



ADULT EDUCATION PROVIDERS CAN IMPROVE VALIDATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

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Validation of non-formal and informal learning is gradually more seen as a way of improving lifelong learning and well being. More European countries are underlining the importance of making visible and valuing learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions, for example at work, in leisure time activities and at home. In 2009, the CEDEFOP has launched the [European Guidelines for Validating non formal and informal learning](#), aiming to support the process of implementing the validation systems in the EU countries and giving some umbrella recommendations for the main challenges faced by policy makers and other stakeholders. In 2012, the [European Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)¹ reinforced that establishing by 2018, Member States should have in place arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, including specific elements and following some particular principles, such as the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Last year, CEDEFOP has launched the [European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014](#), the first document after the adoption of the Council Recommendation, updating the state of the art in 33 countries and monitoring the key developments on this issue. Some main challenges have been found by this analysis: access, awareness and recognition, the system fragmentation; the financial sustainability; coherence; professionalization of staff and data collection. Our project will reflect upon and build on it.

The project

AVA - Action Plan for Validation and non-formal education aims to contribute to reducing the fragmentation on the national validation systems by exploring best practices on validation for disadvantaged groups and linking the different educational sectors.

Final result of this project will be an Action Plan targeted at both policy makers and adult education organizations, which will include key messages on how to progress towards more inclusive and effective validation systems as well as needed actions to overcome the main obstacles and challenges perceived by the AE civil society.

¹ Council Recommendation of 20 December on validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of The European Communities*, C 398, p.1



To do so, the consortium will examine existing tools, methodologies and policies from a non-formal adult education providers' and stakeholders' perspective and suggest new solutions to ensure one step up in learning or entrance into the labour market for disadvantaged learners.

The challenge of timing

The 2012 Council recommendation, which sets 2018 as the target date for establishment of national validation arrangements refers explicitly to the European Inventory as providing *an unrivalled source of information detailing how validation of prior learning is developing across Europe*². The **European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning published in 2014** presents some concerning conclusions: *on the whole, evidence collected as part of 2014 country updates suggests that there is an increasing trend towards the creation of national validation strategies since 2010, but most countries need to further develop their practical validation arrangements.*

The AVA partners believe that Member states will have to face big challenges (and in some even resistance) while putting in place such systems and thus they should be supported more. A major role could be played by adult education providers and stakeholders, which are often the implementing bodies of the validation systems.

However, the inventory suggests that in a third of the EU countries most guidance practitioners are aware of validation, a very significant improvement from the situation in 2010. However, in 19 countries awareness was reported as medium-IE, LI, UK-Scotland, AT, DE, DK, HR, IT, LV, MT, NO, RO, SE, CH - or low- BE-Flanders, HU, LT, SK, UK-ENI.

For this reason, the AVA consortium trusts that the action plan produced in the framework of the project will be published at exactly the right time (in 2016) for the further development of national validation systems, present the challenges and experiences of adult education providers, create new and update existing tools, initiatives and good practices.

The focus on disadvantaged groups

The AVA consortium decided to focus on disadvantaged groups because it believes that validation is one of the key tools and components for lifelong learning to enable people to move vertically and horizontally in their personal lives and careers. According to the AVA consortium, validation should be

² CEDEFOP, Briefing Note, November 2014



considered as a right. All citizens should be able to participate in validation arrangements, as it works often as a second chance opportunity; it increases motivation for Lifelong Learning and helps on bridging the gap between the job demand and supply, by recognizing competences acquired outside the formal system.

This is backed up by the **2012 Council Recommendation**³, which states that *disadvantaged groups [...] are particularly likely to benefit from the validation arrangements, since validation can increase their participation in lifelong learning and their access to the labour market* as well as by the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning which recommend that validation should focus on the individual, his needs and objectives.

However, too little has been done so far to make the validation systems inclusive and to ensure fair treatment: in what concerns the access of disadvantaged groups to validation, European Inventory states that while there has been some progress since 2010 in this area, still in a minority of countries - IT, RO, NO, DK, LV, BE-Wallonia, BE-Flanders, IS- disadvantaged groups are considered as a priority in national/regional strategies or policies on validation. In twelve countries- PL, SK, SI, NL, CH, DE, IE, SE, AT, BG, EE, UK-Scotland- some projects or initiatives were reported to have a particular focus on disadvantaged group, whereas in a further twelve countries- LI, LT, TR, CZ, EL, ES, FI, HU, LU, UK-ENI, FR, MT- no specific targeting was reported.

The AVA consortium will look into experiences of addressing disadvantaged groups and the issue of trust building. Furthermore, while conducting its research on the field, the project takes into consideration not only policy approaches but also methods and practice: we believe that this over-arching scope adds relevance and will positively influence policies and strategies at a regional, national and European level.

Thanks to this approach, participants in the project but also the wider adult education community will be able to develop and learn how things could be done. They will learn from others, gain insight into different tools, develop different approaches, propose possible solutions, develop partnerships between systems and sectors and understand existing European tools better.

³ Council Recommendation of 20 December on validation of non-formal and informal learning. *Official Journal of The European Communities*, C 398, p.1



The issue of fragmentation

Often, solutions and learning about the consequences of validation systems, especially for the individual (and here especially for the low-skilled) could be achieved by increased dialogue and cooperation across sectors and institutions.

Though, another finding of the European Inventory is that in most of the cases, validation systems are still very fragmented. The Inventory suggests grouping the countries developments in what concerns validation, according to their approaches:

- Countries with no national (or, where relevant, regional) strategy in place;
- Countries in the process of developing a national (or where relevant, regional) strategy;
- Countries with a national (or where relevant regional) strategy in place, but with certain elements of a 'comprehensive strategy' missing;
- Countries with a comprehensive national (or where relevant regional) strategy in place.

Only three countries currently have comprehensive national strategies in place- FI, FR, ES. However, progress is underway in this respect, as thirteen other countries are in the process of developing a strategy in 2014 - AT, BE-Flanders, CH, CY, DE, EL, LI, LT, MT, PT, SI, SK,TR. Thus, where national strategies are in place, evidence from the country updates reveals certain gaps. The main gaps we can observe are:

- Lack of measures to promote take-up of validation or too low visibility of the process;
- Low involvement of the voluntary sector and private sector compared with other sectors;
- Weak links between validation activities in the public, private and voluntary sector;
- Lack of integrated strategy covering different sectors of education and training;
- Coexistence of different policies and regulatory frameworks in the same country.

One of the project purposes is also to show the benefits of a more integrated system for validation at the national level. Indeed, the consortium believes that these integrated systems will contribute in enabling the low-skilled to have their competencies validated for both further education pathways and possible employment.

The cross-sectorial view will make non-formal learning outcomes visible across sectors, and will define the special competencies that the non-formal system can give. We aim at developing and supporting an integrated approach that bridges learning and the labour market on the one hand but also combines practice and policy.



The Survey

As mentioned above, the **European Inventory** published recently by the European Commission presents many challenges on validation: the access, awareness and social recognition of the potential of validation, its financial sustainability, its coherence, the professionalization of staff and data collection (meaning that no analysis on progression and cost-benefit is available) and fragmentation.

These are key challenges which should be better examined to help the further development of the validation systems. The AVA consortium will do so through a questionnaire addressed to adult education providers and civil society representatives.

National validation arrangements will be examined in order to identify potentials as well as obstacles in order to further develop transparent, coherent and legitimate validation arrangements. Besides of getting grass roots' feedback on the existing systems from organisations and adult education providers, the survey has the purpose to collect experiences and to practice understand their challenges and fears. A special focus will be kept on positive methodologies to make validation systems more inclusive and allow disadvantaged groups to move vertically and horizontally in their personal lives and careers.

If you wish to share your insight, please follow this [link](#). It will take around 30 min. to fill in the questionnaire.

More on our project...

The project is financed with the support of the Erasmus+ program and will run until August 2016. AVA is coordinated by the **European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)** and carried out in collaboration with **Learn for Life (NL)**, **Kerigma (PT)**, **Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen – VÖEV (AT)**, **ASOCIATIA EUROED (RO)** and the **Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NO)**.

Two main events will be organized in the next years:

- *A jour fixe* for presenting the survey results to a wider public, (Vienna, Austria -October 2015);
- An expert seminar for debating the main themes and outcomes of the survey (Oslo, Norway, February 2016).

Please find more information at the [project website](#).

AVA has a Hashtag! If you want to post something related with our project, please use **#actionforvalidation**.