



**PACT FOR  
SKILLS**

# **THE USE OF VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING FOR UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING**

Webinar | 19 September 202

The European Commission organised its fourth webinar as part of a series of events for Pact for Skills members to discuss and exchange with experts and with the Pact for Skills Community. The webinar presented key EU initiatives to boost upskilling and reskilling with a focus on validation. Moreover, the event was an opportunity to learn about existing projects and practices on validation of non-formal and informal learning, and share experiences on challenges and success factors of validation practices.

## Key messages

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is an essential element of quality and effective education and training systems. It provides qualifications to people to people who possess valuable skills but lack the credentials to prove their expertise. There is great potential for the Pact for Skills to ensure that validation of prior learning is accessible to all and thus giving them access to better work and training opportunities.

The EU has a long history of promoting validation of non-formal and informal learning, also for upskilling and reskilling. Key initiatives include the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>1</sup>, the European Skills Agenda<sup>2</sup>, the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways<sup>3</sup>, as well as the recent Council Recommendation on Individual Learning Accounts<sup>4</sup>. The current European Year of Skills, moreover, represents an opportunity to further highlight the importance of strengthening validation services provided to potential learners, including through better cooperation among key stakeholders.

The experiences shared by Pact Members from implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning projects on the ground present valuable learning opportunities for the wider Pact for Skills community. Through the work of these projects the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning is emphasised and is being integrated in upskilling and reskilling. Companies, different sectors and governmental institutions need to work together to attribute appropriate value to skills. Individuals gain credentials for their prior learnings and are able to develop their full potential and reach their professional and personal aspirations.

### Call for action

The European Commission is keen for Pact members to share experiences from the ground in making non-formal and informal learning visible through validation measures:

- Submit your ongoing projects and activities on the website of the [European Year of Skills](#).
- Share examples of projects and initiatives by reaching out to [EC-PACT-FOR-SKILLS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EC-PACT-FOR-SKILLS@ec.europa.eu).

<sup>1</sup> [COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)

<sup>2</sup> [European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts](#)

## EU approach and guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning

The EU has a long history with validation of prior learning. Already in 1995 a [Commission White Paper on Teaching and Learning](#) touched on the topic of validation. A more comprehensive overview came out in 2009, as the [Council Recommendation on validation](#) provided guidance on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This provided the principles the 2023 edition of the [European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning](#) builds its contents on.

The validation process is defined as a “confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard”<sup>5</sup>. It consists of four phases. The identification and documentation include a first audit of prior learning and skills. The phases assessment and certification aim to validate informal learning and provide accreditation. It is important to note that the individual must always be placed at the centre of the validation process to be able to consider their specific needs and circumstances.

The guidelines address relevant factors to develop and implement validation in European countries and discuss common challenges, leaving it up to the individual countries and their requirements on how they can best adapt the guidelines into their systems. The [European inventory on validation](#) gives an idea of answers and measures that have been implemented across Europe, illustrated by good practice examples.

## EU initiatives to boost upskilling and reskilling with a focus on validation

The European Commission supports upskilling and reskilling through a wide range of initiatives such as the [Pact for Skills](#) and the [European Year of Skills](#) and by setting a framework for adult skills policies, including, among others, the [European Skills Agenda](#), the European Pillar of Social Rights and its [Action Plan](#). The latter sets out an ambitious goal for the EU: To ensure that at least 78% of adults are in employment by 2030; which makes the process of validating non-formal and informal learning in upskilling and reskilling measures even more crucial.

A number of key initiatives are in place to achieve these objectives. For instance, the [Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways](#) is targeted at low skilled adults and aims to provide them with skills including basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or to support them in progressing towards an upper secondary qualification. An [evaluation on the implementation](#) of the Recommendation in member states has been conducted in 2019. It demonstrated that small-scale upskilling measures have been put into effect, subsequently boosting discussions on the subject. Validation measures are less prevalent and have been difficult to implement. It remains a challenge to incorporate validation into education and training systems and incentivise employers and low-skilled people into taking up action. Still, promising examples have surfaced in Greece, Germany, Portugal, Denmark and France. For

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<sup>5</sup> [European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning](#)

instance, in Greece PES training programmes are going to be validated in cooperation with the Greek National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance.

Another initiative underlining the importance of validation is the [Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts](#), which aims to support all working-age adults to access training and to increase individuals' incentives and motivation to seek training. Validation provides the certainty that learning outcomes will be recognised and can be used as an incentive. The initiative aims to tackle barriers to participation in training activities, such as insufficient financial support and time constraints and underlines the importance of both universal and differentiated personal support to individuals.

## The role of Pact Members in boosting upskilling and reskilling through validation: experiences from the ground

The webinar was an opportunity for the participants to learn about existing projects and practices from the ground, focused on validation of non-formal and informal learning for upskilling and reskilling.

First, **NEWTON University** presented the [PASS project](#), set up to assess key competences needed in the changing labour market and to make sure people are able to claim proficiency in these competences via validation. In cooperation with the **Automotive Skills Alliance** it aims to **identify key competences** that are in demand in the automotive industry. To achieve this, a survey was constructed for relevant institutions in the sector, such as companies, VET providers, universities and industrial associations. The results showed that soft skills were the most commonly requested and the most valued of them were transversal skills such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills. To be able to assess these skills, PASS is now developing definitions and **ways to measure the competences**, so that future employees may profit from the project. Since the understanding of competences such as “creative thinking” might differ between companies and countries, explanations to unify the interpretation of the skill clusters are being worked on. It is likely that assessment centres and **trained evaluators** will be chosen as an appropriate method to provide certification for the acquired competences. In this process standards and models will be developed that can be used in multiple countries and, thanks to their transversal character, also outside of the automotive industry.

Next, **BFI Salzburg** presented [Du kannst was!: Validation of Prior Learning: combining individual progress and company goals](#). 'Du kannst Was!' mission is the assessment of competences acquired in prior learning and being able to grant qualified vocational qualifications during the validation process. Employees who have work experience but didn't go through an apprenticeship process can achieve an **official apprenticeship leave certificate** through Du kannst was!. The project is **carried out in close cooperation with the economic chambers** in Upper Austria and Salzburg, who carry out the formal assessment. Companies are increasingly interested in offering this kind of qualification opportunity to their employees to attract new personnel and provide opportunities to existing employees. Still, validation is seen as a differing path from traditional training and further work is needed to get more companies to join the project. One company that has been actively participating for three years is the retail chain Interspar. Employees are achieving their retail apprenticeship leave certificate over ten months instead of three years thanks to the validation of their work experience and other prior learning.

The **National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training** from Portugal, presented their **QUALIFICA Programme**, focused on raising the qualification level of adults and their employability. The programme was established due to the high rate of **low-skilled adults** in the Portuguese population who are facing obstacles in the labour market. To increase digital and functional literacy and align provided training with labour market needs Portugal created the Qualifica Programme. **Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)** is an important part of its adult education and training. Until 2023 they have created 313 Qualifica Centres that provide training to more than 900,000 adults of which 98,819 attained a certification through RVCC processes. It also helps guide adults towards lifelong learning and training pathways with the help of increasing engagement from PES, VET and education centres and employers. The programme's key tools are its [web portal](#) and the [Qualifica Passport](#). The Qualifica Passport is an online tool that helps gather prior qualification and skills using credit accumulation and transfer based on the National Credit System for VET. It also provides information about possible education and training paths according to the needs and goals of the user. The Passport acts as a documentation of competences and qualifications that can be used for seeking employment or training.

### Looking for a project partner? Check the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE)

The [EPALE platform](#) provides a space for stakeholders across Europe to access resources, and exchange and discuss ideas on adult learning. For example, the [EPALE Communities of Practice](#) offer a space to share project ideas with other adult learning professionals. Furthermore, the [Partner Search](#) tool can help you find organisations who are interested in collaborating with you on projects. You can also register your own organisation to post partner finding announcements, and allow other users to reach out to you to share opportunities for cooperation.

## Key messages from the plenary

During the plenary discussion, the presenters shared **helpful tips** on how to further the acceptance and implementation of validation measures. It is crucial to make validation an integral part of upskilling and reskilling processes. That means, there is a need for legal embedding of validation to further the process of gaining widespread acceptance by the population and institutions such as government bodies and companies.

An important requirement for the successful implementation of validation procedures is the establishment of a **comprehensive framework** that allows for their transferability across various sectors, regions, and countries. To achieve this, there is a crucial need for guidance and support aimed at **highlighting the market demand for validated qualifications**. A legal framework plays a vital role in creating clear pathways and ensuring that the outcomes of validation can be effectively applied.

It is worth noting that tools and methodologies developed for one project can be transferred to other sectors to be used for the validation of different sets of competences. They can be seamlessly adapted to cater to the unique needs of various areas and countries. In the case of soft skills, which are highly requested in most sectors, even the set of skills themselves can be reused for other projects.

One pilot study also tackled this particular challenge of cross-compatibility to other countries by implementing a top-down approach. While employing validation methods in the upskilling and reskilling of regional workers instead of using their national classification of competences, they used [Europass Digital Credentials](#). This initiative seeks to enhance the recognition and transferability of validated skills and qualifications in an increasingly mobile global workforce.

### **The European Year of Skills can help you showcase your work on upskilling and reskilling**

The dedicated [European Year of Skills website](#) includes an interactive 'Events Map', where you can register skills-related activities you are organising or find other activities and events near you. You can also download a [Communications Toolkit](#) to help you prepare your communication activities, events and media relations.