) in relation to the diploma of VET and PET teachers, and Interpret, offering the PET diploma for community interpreters, are other examples.

The question on measuring validation success in the CVET sector offers additional country information. In Denmark, for example, individual education institutions are obliged to have an evaluation system, with some of these at national level. In Bulgaria, the National Agency for Vocational Education and training (NAVET) requires centres for vocational training (CVTs) to present annual data on the number of documents they have issued for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The data also show that Malta (childcare sector only) and Latvia collect information on the number of validation users. Greece collects data on the

number of validation users in CVET (certification exams) though these data are not centralised.

### 2.3.3. Adult education

According to the information collected for the inventory, 15 countries across Europe have VNFIL arrangements for adult education, but only Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Iceland, Ireland and Latvia (Section 2.3) report some form of structured data collation process. In Austria, the Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie*, WBA) offers validation leading to the award of a qualification, different from those awarded through formal education and training. Data are collected on participation (number of registered participants by gender, age, Bundesland), number of qualifications awarded by level and thematic areas (education management, teaching/training, counselling, and library and information management), and duration and cost of the procedure. Data on the number of participants and qualifications awarded are frequently updated on the website <sup>(9)</sup>. In Ireland, regarding, data are collected annually for the *Writeon* procedure by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) with respect to participation, achievement, success rates, length and cost of the procedure. In Iceland information on the number of applicants and of credit points validated is collected, while Belgium-Wallonia also records applicant numbers, with 14 775 candidates undertaking VAE in 2013/14 <sup>(10)</sup>.

## 2.4. Higher education

In higher education (HE), 23 countries have already started to implement VNFIL arrangements. According to the evidence collected for this report, only seven compile statistics at national or regional level to measure take-up of validation in the sector, either for admission to programmes or to award HE credits: Austria, France, Belgium-Wallonia, Latvia, Norway and UK-England and Northern Ireland and UK-Wales.

For instance, data on use of validation for admission to HE are collected at national level in Austria: the procedure is known as 'non-traditional HE

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<sup>(9)</sup> Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie*, WBA):  
[http://wba.or.at/ueber\\_uns/Zahlen\\_Daten\\_Fakten.php](http://wba.or.at/ueber_uns/Zahlen_Daten_Fakten.php)

More detailed data are available in the evaluation report of 2014:  
[http://wba.or.at/\\_pdfs/Bericht4\\_QuantitativeErhebung\\_2014\\_END.pdf](http://wba.or.at/_pdfs/Bericht4_QuantitativeErhebung_2014_END.pdf)

<sup>(10)</sup> Data provided by EQF AG representatives for the 2014 inventory.

entrance exams' or without taking the *Reifeprüfung* exam. Data are also collected in France in the VAP 85 procedure: *validation des études, expériences professionnelles ou acquies personnels en vue de l'accès aux différents niveaux de l'enseignement supérieur* (validation of studies and of professional or personal experiences for accessing various levels of higher education, distinct to the VAE procedure). In Belgium-Wallonia data are collected within *Hautes Ecoles* (Box 4).

#### Box 4. **Access to Hautes Ecoles in Belgium-Wallonia as part of validation des acquis de l'expérience**

In Belgium-Wallonia, Hautes Ecoles are a specific type of HE institution (different from universities) which offer either short or long training cycles.

The validation procedure enabling access to Hautes Ecoles is the responsibility of the Cellule VAE interréseaux <sup>(1)</sup>. Data are collected annually at regional level: number of requests; procedures carried out; candidates supported through the process; applications submitted; applications examined by a jury; and registrations in a programme following the procedure. Data are available for 2011/12. Some data are also available on the characteristics of candidates: gender, employment status, number of years of experience and level of education.

Source: Cedefop, based on the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Belgium (FR) (European Commission et al., 2014a).

In Norway, data are collected on applications for exemptions, covering participation (number of applications for exemptions) and success rates (number of successful applications for exemptions). At master level, data are only available for the number of exemptions granted, not the number of applications. There are also data on applicants for enrolment on the basis of VNFIL (numbers, gender and how many were approved, and to which subject/line of study). There are annual updates over a number of years, since 2007.

Mechanisms have been centralised in France since 2002 as part of the VAE procedure for validation leading to the award of credits or a full qualification by HE institutions. The DEPP, a department of the Ministry of

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<sup>(1)</sup> Cellule VAE interréseaux (working body set up to design and implement the validation procedure): <http://www.vae-cghe.be/la-cellule-vae.aspx>

National Education, Higher Education and Research <sup>(12)</sup>, releases an annual synthesis reports on the use of VAE in the HE sector, based on the data provided by universities. The latest available report covers 2013 and includes data on the share of qualifications obtained through VAE out of the total number of VAE procedures. Data are also provided on the qualifications obtained through VAE by type of higher education degree, field of study, age group and highest level of education held (DEPP, 2014).

There are centralised data collation procedures for validation in universities in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (Box 5).

#### Box 5. **Accreditation of prior experiential learning in higher education in England and Northern Ireland and in Wales**

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, the procedure known as accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) leads to the award of credits to obtain a recognised qualification in higher education. HE institutions have to report annually to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) with data on the take-up of APEL. This is a new development in England since 2014 (in Wales data collection commenced in the academic year 2012/13).

In England and Northern Ireland, data must be collected on the number and proportion of students with at least one module taken through APEL, by mode and level of study, as well as the number and proportion of modules taken through APEL, by mode and level of study. In Wales, HE institutions are required to state whether a module has been assessed through APEL, is only available through APEL, or has not been assessed or is not available through APEL.

*Source:* Cedefop, based on the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report UK (European Commission et al., 2014c).

In the rest of the countries, data on the use of validation at this level of education are often collected (and/or released) only at provider level because of the high level of autonomy of HE institutions.

The question about measuring validation success in the HE sector offers additional country information. Estonia, for example, also collects information

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<sup>(12)</sup> Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance:  
<http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid1180/direction-de-l-evaluation-de-la-prospective-et-de-la-performance.html>

on the number of validation applications. As in the case of CVET, individual education institutions in Denmark are obliged to have an evaluation system, with some at national level.

The country experts for Ireland and Belgium-Wallonia indicate that developments are under way to introduce new and/or additional performance indicators. A performance framework for individual higher education institutions was recently introduced in Ireland and it is expected that data on validation will be collected in respect of:

- (a) overall number of applications made and whether these are for the recognition of prior certified and/or prior experiential learning;
- (b) the fields of learning to which applications for recognition of prior learning (RPL) are made;
- (c) the number of successful applications;
- (d) the rates of successful participation of learners who have entered a programme through RPL;
- (e) programmes, modules and units against which prior certified learning has been recognised.

In Belgium-Wallonia, a performance indicator is to be developed which measures retention rates once candidates are admitted in a programme. Although the country expert reports that there are currently no statistics about the graduation rate of VAE candidates compared to regular students at the end of their study pathway, qualitative research carried out by Universities in Louvain, Liège and Brussels indicates that students who access university programmes through VAE are less likely to drop out compared to other adults returning to education. VAE students also generally obtain higher grades than other students.

## 2.5. Non-affiliated or formative VNFIL

Some VNFIL arrangements aim to identify, recognise and document the abilities and skills of individuals that are not related to formal education and training programmes and qualifications. These include skills audits, competence portfolios, and so-called reflective EVC (*Erkenning van Verworven Competenties*: recognition of prior learning) <sup>(13)</sup>. Not all countries

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<sup>(13)</sup> These are sometimes labelled as 'formative' validation. Unlike summative validation, whose purpose is to assess if the user has acquired a specific list of learning outcomes required for a given qualification, formative validation can promote the recognition of a broader range of skills and aptitudes and tends to focus on identification and documentation phases (although it can also include assessment and certification).



in Europe have developed such arrangements or recognise them as a form of validation in the national context, as the term ‘validation’ may exclusively be understood to refer to processes aiming at certification.

Evidence collected by national experts for this review suggests that information on the take-up of this type of validation procedures is very fragmented as they typically comprise a range of small-scale initiatives, rather than being delivered within nationwide schemes. In most cases, data for each type of VNFIL arrangement are collected at provider level and the type of data collected will vary from provider to provider. A few examples of data collection at provider level are given in Annex 1.

However, a few examples of schemes with national relevance for which some data are compiled can be identified. These include the *Libretto formativo del cittadino* in Italy, the *ProfilPASS* tool in Germany and skills audits in France and in Luxembourg. In Italy, the *Libretto formativo del cittadino* is a tool which records experience acquired during training or learning pathways, continuing training and employment, plus competences acquired in non-formal and informal ways. The tool is based on a unified format across Italy and used by the regions, following testing phase in 13 regions and autonomous provinces between 2007 and 2010. According to a national survey in 2013, there have been at least 50 000 users in the two previous years; according to regional monitoring data, half of these are in Tuscany (ISFOL, 2013). Since 2011, the regional public employment services in Tuscany have offered this service to unemployed people receiving benefit and subsequently to other target groups. The regional authority collects cumulative data on take-up and characteristics of users (employment status and age of users). According to the latest figures available, as of September 2015 a total of 52 683 documents have been delivered since 2011 to mostly unemployed individuals.

In Germany, *ProfilPASS* is a tool used to document and assess informally acquired competences, regardless of where they were acquired or their field of learning. It is based on user self-assessment, supported by professional guidance, and is delivered by 55 *ProfilPASS* dialogue centres. According to the latest inventory report for Germany (2014), since 2006 *ProfilPASS* has been used by more than 150 000 people, of which half were adults (74 000) and the other half young people (79 000).

Skills audits (*bilans de compétences*) are used in France to support workers (and some jobseekers) in analysing and documenting competences, aptitudes and motivation, with a view to defining a professional or retraining project. Workers are entitled to a skills audit as part of their individual right to benefit from continuing training. This is not defined as a form of validation in

France, as the term is only used for VAE leading to the award of qualifications. While the take-up of skills audits is no longer the object of specific and regular publications (since 2005), recent evidence on their use and characteristics is available from official reports providing insights into investment in lifelong learning. In 2013, the bipartite funds collecting employee and employer contributions for continuing vocational training (OPCA) financed a total of 27 733 individual leaves of absence for skills audit, for an average duration of 23 hours and an average cost of around EUR 1 500 (République Française, 2015).

In Luxembourg, skills audits (also known as *bilans de compétences*) are offered to jobseekers by the ADEM (Agence pour le développement de l'emploi), the public employment services. Information on take-up is available from annual activity reports and the number of users varies over time as the service offer evolves. In 2012, 193 skills audits were carried out by the ADEM; the agency also offered a specific type of skills audit to 62 young people (aged 16 to 29) through a three-week programme called *bilan de compétences professionnelles* (BCP) (ADEM, 2012). In 2013, 48 registered jobseekers benefited from a new form of skills audit offered by ADEM, based on methodology used by Zukunftszentrum Tirol and the University of Munich. Data were collected on the level of educational attainment of users <sup>(14)</sup> (ADEM, 2013).

In Belgium, the Flemish department of work monitors the number of certificates for vocational experience awarded every year in the region and the success rate. Participation is also monitored by individual characteristics of participants. Outcomes and impact are not monitored, though research projects are sometimes commissioned to collect more detailed information.

## 2.6. Using indicators to measure performance

In response to the question 'how is the validation system measured', the data provided by the country experts reveal that the use of indicators to measure validation system performance remains limited to a minority of European countries. In summary, across all sectors, there are more countries reporting no set of indicators in place than countries that do use indicators to measure performance: the figures are even for the 'other' sector only.

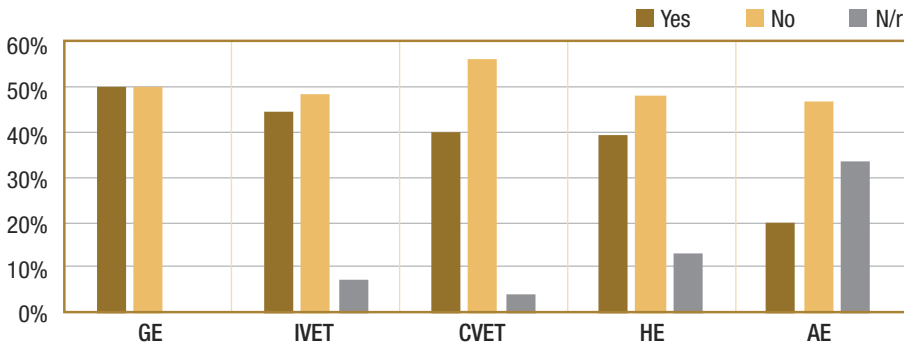
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<sup>(14)</sup> 17% had no qualifications, 10% had an ISCED level 3, 29% had a bachelor degree and 45% a qualification at master or PhD level.

Figure 1 shows that, while 16 countries were reported to have validation arrangements in place in general education, only half of these make use of indicators to measure validation performance. This is followed by around two fifths in IVET, CVET and higher education. The lowest share of countries with validation arrangements using indicators to measure performance is found in the adult education sector, at around one fifth.

Several countries use performance indicators across all sectors where validation arrangements are reported to be in place. Latvia uses performance indicators across all education sectors. Norway is reported to use performance measures across all sectors where validation arrangements are in place (GE, IVET, CVET, HE), as do Portugal (GE, IVET), Denmark (GE, CVET, HE) and the Czech Republic (CVET). The picture is mixed across other countries where it is reported performance measures are used in some sectors but not others where validation arrangements are in place.

Figure 1. **Countries using validation system performance indicators across sectors (%)**



NB: Y = yes; N = no; N/r = no response.  
 Percentage out of total countries with validation arrangements in place.  
 Number of total countries: GE: 16; IVET: 27; CVET: 25; HE: 23; AE: 15.  
 Source: Cedefop analysis based on country expert data returns.

# Gaps and obstacles to VNFIL monitoring

## 3.1. Comprehensive VNFIL take-up statistics lacking

Despite the importance given in the 2012 Council recommendation (Council of the EU, 2012) to keeping track of progress made on the implementation of VNFIL arrangements, many countries lack comprehensive VNFIL national statistics. Data collection procedures at provider level can differ and are not always accompanied by procedures for aggregating such data at national (or regional) level. To date, many countries covered by the inventory have not started to centralise data at national/regional level on VNFIL arrangements, at least not in all education sectors with such arrangements.

For VNFIL arrangements linked to formal qualifications, a lack of comprehensive monitoring systems (at various levels) is reported by the country experts for Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK (Box 6).

### Box 6. Recognition of prior learning in the UK and Ireland

In the UK and Ireland, the process of VNFIL is generally described as ‘recognition of prior learning’ and is in place in various education sectors. Both countries are characterised by a lack of legal framework on recognition of prior learning, but guidelines are in place to encourage consistent implementation. The institutional framework has a strong impact on the availability of data on VNFIL. Data are only collected at the institutional level and are not centralised, except in some specific cases.

In the UK (England, Northern Ireland and Wales), centralisation of data on the use of VNFIL currently only takes place at higher education level, where universities have to report to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). In other sectors, different providers may collect data on individuals undergoing recognition of prior



learning, but no overview is available. A study into recognition of prior learning in England and Northern Ireland prepared by the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE, 2013) suggests that data collection is an issue for the qualifications and credit framework (QCF). Currently credits awarded within the QCF through recognition of prior learning are recorded in the same way as any other credits, which means that it is not possible to determine how many credits are awarded through validation or how many learners are making use of validation opportunities.

In Ireland, the type of data collected on VNFIL varies from provider to provider. Provider data on the practice of recognition of prior learning and on learner use of recognition of prior learning for entry, module exemptions or achievement of full, major, supplementary or special purpose awards are, at best, uneven. This information was not systematically gathered or published by central or individual providers within further education and training and there are no nationally agreed definitions on individual data strands that might be collected. A 2011 report into recognition of prior learning in the HE sector (university sector framework implementation network, 2011) recommended that institutions should seek to collect recognition of prior learning data on:

- the overall number of applications made and whether these are for the recognition of prior certified and/or prior experiential learning;
- the fields of learning to which applications for recognition of prior learning are made;
- the number of successful applications;
- the rates of successful participation of learners who have entered a programme through recognition of prior learning;
- programmes, modules, units against which prior certified learning has been recognised.

*Source:* Cedefop, based on the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report UK (European Commission et al., 2014c) and country report Ireland (European Commission et al., 2014b).

Challenges linked to monitoring, reported at national level, include lack of a clear regulatory framework on VNFIL and/or mandate for organisations responsible for VNFIL to build up integrated databases or release annual data, and/or insufficient capacity to develop a more structured data collection process. In Romania, for instance, there is currently no legislative framework regulating the collection of data on validation arrangements. In Bulgaria, under

the Vocational Education and Training Act <sup>(15)</sup>, the National Vocational Educational Agency (NAVET) requires the centres for vocational training (CVTs) to present annual data on the number of documents they have issued as a result of VNFIL, but does not verify the reliability of the data collected by the centres.

In Sweden, the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has developed a database for registration of validation, but does not have the authority to monitor and follow up on the development of VNFIL.

In the Netherlands, at the time of reporting, there is no structured process in place for the collection of data on the use of EVC (*Erkenning van verworven competenties*) or recognition of prior learning among EVC providers. However, the Dutch knowledge centre on EVC (Kenniscentrum EVC) releases ad hoc reports on qualitative and quantitative developments in VNFIL. This includes a report published in 2014 containing figures on the number of EVC procedures carried out in 2012, 2013 and expectations for 2014, based on an online survey of the network of registered EVC providers (van Kippersluis, 2014).

### Box 7. **Monitoring of validation and certification of competences in Emilia Romagna**

In Emilia Romagna region, a system for validating and certifying competences has been in place since 2007. The procedure has the potential for three different outcomes: award of a whole qualification ('certificate of qualification'); award of a certificate of competence (one or more competence of a qualification is certified); or, if a validation dossier does not reach the requirements for certification of at least one competence, award of a 'card of skills and knowledge'.

Information is recorded yearly by the regional authorities in Emilia Romagna with respect to all different types of outcomes. In 2014, about 12 300 certificates of qualification were awarded (compared to 8 700 in 2013), about 4 100 certificates of competences were delivered (against 3 400 in 2013) and 18 800 cards of skills and knowledge (against 4 300 in 2013).

Source: Cedefop, based on report from Italian country expert.

<sup>(15)</sup> Vocational Education and Training Act, promulgated in 1999 (State Gazette 68/30.7.1999): <http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/46d8fa71cda79dfa5940a4b43f2408d274603937.pdf>. Art 42 was last amended in 2014 (State Gazette 61/2014).

Italy does not gather national data on the use of VNFIL but four regional authorities (Valle D'Aosta, Toscana, Emilia Romagna and Lombardia) which are more advanced in the development of VNFIL, compile regional databases. An example from Emilia Romagna is provided in Box 7.

Fragmentation of the offer of VNFIL arrangements, and the fact that the data collected can vary from one type of VNFIL arrangement to another (and from one provider to another) are principle obstacles for the development of comprehensive monitoring systems. For example, in Switzerland, various validation providers, including HE level (such as University of Geneva, University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland) have set up specific data collection systems concerning qualifications for which validation is currently possible. However, there are no centralised statistics on VNFIL to date.

This diversity of arrangements can be linked to the fact that the responsibility for implementation of VNFIL is entirely delegated to the level of individual providers together with the considerable autonomy of such providers in relation to central authorities.

It is not always compulsory for validation providers to collect and/or publish data. For example, in Finland it is not mandatory for universities to publish any statistics on validation, although some universities may do so.

The lack of procedures to collect and manage data centrally and absence of data in the public domain are also linked to the fact that many VNFIL initiatives are recent or under development. Typically for small-scale initiatives, VNFIL providers collect data on the number of users of validation procedures for internal monitoring purposes (such as collecting and processing requests) but do not release these data.

Developments are expected in some contexts as VNFIL processes are evolving. In Malta, the validation process has recently been established within the childcare sector while more sectors will be included once the sector skills units are established. Data are being collected by the employment training centre on those individuals who are undertaking validation; the centre passes the data to the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). It is foreseen that data will be collected for those involved throughout the different stages of validation from application to completion.

The following factors can together explain the lack of appropriate monitoring mechanisms for VNFIL at national or regional level:

- (a) lack of definitions of VNFIL and a comprehensive legal and/or policy framework for its implementation and monitoring; the result is a lack of clear rationale for collecting, centralising and/or publishing data concerning (all) VNFIL arrangements;

- (b) fragmentation of the offer of VNFIL arrangements, and the heterogeneity in data collection systems at the provider level; these factors impede the development of comprehensive monitoring systems such as centralised databases;
- (c) the early stage and small scale of VNFIL arrangements, for example where such arrangements have been recently introduced and remain very small-scale or pilot practice.

### 3.2. Lack of empirical evidence on VNFIL impact

Studies investigating the impact of VNFIL on individual users are rare. These have only been identified in a few countries in the form of one-off studies, two of which are described below.

In Belgium-Wallonia, a study was carried out in 2012 on behalf of the consortium for the validation of competences (VDC). It measured impact on self-esteem, employability, transition to employment or return to education, and satisfaction with skills certificate mechanism and resulting employment in terms of the match with competences. For employers, the survey focused on the impact of VDC in terms of visibility and image; and perceptions and attitudes towards the Consortium, the testing sessions and the skill certificate itself.

In the Netherlands, a study on the effects of the EVC procedure (recognition of prior learning) was commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs. It was published in 2011 (ProfitWise, 2011). The study, focusing on 72 Dutch companies, compared the effects of EVC to additional training, supplementary certification and the assignment of academic credit or diploma after obtaining the EVC certificate. The study showed that EVC stimulates participation in formal learning activities and increases the probability of obtaining a degree (at least 40% of the RPL participants in the study acquire a diploma after obtaining the EVC certificate). The study showed positive impact in terms of self-perception of employability for employees aged between 40 and 50. However, the research showed that the positive effects attributed to EVC (on perceived employability and career progress) are largely linked to the achievement of academic degrees.

The Dutch knowledge centre on EVC (Kenniscentrum EVC) has also released a recent publication of the value of EVC for both employers and employees (Kenniscentrum EVC, 2014).



# Barriers and enablers

This section briefly describes the main enablers and barriers in creating a system for monitoring validation. The main enabler is a clear, comprehensive framework for validation that explicitly includes a way of monitoring the process. The system for monitoring VNFIL needs to be an integral part of the quality assurance system, under a systematic application of the quality circle (plan, do, check, change) (Cedfop, 2015). The existence of a clear legal, institutional and policy framework for validation will provide clear responsibilities for the different stakeholders and can contribute to the creation of a clear mandate for the collection and centralisation of data. In this sense, having a specific taskforce, working group, inter-ministerial committees or similar institutions overseeing the development of VNFIL will contribute to an adequate system. The lack of an institutional structure will hamper the development of a monitoring system.

A clear institutional setting is also likely to contribute to validation that is well-defined and structured. Without clear and common understanding of validation across stakeholders, it will be not possible to collect meaningful information. Monitoring validation requires understanding its different stages and how individuals might or might not go through the whole process. This requires a 'beginning' and an 'end' (or multiple endings). This needs to be understood and clarified when establishing a system for monitoring VNFIL, or there is a risk of overloading the data collection with irrelevant information. Further, when boundaries between non-formal and informal learning are blurred, and each institution might combine validation of non-formal and informal learning with actual formal training, monitoring might prove difficult.

Lack of common understanding of validation might be accentuated by a fragmented offer of validation opportunities. Fragmentation will also mean that data collection occurs differently in each of the arrangements and integration into a common database will be more difficult. Nationwide VNFIL arrangements (as opposed to multiple small-scale arrangements) support the creation of a monitoring system.

It could be argued, however, that collecting information on VNFIL is not necessary because it may not contribute to equal status of NFIL and formally acquired qualifications. Here it may be considered that there is no need to

collect separate data from education institutions, since what is important is that the qualifications have been acquired, irrespective of how they have been acquired. Some countries might not consider mandating education institutions to record validation.

Table 3 summarises the main barriers and enablers for development of monitoring systems for VNFIL which have been identified through the thematic report.

Table 3. **Barriers and enablers in developing monitoring systems for VNFIL**

Barriers	Enablers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of an institutional structure linked to VNFIL (e.g. lack of legislation in the policy area, or mapping of available validation opportunities; no responsibilities for overall monitoring of validation)</li> <li>• fragmented offer, lack of consistent definition of VNFIL (existence of different arrangements) and common databases</li> <li>• lack of mandate for education institutions to collect separate data on take-up of VNFIL (as VNFIL is seen as having an equal value to formal education and training)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• existence of a clear legal, institutional and policy framework for validation, laying out clear responsibilities for different stakeholders and clear mandate for collection and centralisation of data on VNFIL</li> <li>• common understanding of VNFIL and consensus on definitions of different forms of VNFIL</li> <li>• nation-wide VNFIL arrangements (as opposed to multiple small-scale arrangements);</li> <li>• maturity of the validation system and sufficient scale</li> <li>• existence of a specific taskforce, working group, inter-ministerial committees, etc. overseeing VNFIL development</li> </ul>

Source: Cedefop.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## 5.1. Main conclusions

The following concluding points can be drawn from the findings of this report:

- (a) this thematic review confirms that the development of comprehensive monitoring systems in relation to VNFIL is still at an early stage across Europe. It is not yet a clear national priority at the level in most countries;
- (b) although data are collected by VNFIL providers, not all countries currently compile and centralise such data, or only do so for some VNFIL arrangements at specific levels. The fragmented offer, small-scale of VNFIL arrangements and diversity in data collection systems at institution level largely explain the lack of comprehensive national (or regional) monitoring systems;
- (c) statistics are not systematically published, or are not released regularly;
- (d) where data are centralised, some variation can be observed concerning the type of data compiled: it typically concerns overall participation and achievement, while data on the characteristics of participants are not systematically gathered and analysed;
- (e) the type of data collected and centralised do not generally capture the different stages, length or cost of the validation procedures;
- (f) evidence on outcomes and impact remains limited;
- (g) this review has not identified progress in most Member States in monitoring VNFIL arrangements, since the previous European inventory on VNFIL. New developments were only identified in a few countries: these relate to improvements in the collection of data at upper secondary level in Norway; centralisation of data on recognition of prior learning in HE in the UK; and the adoption of a legal basis in France to underpin data collection at regional and national levels, which should ultimately contribute to a more comprehensive monitoring of VAE through regional databases. In Malta, it is expected that monitoring systems will be developed as the current offer of VNFIL arrangements is expanded;

- (h) a few Member States (including Iceland, Romania and Slovakia) are developing databases providing an overview of available validation procedures, but these currently do not measure take-up.

## 5.2. Recommendations

Based on the evidence collected for this report, a number of recommendations for VNFIL stakeholders can be identified.

### 5.2.1. Collection of data: recommendations for VNFIL providers

Three main recommendations can be identified:

- (a) develop a database to collect data on different aspects of the take-up of VNFIL, such as:
  - (i) participation at different stages of validation;
  - (ii) type of qualification (level, field of study) or outcomes (e.g. certificate);
  - (iii) achievement and success rate;
  - (iv) user characteristics;
  - (v) length of the procedure;
  - (vi) cost of the procedure for the institution and for the user (in comparison with the cost of achieving the qualification through a formal learning route);
- (b) make data available online (annual statistics);
- (c) if possible, gather data on outcomes and impact of VNFIL for users (based on surveys and internal or external evaluations).

### 5.2.2. Monitoring: recommendations for national or regional stakeholders

If no centralised databases are already in place:

- (a) take stock of existing data collection systems among the main providers of VNFIL;
- (b) offer guidance to VNFIL providers on how to keep their own registers to monitor their activities and encourage the publication of data;
- (c) develop common databases in cooperation with stakeholders, for instance by creating working groups to assess whether and how data could be centralised, using common categories; the adoption of legislation could be required to clarify roles and responsibilities, but is not a prerequisite.

If some centralised databases are already in place:

- (a) encourage the creation of working groups involving all stakeholders to assess how the data compiled at the regional or national level could be improved. These discussions could cover aspects such as the length and cost of the procedure, or how to improve the coverage of VNFIL arrangements;
- (b) complement available evidence on take-up by launching studies to measure the impact of validation on users;
- (c) identify and recognise good practice in collecting data in relation to validation (including outcomes and impact) and consider the use of awards or awareness raising events to promote the benefits of such approaches;
- (d) use data for planning purposes and inform policy developments on VNFIL, for example budgeting and awareness-raising activities.

# List of abbreviations

<b>ADEM</b>	<i>Agence pour le développement de l'emploi</i> (public employment services) (Luxembourg)
<b>APEL</b>	accreditation of prior experiential learning (UK)
<b>CVET</b>	continuing vocational education and training
<b>EVC</b>	<i>erkenning van verworven competenties</i> (recognition of prior learning) (Luxembourg)
<b>GE</b>	general education
<b>HE</b>	higher education
<b>IVET</b>	initial vocational education and training
<b>OER</b>	open educational resources
<b>PET</b>	professional education and training (Switzerland)
<b>QCF</b>	qualifications and credit framework (UK)
<b>RPL</b>	recognition of prior learning
<b>VAE</b>	<i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> (validation of prior experiential learning) (France)
<b>VNFIL</b>	validation of non-formal and informal learning
<b>VDC</b>	consortium for the validation of competences (Belgium-Wallonia)
<b>VPL</b>	validation of prior learning (Switzerland)

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This report is based on data provided by the European inventory country experts in response to a series of questions on measuring validation. The experts used information provided in previous versions of the inventory (2010 and 2014), their wider knowledge of validation in the country, and relevant literature they were aware of and had access to. Additional information was obtained from the inventory country experts in Belgium-Flanders, Iceland, Italy, and the Netherlands. Information was also received from ministries in charge of validation in Luxembourg and France.

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DARES (France, a research institute within the Ministry of Employment): <http://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/dares-etudes-et-statistiques/>

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- Validation des compétences (Belgium-Wallonia, official portal for validation): <http://www.validationdescompetences.be/>

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ANNEX 1

# Examples of data collection processes

Table A1. **Examples of data collection processes identified at the institution level for VNFIL procedures not linked to formal qualifications**

These examples are based on the information provided by the country experts. However, they should not be viewed as good practice as the information needed to make such an assessment is not available. The examples have been provided to illustrate the variety of VNFIL initiatives (such as target groups, providers) and the type of data gathered in each case. This variety may be one of the reasons why comprehensive monitoring systems (based on centralised data) are not in place or are difficult to put in place.

	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Luxembourg</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>
<b>Name of the formative validation procedure and responsible institution</b>	Identification of competences at the OK Study Centre (OK opintokeskus)	Skills audit for the unemployed, ADEM (Public employment service)	Reflective EVC at the Internationaal Vrouwen Centrum (IVC), Den Helder	HRD-policy in the police organisation of the region Limburg (in cooperation with Fontys Hogescholen)
<b>Target group</b>	Employees	Registered unemployed	Migrant women	Police officers
<b>Purpose and outcomes</b>	Identification of competences (supported by employers) leading to an 'open badge' competence portfolio	Assessment of skills and competences to support the identification of job prospects and training needs	Assessment (leading to a certificate) to help participants to manage their own careers, articulate their own development needs and build up their own competences	EVC-procedure used as a tool for competence management and career planning and leading to a certificate

	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Luxembourg</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>
<b>Type of indicators collected</b>	Participation achievement (number of open badges)	Participation achievement (number of skills audits carried out)	Participation achievement outcomes and impact length and cost of the procedure	Participation achievement outcomes and impact length and cost of the procedure

# Structure of the questionnaire completed by national experts

Please review the 2014 inventory report only for your country before completing the following questions.

## Summative validation procedures (linked to formal qualifications)

1. Please describe how data are collected at the centralised level concerning 'summative' validation procedures, e.g. which enable the individual to acquire a formal qualification, credit or unit towards a qualification, an exemption, or access to a formal learning opportunity.

For each type of summative validation arrangement for which centralised data are available, please complete the table provided as many times as required and in relation to each education sector (e.g. you may need to complete this table for three procedures in general education; two procedures in initial VET and so on).

Table:

- Name of summative validation procedure
- Name of the institution releasing the data and links
- Education sector

General education (compulsory/upper secondary), initial VET, continuing VET, adult education (if different than CVET), higher education, other initiatives of validation (Chamber of Commerce, private companies, economic sectors, etc.).

- Aim of the procedure

Leads to the award of a recognised qualification identical to those awarded through formal education and training. Leads to the award of credits to obtain a recognised qualification identical to those awarded through formal education and training, Leads to the award of a recognised qualification different from those awarded through formal education and training. Leads to a certificate which can be used to access an education

and training programme or receive a recognised qualification, Leads to access to an education and training programme. Leads to award of a recognised qualification through an external examination (same examination than for those enrolled in formal education and training).

- Level of data centralisation (regional/national)
- Frequency of data collection (annual/other)
- Please describe what indicators are available (and their definition when applicable)

Participation: (e.g. number of applications by level of education or gender or highest level of education achieved, etc.), achievement: (e.g. number of qualifications awarded by level of education/gender/competences gained, etc.), success rates: (e.g. % of successful applications), outcomes and impact, other.

- For each indicator you have selected, could you please define as appropriate. For example in relation to participation – is this participation by the number of applicants, gender, or highest level of education achieved – or other? Please be specific in your response for each of the indicators selected
- Are data collected in relation to the different stages of the process/which ones (identification/documentation/assessment/certification)?
- Are data collected in relation to the length of the procedure (yes/no)
- Are data collected on the cost of the procedure (yes/no)
- Please give any additional comments on the type of information available, scope and further details if relevant

2. For each type of summative validation arrangement where data are not centralised, please provide more details (e.g. if data are only collected at the institution level, e.g. by education providers; what kind of data are collected – as per the table provided above) and/or reasons for the lack of data collection systems at national or institutional level (lack of legislative framework, etc.).

## Formative validation procedures (not linked to formal qualifications)

3. Please describe how data are collected (at the centralised level) concerning ‘formative’ validation procedures, e.g. which aim at engaging individuals, encouraging their participation in lifelong learning and



supporting their next educational and professional choices, but do not necessarily aim to lead to a final certification.

For each type of formative validation arrangement for which centralised data are available, please complete the table provided as many times as required and in relation to each education sector (e.g. you may need to complete this table for three procedures in general education; two procedures in initial VET and so on).

Table:

- Name of formative validation procedure
  - Name of the institution releasing the data and links
  - Type of procedure (supported by employers in the private sector/carried out by public employment services other)
  - Level of data centralisation (regional/national)
  - Frequency of data collection (annual/other)
  - Please describe what indicators are available (and their definition when applicable)
  - Participation: (e.g. number of applications by level of education or gender or highest level of education achieved, etc.), achievement: (e.g. number of qualifications awarded by level of education/gender/competences gained, etc.), success rates: (e.g. % of successful applications), outcomes and impact, other?
  - For each indicator you have selected, could you please define as appropriate. For example in relation to participation – is this participation by the number of applicants, gender, or highest level of education achieved – or other? Please be specific in your response for each of the indicators selected
  - Are data collected in relation to the different stages of the process/which ones (identification/documentation/assessment/certification)?
  - Are data collected in relation to the length of the procedure (yes/no)?
  - Are data collected on the cost of the procedure (yes/no)?
  - Please give any additional comments on the type of information available, scope and further details if relevant
4. For each type of formative validation arrangement where data are not centralised, please provide more details (e.g. if data are only collected at the institution level, e.g. by education providers, what kind of data are collected – as per the table provided above) and/or reasons for the lack of data collection systems at national or institutional level (lack of legislative framework, etc.).





# Monitoring the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning

Thematic report for the 2016 update  
of the European inventory on validation

This thematic report provides an overview of validation monitoring of non-formal and informal learning across Europe. Based on data collected for the European inventory project, the report explores the extent to which data are available on different aspects of validation in different education sectors. The results show a lack of comprehensive national statistics on validation, exacerbated in many countries by a lack of a clear regulatory framework on validation and/or mandate for organisations responsible for validation to build up integrated databases or release annual data. A further challenge is the fragmented offer of validation opportunities. Recommendations highlight the need for the collection of data on different aspects of validation take-up. Encouraging new and/or existing working groups, inter-ministerial committees or similar institutions involving stakeholders can help assess how regional or national data could be compiled/improved and used for planning to inform policy developments on validation.

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