



**QUALITY LABEL**  
for badge recognition

# Good practices of validation and recognition systems of learning activities and outcomes

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- Overview of the European validation and recognition systems and solutions
- Country-based analysis in Italy, Netherlands, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain



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# Introduction

The increasing importance of non-formal and informal learning has led to a growing need of effective validation and recognition systems. This publication details the outcomes of the research conducted within the “Quality Label for Badge Recognition<sup>1</sup>” European project - a Strategic Partnership, in the field of youth, realised with the support of the Erasmus+ Program<sup>2</sup>.

The project aims to increase the value and recognition of non-formal and informal learning and youth work through establishing a Quality Label for Badge Recognition. The consortium of partners, each with expertise in validation and recognition practices within non-formal education, collaborates on this initiative. These partners include Breakthrough Foundation (the Netherlands) – lead partner, TiPovej! (Slovenia), Awero (Lithuania), Associazione Interculturale Nur (Sardinia, Italy), Nexes (Spain), BalkanIdea Novi Sad (Serbia).

Recognising the valuable experiences of each partner organisation, the project is exploring and mapping effective practices on national scale. This research aimed to identify trends and innovative approaches in validation and recognition, ensuring a forward looking and adaptable approach.

The primary objective of the research was to explore and map existing national and european validation and recognition systems and solutions. This information will be used later in the project to establish a quality standard for Open Badges issuers seeking to improve the quality and wider recognition of learning activities and outcomes within and beyond non-formal learning and youth work fields.

This publication maps out the frameworks, policies, and processes currently in place for validating and recognizing learning activities and outcomes within and beyond non-formal learning and youth work contexts in Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain. By identifying and analysing these systems, the research aimed to highlight effective practices and key criteria for a quality standard for Badge Issuers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.citiesoflearning.net/qualitylabel/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

## 1.1. Research phases and methodology

The research searched to answer the main research question:

***What are the current national and European validation and recognition systems and solutions for learning activities and outcomes, and how can their mapping and assessment support the establishment of an agreed quality standard for Open Badges issuers seeking better quality and wider recognition within and beyond non-formal learning and youth work fields?***

Specific objectives:

- The research aimed to map and assess the credibility of existing validation and recognition systems at the national and European level. Particular attention was paid to the current state of badge recognition in the youth work and non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- Sought to identify similarities, differences, and potential areas of convergence among these validation and recognition systems. A particular focus was placed on the effectiveness, especially those that employ Open Badges;
- Analyse the role of quality label standards in validation and recognition systems;
- Explore emerging trends and innovative practices in validation and recognition;
- Identifying gaps
  - (1) to pinpoint the limitations and weaknesses in current systems to understand the areas where improvement is needed;
  - (2) to identify the specific challenges faced by badge issuers in the countries Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain and their contexts;
  - (3) based on the findings, the project aims to develop country-specific and European badge recognition strategies that align with local educational frameworks, policies, and cultural factors.

### Methodology

To achieve these objectives, the project consortium employed a combination of **desk research** and **interviews** with local and European stakeholders and badge-issuers (the City of Learning partners). This approach aimed to collect qualitative data for analysis..

### Guiding questions

Each partner had to follow a template that worked as a guide to collect information, but due to the specifics of the local and national realities, there was freedom to create other kinds of documents and materials when it was felt necessary. The following points and questions were established to guide the research:

1. Identify existing systemic solutions for validation and recognition, including stakeholders involved and the rationale behind these systems..
2. Who are the stakeholders involved in these systems?
3. What are the core elements that make up these validation and recognition systems?

4. How are these systems established and maintained?
5. Analyse the findings to identify any existing gaps or weaknesses in current systems.

The desk research and interviews allowed project partners to develop and answer the research question through examination, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of data. Find the results in the next chapters.

## 2. Key definitions

### 2.1. What are validation and recognition systems?

Imagine you've spent months volunteering at an animal shelter, learning to care for rescued dogs, train them, and even advocate for adoption. You've poured your heart and soul into this experience, gained valuable skills and knowledge. But when it comes time to apply for a job at a veterinary clinic, how do you translate those non-formal learning experiences into something your potential employer can understand and value?

This is where validation and recognition come in. These aren't just fancy educational terms, they are powerful tools for bridging the gap between the things that you learn outside of a classroom and the opportunities you deserve. While the core concepts remain similar, the way validation and recognition are defined and applied varies greatly across Europe. This chapter delves into these variations, exploring how different countries approach these systems within their youth work, educational and professional landscapes.

#### Italy

In Italy, "validation" of competences (*validazione delle competenze* in Italian) is defined according to the EU Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of learning outcomes, and is defined as "a process that allows access to qualifications (understood as aggregates of several skills or individual skills) through a reconstruction and evaluation of formal, non-formal and informal learning. These opportunities represent an integral part of the skills certification system, therefore the identification, validation and certification of skills acquired in a non-formal and informal context must be understood as an alternative way to the formal one for obtaining qualifications (understood as aggregates of several skills or individual skills). The qualifications obtainable through validation are potentially also accessible in the formal context and vice versa."

The system of validation and certification of competences in Italy is delegated to each region and has not, at the moment, been systematically implemented across the country, which makes definitions more prone to variation and interpretation as well.

The process of validation is defined separately from that of "certification" of competences (*certificazione delle competenze*, in Italian), which is specifically related to the final steps of validation and the actual acquisition of a qualification.

The term "recognition" of competences (*riconoscimento delle competenze*, in Italian) is used interchangeably in Italy to describe several steps in the process of validation and certification of competences, following the guidelines of the EU Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of learning. Often, documents such as Europass or Youthpass are mentioned as tools for "recognition" (but also "certification") in such contexts, but there is no clear cut separation between the two terms, and "validation" and "certification" are used more often, especially in official and formal documents.

In the youth work and non-formal learning fields (which, it's also important to note, are not formally recognized or regulated in Italy at the moment), the term "recognition of

learning/competences" is seen more often than "validation" or "certification".

## Lithuania

In the National Volunteering Service programme the "validation definition" is explained as "competence assessment" and use of "certificate". More in [this document](#).

In the field of education validation is seen as a process of assessment of competencies and aligning assessment results (competences) to specific qualifications.

## The Netherlands

In the Dutch context, validating learning is seen as the process of assessing and confirming the validity, effectiveness, and reliability of educational activities and learning methods. This involves evaluating whether the learning process and its outcomes meet the stated goals and standards, often applied to determine the quality and value of learning experiences such as programs, courses, training or workshops.

Within the education and training sector, validation of learning is often applied to determine the quality and value of learning experiences. It may involve evaluating learning programs, courses, training, or workshops and measuring the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved.

Validation of learning typically involves the use of various methods and tools, such as assessments, evaluations, observations, portfolios, and feedback mechanisms. Through these methods, the quality and effectiveness of the learning process can be assessed, and any gaps, issues, or areas for improvement can be identified and addressed.

Validating learning is considered an important aspect of education quality and professional development. It helps educational institutions, teachers, and trainers gain insights into the effectiveness of their teaching methods and make continuous improvements to optimise learning experiences and outcomes.

More on national validation of education is [here](#)

Validation visible in practice is almost always an instrument for the realisation of a more distant educational or labour market goal.

The translation of "recognition" to Dutch is "herkennen" or "erkenning". Both terms can be used depending on the context. "Herkennen" refers to the act of recognizing or identifying someone or something, while "erkenning" refers to the act of acknowledging or recognizing the value, validity, or achievements of someone or something.

In the Dutch context, a recognition system of learning, known as "erkenningssysteem van leren," is seen as a framework or mechanism that acknowledges and validates prior learning and competencies of individuals. It aims to provide recognition for knowledge, skills, and experiences acquired outside of formal educational institutions.

The recognition system of learning in the Dutch context is considered important for promoting lifelong learning, facilitating career progression, and supporting individuals in their educational and professional development. It allows individuals to have their existing skills and knowledge assessed and formally recognized, which can lead to the award of qualifications, certificates, or credits.

In the Netherlands, there are several initiatives and frameworks in place to support the recognition of prior learning, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Dutch National Qualifications Framework (NLQF), for example Beroepsgerichte Basisopleiding (this translates to 'work-oriented basic education and is a Dutch vocational program that integrates prior learning and work experience into the qualification process. These frameworks provide a reference for comparing and assessing different qualifications and competencies, enabling individuals to have their prior learning recognized and integrated into their educational pathways.

The recognition system of learning in the Dutch context emphasises the value of lifelong learning and promotes inclusivity by recognizing the diverse learning experiences individuals may have acquired through work, volunteering, self-study, or other non-formal or informal learning settings. It allows individuals to demonstrate their capabilities and facilitates their transition into further education, employment, or career advancement based on their existing knowledge and skills.

## Serbia

In Serbia, the process of validation is typically associated with the acknowledgment and confirmation of various types of qualifications, competencies, or experiences. The term "validation" is used in different contexts, and its interpretation can depend on the specific area or field. Here are some common contexts in which the process of validation is seen in Serbia:

**Educational Validation:** Educational validation involves confirming and recognizing academic qualifications obtained through formal education. This process ensures that qualifications, such as degrees and certificates, meet the established standards. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Serbia plays a role in validating and classifying educational qualifications based on learning outcomes.

**Professional Validation:** Professional validation is often required in certain industries or occupations. This process involves confirming that an individual's professional qualifications and experiences meet the standards set by relevant professional bodies or associations. This may include obtaining a licence or certification.

**Validation of Research and Academic Achievements:** In academia, the validation process extends to research outputs, publications, and academic achievements. Institutions may validate and recognize the quality and impact of scholarly work through peer review processes.

**Validation in Employment:** Employers may engage in a validation process when assessing the qualifications and competencies of job applicants. This can involve verifying educational credentials, professional certifications, and work experience.

**Validation of Cultural and Artistic Contributions:** In the context of culture and the arts, validation may refer to recognizing and appreciating the artistic and cultural contributions of individuals. This can include validating achievements in literature, music, visual arts, and other creative fields.



Serbia has a National Qualifications Framework that defines and classifies qualifications based on learning outcomes. The NQF provides a systematic way to understand and recognize competencies acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

**Educational Recognition:** In the field of education, recognition refers to the process of acknowledging and validating qualifications obtained by individuals. This includes the recognition of foreign qualifications, credits, or degrees. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) plays a crucial role in ensuring the recognition of educational qualifications in Serbia.

**Professional Recognition:** Recognition in a professional context involves acknowledging an individual's professional qualifications and credentials. Professional recognition may be required for certain occupations or industries, and it often involves validation by relevant professional bodies or associations.

**Recognition of Achievements:** In general, recognition can refer to acknowledging and appreciating someone's accomplishments, contributions, or achievements in various fields, including academia, sports, arts, and more.

## Slovenia

**Integrative definition of the term VALIDATION:** Although there is no national mechanism for recognition and validation of competences and skills acquired through youth work<sup>1</sup>, the validation system in Slovenia refers to a formal process that aims to assess and confirm the acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies obtained through non-formal or informal learning. It provides individuals with an opportunity to obtain official recognition for their learning achievements outside the formal education system. More info [here](#).

**Integrative definition of the term RECOGNITION:** Although there is no national mechanism for recognition and validation of competences, the competences and skills acquired through youth work<sup>1</sup>, the recognition system in the youth sector in Slovenia refers to the process of acknowledging and accepting the learning outcomes, competencies, and achievements acquired by young people through non-formal and informal learning activities by obtaining qualifications, certificates, or other credentials. It aims to assess and give value to these learning experiences within the youth sector, providing young people with recognition and opportunities for further personal, educational, and professional development. It involves officially recognizing and valuing these learning experiences within the formal education system, the labour market (e.g. e-Nefix), or other relevant contexts. More info here (desk research) and here (definitions in Slovenian context).

## Spain

The word "validation" in Spanish means the action and effect of validating; Firmness, strength, security or subsistence of some act. In Spain, the validation process makes it possible to identify, document, evaluate and certify the abilities of a person, which can give rise to a partial or complete qualification that increases opportunities in the labour market, opens up new professional opportunities, and/or gives access to education and training programmes. There is not a unique system of validation in Spain (some examples: VET; Reconoce). Learn more about the different systems [here](#).

The word “recognize” in Spanish means admit or accept that someone or something has a certain quality or condition; examine to find something. The procedure for the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience and non-formal learning, has several positive points, one of them, the coverage of the different validation elements (identification, documentation, assessment and certification). Learn more about the different systems here.

## 2.2. What is the difference between validation and recognition systems?

Validation and recognition work hand-in-hand to empower individuals who participate in non-formal education.

Within the diverse educational landscapes of Italy, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Spain, validation and recognition stand as integral processes that bridge formal, non-formal, and informal learning, collectively serving as instruments in assessing and confirming acquired knowledge, skills, and competences.

Validation, as collectively understood in our field, focuses on assessing and confirming the skills and knowledge gained outside of formal education. It involves evaluating learning experiences to determine the level of knowledge and skills acquired. This might involve assessments, observations, portfolio's, or other methods. Validation provides a confirmation of the validity and effectiveness of the learning experience. Depending on the system, it may lead to a certificate or credential.

Recognition, as collectively understood in our field, acknowledges the value of the skills and knowledge gained outside of formal education. Recognition accepts and incorporates validated learning experiences into other contexts, such as further education or employment. This enables individuals to use their validated experiences, skills and knowledge for new opportunities. For example, a certificate earned through validation might be used to gain access to higher education or qualify a job.

In simpler terms, imagine validation as a test that assesses your experiences, knowledge or skill in a specific area. Recognition is like getting a diploma, certificate or badge that acknowledges you have the necessary experience, knowledge or skill.

Both systems work together, validation provides the evidence, while recognition allows individuals to use that evidence to unlock further opportunities. The specific details of validation and recognition systems vary across Europe, with some countries having more established frameworks than others.

Understanding these variations across Europe enables us to build bridges between non-formal education and youth work with the formal education and the employment sectors. This will empower young people, enhance opportunities, strengthen non-formal education, and promote a more inclusive approach to lifelong learning across Europe.

## Summary of the European overview

The European research review delves into the potential of micro-credentials, validation tools, and recognition strategies in non-formal education settings. It underscores the importance of validating and recognizing learning that happens outside traditional educational settings, emphasising the role of micro-credentials in various contexts, from professional development to upskilling. The review also touches upon the validation in the voluntary sector and the recognition of prior learning. This review aimed to identify possible implications for creating a recognition strategy for Open Badges.

A number of strategies and guidelines are linked to the European youth policies. Please check youth policy research with the selected policies relevant for the Cities of Learning network at [https://bit.ly/youth\\_policies\\_col](https://bit.ly/youth_policies_col) . Open Badges recognition strategy may follow the adapted steps based on “[Unlocking doors to recognition](#)”. When considering the strategy building, partners may consider the following:

### **Localised acceptance and portability:**

It's important to engage with national youth work stakeholders, educational institutions, vocational training centres, and employers to ensure that open badges are recognised and valued within the country. This might involve aligning badge criteria with national educational standards or industry-specific competencies.

### **National inclusivity and accessibility:**

It's needed to ensure that the badge system is accessible. This might involve leveraging local languages, cultural contexts, and digital infrastructures. Digital skills development can be a complementary process towards acceptance of such digital tools like an Open Badge.

**Integration with national validation tools:**

Aligning the open badge system with existing national qualification frameworks, certification systems, and other validation tools. This potentially may ensure consistency and mutual recognition of learning achievements across different platforms.

**Flexibility to national needs:**

The badge system should be adaptable to the specific needs and priorities of the country, whether it's addressing specific issues in youth work or employment, or promoting certain industries or addressing national skill gaps.

**Feedback and continuous improvement**

Regularly gather feedback from badge earners, educators, employers, and other stakeholders to refine and improve the badge systems in place. This would ensure that the system remains relevant and effective in the face of changing national priorities or challenges.

These are the initial insights, which will be explored further on within the partnership of the "Quality Label" project.

## 3. European Recognition tools

Please find some practical examples of the recognition of non-formal education, youth work, and prior learning.

### 3.1. Youthpass

[Youthpass](#) is a tool developed by the European Commission to recognize and validate learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning activities within the Erasmus+ youth programs. It provides young people with a personalised certificate that describes the skills and competences they have acquired through these activities.

Though Youthpass does not have a wider recognition strategy, how young people or youth workers can make use of the Youthpass portfolio. It depends on each country deciding case by case. For example, Youthpass from ESC gives extra admission points to universities in Lithuania.

### 3.2. Visible Value - overview of recognition practices in youth work

**The Council of Europe** invested in research and knowledge-building linked to the recognition of youth work. As the Council of Europe youth work section on recognition states 'There are not many European policies that focus on recognition, in fact, none of the following are specifically about recognition but recognition is a key feature to them.'

Council of Europe dedicated a special section under youth related matters called [Visible value](#) - recognition of youth work page provides a number of resources, cases and tools linked to it.

They provided a [List of 25 recognition practices and tools](#). Feel free to review more practices, here are a few worth exploring closer in understanding how effective these solutions were and if they reached intended goals.

#### Few practices of our interest:

- [aufZAQ](#) (Austria)– Certified Quality of Non-Formal Education in Youth Work. They published [a manual](#) (2020) A manual for the recognition youth worker of competences
- [Nefiks](#) (Slovenia), System for recording your competencies gained in non-formal education.
- [Valorise-Toi](#) (Empower Yourself), Translating the competences gained in the scout movement to the 'employers' language'. [Manual](#) in English language
- [Validation](#) of youth worker's competences by National Association of Youth Workers in Serbia (NAPOR)

[Terminology of recognition \(Video\)](#)

### 3.3. Europass

[Europass](#) is a free, personal tool designed to facilitate learning and working within Europe. It provides a platform for individuals to create a comprehensive profile that showcases their skills, qualifications, and experiences in a format that is recognized across Europe.

Europass helps in recognizing learning and achievements by providing a standardised framework that makes it easier for employers and education institutions to understand qualifications from different countries. This makes it a valuable tool for job seekers and students looking to study or work in different European countries.

The platform also offers resources to find jobs and courses, making it a comprehensive tool for career development and lifelong learning. It has been widely adopted, with over 5 million users as of July 2023.

### 3.4. European Digital Credentials for Learning

[European Digital Credentials for Learning](#) (EDCs) is the initiative of the European Commission aiming to support organisations to issue digital credentials or convert paper-based ones into the digital. In terms of aims, EDCs have similarities to Open Badges. One layer that is different is the E-seal, which have to be acquired by the issuers in their country are standardised, tamper-proof electronic documents that certify the owner's skills or learning outcomes. These outcomes could have been achieved through formal, non-formal, or informal learning contexts. EDCs can describe a range of things, including activities (like classes attended), assessments (like projects), achievements (like skills developed), professional entitlements (like registration as a medical doctor), and qualifications.

EDCs are typically used to qualify for job positions, university placements, and more. They are legally equivalent to paper-based certificates in all Members of the European Education Area. In practice, they could be a digital version of your University diploma, course certificate, or any other type of credential.

EDCs offer numerous benefits for individuals, employers, and organisations:

- Individuals can build an online portfolio to track their learning while being in full control of their data. They can easily reuse their credentials to get a job or apply for further training across Europe. They can present and have their credentials verified at any point in their career, even if the institution who issued them closes, or if the data used to create them is lost.

- Employers can dramatically reduce the time and cost of verifying credentials and processing job applications. They can better understand the credentials of candidates, especially from other Member States as credentials will be translated into the target language. They can trust tamper-free credentials.
- Education and training providers can reduce costs for issuing credentials. They can better understand the credentials of learners, especially from other Member States as credentials will be translated into the target language.

Other practices to explore a bit deeper if they have relevance to our project:

**The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS):** While primarily used in higher education, ECTS can also recognise non-formal learning outcomes. It enables individuals to transfer credits earned from non-formal learning experiences into formal education settings, allowing for a smoother transition and recognition of prior learning. ([https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/ects-users-guide\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/ects-users-guide_en.pdf))

## 4. European documents and guidelines

Here is the analysis of European strategies and guidelines aiming to support the recognition of competences or outcomes of non-formal education, youth work, adult education, and lifelong learning:

### 4.1. Youthpass strategy

This is the strategy for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the European youth field. The [Youthpass strategy](#) aims at two major areas:

1. This strategy document aims to serve as a basis for the work of the SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre in developing Youthpass together with the European Commission and the National Agencies for the EU youth programmes;
2. To offer inspiration and a framework for cooperation with other organisations and stakeholders that wish to create greater awareness and visibility of the learning value of youth work and volunteering across Europe.

The second part, being more open in terms of organisations and tools, might be useful to utilise. In fact, this is the only recognition-oriented strategy on the European level and in the field of youth work and non-formal education.

There are two aims in the strategy focusing not just on Youthpass but on a broader scope of recognition of youth work and non-formal learning.

Aim 3:

To amplify the visibility and recognition of the learning value of youth work, considering the full spectrum of learning taking place in youth work (with both young people and youth workers considered learners, encompassing all dimensions of recognition, and considering the various phases of validation).

Aim 4:

Through experiences made with Youthpass, to inform relevant policy processes, support the development of related youth (work) policies at European and Member State level, and to make systematic efforts to promote the recognition and validation of learning.

### Field of Action 2: Learning and Recognition

This Field of Action aims to strengthen awareness and recognition of the learning value of youth work, in particular through the capacity-building of youth work organisations. The scope



of proposed measures goes beyond the European youth programmes to seek synergies within the community of practice in youth work and in volunteering.

-> Measures to explore and explain learning, competence development and its recognition in youth work in Europe, with a particular focus on informal learning as well as non-formal learning. This means **building evidence**, promoting debates, **supporting peer learning and raising greater general awareness about the learning value of youth work**.

-> Awareness-raising and **capacity-building** of the different youth work practitioners as facilitators of learning, and of organisations **on enhancing the learning value of youth work**. For this, the Youthpass process can serve as a model. These measures include opportunities to explore and debate the applicability of the Youthpass process type of methodology in youth work practice; training and information materials; and other possible tailor-made tools.

-> Offer support to and promote **cooperation and synergies among processes and initiatives** in the youth work community of practice that relate to the various dimensions of recognition and validation phases, particularly the strategic initiatives funded by the Erasmus+ programme.

-> <...> There are already numerous practices in Europe that seek to recognise and validate learning in the youth field; the work related to Youthpass could promote and inspire the quality approaches, processes and tools that serve the same cause – to raise the awareness and impact of learning in youth work. Suitable measures, for example a **label**, should be explored with **a view to raising the visibility of and trust in such quality recognition approaches**, as well as assuring further support to the quality of these approaches.

## 4.2. Unlocking Doors to Recognition

SALTO Training and Cooperation issued one of the very few publications aiming to support organisations in establishing their recognition strategies. One of them ["Unlocking Doors to Recognition: Setting up strategies for the better recognition of youth work and non-formal education/ learning in your context"](#)

The handbook provides guidelines on how to set up a recognition strategy in the field of youth work. Here are some basic steps mentioned:

1. **Understanding the current situation:** The first step is to understand the current situation that you want to change. This involves assessing the existing recognition practices and identifying their strengths and weaknesses;
2. **Setting a vision:** The second step is to set a vision for what you want the current situation to become in the future. This involves dreaming and envisioning the ideal recognition practices;

3. **Planning the path:** The third step is to plan how to achieve the change. This involves designing a strategy that includes specific actions, resources, and partnerships;
4. **Setting checkpoints:** The fourth step is to set checkpoints to know if you have achieved any of the steps for change. This involves monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategy;
5. **Listing down activities and coming up with the plan:** The fifth step is to list down the activities within your plan. This involves considering aspects such as coordination, partnerships, visibility, resources, and learning.

If adapting these guidelines here are some possible steps when designing European recognition strategy as part of the project's Work Package 2:

1. **Understanding the current situation:** to assess the current state of recognition of Open Badges in non-formal education and life-long learning settings. What are the existing practices? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Are there any barriers to the wider use and recognition of Open Badges? What data do we have to support our analysis? What data is missing?
2. **Setting a vision:** Envision a future where Open Badges are widely used and recognised in non-formal education and life-long learning settings. This could include a vision where Open Badges are seen as a valid and valuable way to recognize and validate learning outcomes and where they are widely accepted by learners, educators, employers, and other stakeholders.
3. **Planning the path:** Develop a strategy to achieve this vision. This could include actions such as:
  - a. Advocating for the value and benefits of Open Badges to learners, educators, employers, and other stakeholders.
  - b. Providing training and resources to help educators implement Open Badges in their programs.
  - c. Developing partnerships with organisations and institutions that can support the use and recognition of Open Badges.
  - d. Working with policy makers to create supportive policies and frameworks for the use and recognition of Open Badges.
4. **Setting checkpoints:** Identify key milestones and indicators of success. This could include the number of youth workers/educators using Open Badges, the number of learners earning Open Badges, the number of organisations recognising Open Badges, and feedback from stakeholders about the value and benefits of Open Badges.
5. **Listing down activities:** List down the specific activities that will be carried out to implement the strategy. This could include activities such as:

- Organising advocacy campaigns to promote the value and benefits of Open Badges.
- Developing and delivering training programs for educators.
- Building partnerships with supportive organisations and institutions.
- Engaging with policy makers to advocate for supportive policies and frameworks.

### 4.3. Micro-Credentials

#### WHAT ARE MICRO-CREDENTIALS?

No consensus exists on the term 'micro-credential'. In addition, a wide range of other terms are commonly used synonymously or in association with the term. These include: digital badges, alternative credentials, digital credentials, nanodegrees, digital certificates, micromasters, and even, short online courses.

A UNESCO report identifies the term 'micro-credential' as an umbrella term that "encompasses various forms of credential, including 'nano-degrees', 'micro-masters credentials', 'certificates', 'badges', 'licences' and 'endorsements'" (UNESCO, 2018). On the other hand, The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have both adopted variants of the term 'alternative credentials', which encompasses but also differentiates between academic certificates, professional certificates, digital badges and micro-credentials (Kato, Galán-Muros, & Weko, 2020; ICDE, 2019).

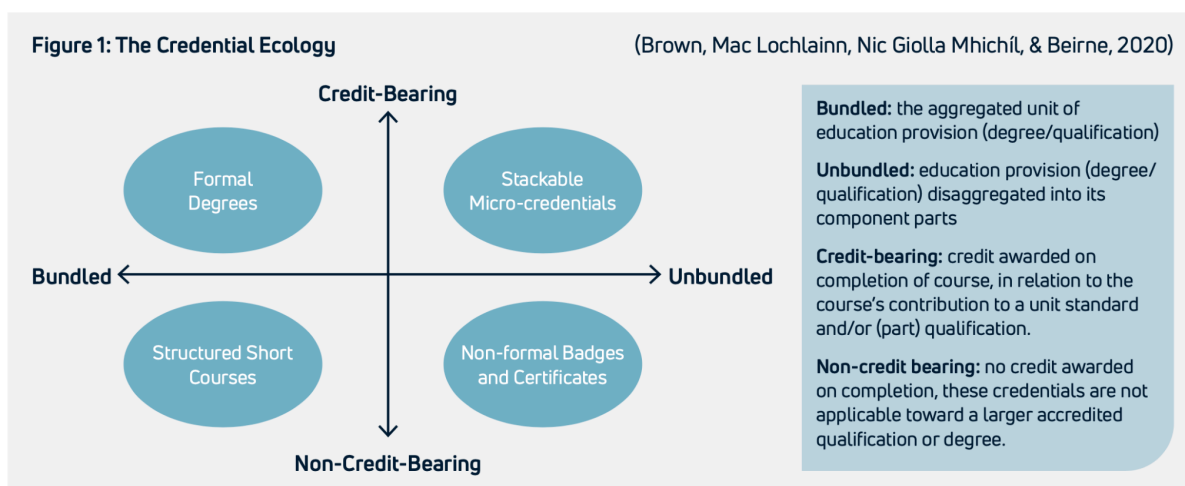


Image source: Beirne, E., Nic Giolla Mhichíl, M., & Brown, M. (2020). Micro-credentials: An Evolving Ecosystem. Dublin City University.

A European Commission Consultation Group actively working to address this problem have produced the following working definition:

A micro-credential is a documented statement awarded by a trusted body to signify that a learner upon assessment has achieved learning outcomes of a small volume of learning against given standards and in compliance with agreed quality assurance principles.

Micro-credentials express credit volume and they are referenced to the national qualification framework and the EQF. A micro-credential may be offered independent of the method of provision (face-to-face, online or blended learning) or the nature of learning (formal, non-formal, informal). Micro-credentials are owned by the learner and are sharable and portable in the format of a stand-alone certificate, a digital badge, or as part of a portfolio.

#### 4.4. A European approach to micro-credentials

On 16 June 2022, the Council of the European Union (EU) adopted a [Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#). The Recommendation seeks to support the development, implementation and recognition of micro-credentials across institutions, businesses, sectors and borders.

This document can be helpful in understanding how micro-credentials can be used to validate and recognise learning in non-formal education settings, support lifelong learning, and provide portable evidence of learning that can be used in various contexts.

- **Inclusion and Accessibility:** Conclusions state that well-designed micro-credentials can be used to support inclusion and accessibility to education and training for a wider range of learners. This is particularly relevant for non-formal education, which often aims to reach learners who may not have access to or be served well by traditional formal education systems (page 7).
- **Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning:** On page 9, it refers to the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is a key aspect of non-formal education, as it often involves learning that happens outside of traditional classroom settings. Micro-credentials can provide a way to validate and recognize this type of learning. The document recommends on page 11 the use of micro-credentials to increase participation in lifelong learning.
- **Portability:** On page 13, the document discusses the concept of 'portability' of micro-credentials. This is particularly relevant for non-formal education, as learners often engage with multiple providers and need a way to carry their learning achievements with them.
- **Support for Various Contexts:** On page 21, the document explores the role of micro-credentials in various contexts, such as supporting the professional

development of workers and meeting mandatory requirements for upskilling and reskilling in certain jobs. This is often a key goal of non-formal education.

The proposal recommends the use of micro-credentials to complement and enhance education, training, lifelong learning, and employability ecosystems. Micro-credentials can be used to certify the outcomes of small, tailored learning experiences in formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings.

Therefore, micro-credentials can be used in the field of non-formal education to provide targeted, flexible acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competences to meet new and emerging needs in society and the labour market. They can also help individuals fill the skill gaps they need to succeed in a fast-changing environment, while not replacing traditional qualifications.

## 4.5. European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning

These [guidelines](#) developed by Cedefop, provide practical recommendations and examples for validating non-formal and informal learning across various sectors and contexts. They offer guidance on the design, implementation, and quality assurance of validation processes. Guidelines were prepared based on the Council Recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the EU (2012).

Guidelines define 4 key steps in validating prior learning:

1. **Identification** of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
2. **Documentation** of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
3. **Assessment** of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
4. **Certification** of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.' (Council of the EU, 2012, p. 3, points 2a to 2d).

### Looking at the experience of using digital Open Badges, for which stage badges contributed the most? Which stage of validation is an unused potential yet?

Guidelines have an Annex 1 with some key questions for consideration when designing a validation system (pages 59-64). There are few questions specifically focused on Validation tools:

## Key questions on validation tools

Before the validation tool can be selected it is important to look at the learning to be assessed. It is generally accepted that the following criteria need to be considered:

- purpose of the validation process;
- breadth of knowledge, skills and competences to be assessed;
- depth of learning required;
- how current or recent knowledge, skills and competence are;
- sufficiency of information for an assessor to make a judgement;
- authenticity of the evidence being the candidate's own learning outcomes.

Guidelines have one chapter where it mentions badges "4.1.1. Validation and open education resources" and it has an interesting turn into looking at the connection between Open Educational Resources (further, OER) and potential of badges to validate learning from OERs.

<...> It is important to consider how the outcomes of this learning can be appropriately documented and assessed and how current practices on validation can take them into account. Here are some issues to be considered when linking validation and OERs.

### Possible requirements for validation of OERs:

- Learning carried out through OER must be described in the form of learning outcomes.
- Where the OER brings with it some form of internal credit, for example *badges*, these must be explained and documented in a transparent way encouraging trust.
- Standards and/or reference points underpinning *credits or badges* must be clearly explained.
- Arrangements for quality assurance underpinning OERs must be transparently presented.
- Methods for assessment/testing must be transparently explained.

Based on the points above, the question for the further European strategy on badge recognition and the quality label is:

- Should the project consortium consider the following aspects when assessing the quality of a badge (especially those with potential of validating non-formal learning outcomes):
- What information in the badge is a minimum acceptable standard of clarity and transparency?
- How the standards or reference points should be mentioned/connected in the badge? And should it be a technological solution or rather badge description solution?
- What information in the badge is a minimum acceptable standard of describing assessment methods?

There was an evaluation of the Council Recommendations on how the member states progressed with the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL).



(p.30 of the evaluation study) Many of the stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation study have admitted that the CR has raised awareness about VNFIL in many Member States since 2012, boosting the level of validation activity. This is especially true in the *third sector with 50 organisations in over 20 Member States involved in the validation of the skills and competences of volunteers*.

Projects cited are : Euravon, Volcar, VaPoVo, e-VOC, ReValue, Volunteer Validation, Global Recognition, Lever, Lever Up, GREAT, CivCil, Volunteering Validation Highway, Destination E-validation, Innoval, I've Experienced, ImProvalm, Upval. The outcomes of these projects are/will be included in the Erasmus+ dissemination platform: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/> .

A further 40 tools for validation in the third sector have been developed, showing increasing availability alongside national level programmes. An overview and analysis of these tools can be found on [www.improval.eu](http://www.improval.eu) .

At the same time, many interviewees noted that not all tools comply with CR guidelines. Results from the public consultation confirm this tendency, with respondents finding that VNFIL is often available to individuals through the context of specific projects and/or in relation to VET and hard skills, suggesting that comprehensive and nationwide procedures are seldom being experienced by individuals.

## 4.6. Improving Validation in the Voluntary Sector

[ImproVal](#) project consortium, using the results from the tool collection, the study, and the results of workshops organised with stakeholders in each country, the partners have published a [policy paper](#) for improving validation in the voluntary sector in 2020. The paper was prepared by the EDOS foundation with the support of the Lifelong Learning Platform.

It provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of validation in the voluntary sector across different countries. Here are the main policy actions that the document is calling for:

- **National Body for Advice, Lobbying, Dialogue, and Policy Making:** The document calls for the establishment of a national body that can provide advice, engage in lobbying, facilitate dialogue, and contribute to policy making in the field of validation in the voluntary sector (page 8).
- **Quality Standards and Training Courses:** calling for quality standards and training courses for volunteer programs, volunteer coordinators, and volunteer centres. These standards and courses can help ensure the quality and effectiveness of validation practices in the voluntary sector (page 8).

- **Network of Volunteer Centers:** recommendation for the establishment of a network of volunteer centres at the national, provincial, regional, and local levels. This network can facilitate the sharing of best practices, resources, and information, and can help coordinate efforts to improve validation in the voluntary sector (page 8).
- **Collaboration with the Social and Education Sector:** The document calls for greater collaboration between the voluntary sector and the social and education sector. This collaboration can help align validation practices across different sectors and can contribute to the broader recognition of skills and competencies gained through volunteering (page 8).
- **Collaboration between Companies and the Voluntary Sector:** recommendation to foster collaboration between companies and the voluntary sector to engage employees in volunteer activities. This can help promote the value of volunteering and can contribute to the recognition of skills and competencies gained through these activities (page 8).
- **Certificate of Competencies Gained Through Volunteering:** The document calls for the development of certificates that can validate the competencies gained through volunteering. These certificates can provide tangible proof of these competences and can help volunteers gain recognition for their skills and experiences (page 8).

## 4.7. European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

[The EQF](#) is a common reference framework of eight levels expressed as learning outcomes, serving as a translation device between different qualification frameworks or systems and their levels. It *does not replace or define* national qualification frameworks or systems. The EQF does not describe specific qualifications or an individual's competences and particular qualifications should be referenced to the appropriate EQF level by way of the relevant national qualifications systems.

The purpose of the EQF is to improve the transparency, comparability, and portability of people's qualifications. It plays an important role in raising employability, easing mobility, and access to further education. Qualifications are the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process by a competent authority and typically take the form of documents such as certificates or diplomas. They determine that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

The EQF is used to reference national qualifications frameworks or systems and to compare all types and levels of qualifications in the European Union that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems, in particular by referencing their qualification levels to levels of the EQF set out in Annex II and by using the criteria set out in Annex III.



In terms of designing recognition systems, the EQF can be helpful in the following ways:

The EQF and the national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to it can support existing recognition practises thanks to the strengthened trust, understanding, and comparability of qualifications they bring. That can make the process of recognition for learning and working purposes easier. Overarching qualifications frameworks such as the EQF could serve as information tools for recognition practices.

The EQF encourages the use of common data structures and formats for the electronic publication of information on qualifications with an EQF level. This helps achieve transparency and facilitates the understanding and use of published information on qualifications.

The EQF encourages the use by social partners, public employment services, education providers, quality assurance bodies, and public authorities to support the comparison of qualifications and transparency of the learning outcomes.

Therefore if Quality Label is aiming to provide a quality assurance, application of qualification standards (national or European) can be an important element to higher quality of activities and increased level of potential recognition.

## 4.8. European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions

[This manual](#), developed by the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), provides guidance to higher education institutions on recognizing qualifications and competences from non-formal and informal learning. It offers practical tools and examples to support institutions in implementing recognition practices.

The manual can be useful for recognition in the field of non-formal education in several ways:

- Introduction to recognition: the first part of the manual provides a better understanding of recognition by discussing the legal framework, recognition structures, and diversity in recognition procedures and education systems. This knowledge can be applied to the field of non-formal education (Page 11).
- Recognition of prior learning: the manual provides examples of how institutions, such as Malmö University, take into consideration non-formal or informal learning for admission into bachelor's programs for those who do not fulfil formal admission requirements (Page 79).

- Recognising qualification based on RPL: The manual provides guidance on how to recognize a qualification awarded solely on the basis of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), even when it is not accompanied by a traditional transcript or described in terms of workload and program content (Page 105).
- Resources for recognition: The manual provides a list of information tools that can help in the recognition process. These include the Diploma Supplement, self-certification reports of countries participating in the Bologna Process, letters of recommendation/references, mobility documents such as the Europass Mobility Supplement, and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), which applies to all types of education and promotes the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Page 105).

## 5. Good practices of validation and recognition systems

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Frameworks, policies, and processes currently in place for validating and recognizing learning activities and outcomes within and beyond non-formal learning and youth work contexts in Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain.

## 5.1. Italy: desk research

### Validation and recognition in the national and local context

Categories	National level	Local level (Sardinia)
<b>Non-formal education context</b>	There is no specific system for validating youth work or NFL related competencies. Youthpass is mostly used in Italy, but not yet recognized fully throughout the country.	/
<b>Youth work context</b>	There is no specific system for validating youth work or NFL related competencies. Youthpass is mostly used in Italy, but not yet recognized fully throughout the country. Youth work is not recognized officially as a profession in Italy, hence there are no specific rules about it. <a href="#">NINFEA</a> is an association working towards getting the profession recognized and regulated in the country.	/
<b>Volunteering context</b>	There is no specific system for validating volunteering competencies in Italy. Volunteering is not systematic nor organically widespread, with the exception of the <a href="#">Universal Civil Service</a> (which is not mandatory, lasts 1 year and was born originally to substitute required military services in specific circumstances; it is not validated through any specific system). Youthpass is mostly used in Italy for validating EVS/ESC experiences, but not yet recognized fully throughout the country	/

	and not for local volunteering experiences, which are not generally recognized formally.	
<b>Higher education context</b>	<p><b>Good practice #1</b></p> <p><a href="#">Bestr</a> is the first Italian Digital Credentialing System, which was created in cooperation with <a href="#">Cineca</a>, a consortium of Italian universities and research/higher education institutes coming together to constitute the largest Italian computing centre.</p> <p>Bestr uses digital <a href="#">Open Badges</a> and <a href="#">Blockcerts</a> (platform for creating and verifying blockchain-based certificates) with the goal to connect students and professionals in higher education with employers.</p> <p>It's aimed directly at higher education institutions (universities, research institutes etc.) as badge issuers: learners, who are for instance university students, can earn badges based on attending and completing some specific courses/activities promoted by the university itself or even entire university degrees.</p> <p>Employers and other institutions can verify the validity of all the learners' badges through the platform itself.</p> <p>The system should be recognized by all the members of Cineca (over 100 institutions across Italy, including the Ministry of University and Research).</p> <p>Its diffusion on the Italian territory is however limited and its implementation optional.</p>	<p>In Sardinia, Bestr badges are used by the University of Cagliari specifically at CLA (the university's Language Centre, teaching foreign languages to students and staff), to certify the learners' competence level in foreign languages with a complex badge system for all levels.</p> <p>The University of Sassari has introduced Bestr badges as a certification system for several of their university degrees: students can earn them at the end of their studies to certify that they've successfully graduated.</p>
<b>Adult education context/Lifelong learning</b>	<p><b>"Good" practice #2</b></p> <p>In Italy, the validation and certification of professional competencies is regulated by a national standard (based on the <a href="#">EU recommendation of 2012</a>) that works as guidelines and is then</p>	<p>In Sardinia, the Region is officially the competent body for validation of professional competencies, acting through <a href="#">ASPAL</a>'s centres on the territory (the local agency for</p>

<b>VET context</b>	supposed to be applied by each region autonomously and according to their own capacity.	work-related policies and information).
<b>Employability context</b>		The system is described on the <a href="#">official website of the Region</a> , and it follows the 3 basic steps of the national guidelines: a citizen can request the certification and validation of their professional competencies to their local employment centre, if habilitated; expert staff will first help the citizen to clarify and collect information about the skills that they've acquired throughout their life, which goes into a specific document; a commission of experts will then review the document and verify the validity of what's written in it by different means depending on the skills and circumstances (e.g. interviews, practical tests etc.); the commission, if the validation phase is successful, will then provide official documentation that certifies the verified competencies.
<b>Recruitment context</b>	<p>"The guidelines, also agreed by the regions and autonomous provinces, set the rules for operationalising the services of the competent public bodies for the identification, validation and certification of competences acquired in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, in support of the individual's right to lifelong learning (Law No 92 of 2012). They also complete the regulatory framework of the 'National system for the certification of competences' (Legislative Decree No 13 of 2013).</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>According to the decree, competences specific to certain qualifications related to the national repertoire and are referenced to the national qualifications framework (NQF), are subject to identification, validation and certification. The national repertoire was included in the '<a href="#">atlas of work and qualifications</a>' – a detailed map of labour and qualifications described in a common terminology shared by relevant institutions. The terminology is created by the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (<a href="#">INAPP</a>) to support the technical group responsible for the national framework.</p> <p>The competences are assessed on request and may also be recognised by public bodies (subject to internal arrangements) in terms of credits to aid their portability.</p>	<p>It is not clear whether the system is currently working at full capacity in Sardinia: it's not fully known by the citizens at local level and it's marked as "ongoing/in development" on the <a href="#">INAPP's list of projects</a>.</p> <p>One of the good examples in Italy for implementation of the national guidelines for competence validation is that of <a href="#">Regione Lombardia</a> (the region of Lombardy), which is well-structured and spread-out on the territory. On their website, there is a link to a <a href="#">regional framework</a> that lists all the professional competencies that can be validated through the system.</p>

	<p>The labour ministry collects data by the competent bodies, as well as through INAPP and the National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (<a href="#">ANPAL</a>), and submits them to the national technical committee to verify that minimum service standards and performance indicators are met." - <a href="#">direct quote</a></p>	
<p><b>School context + Employability &amp; Recruitment contexts</b></p>	<p>School context varies greatly from region to region because schools have a certain degree of autonomy when it comes to organising their activities and curricula.</p> <p>In general, public schools recognize and issue formal certificates to certify the completion of a degree, at all levels, and that's the prevalent system of recognition and validation of competences used in the formal education sector.</p>	<p>In Sardinia, schools generally recognize extracurricular activities only if they've been organised/coordinated by the school itself, or (for high schools) if they fall within the PCTO system, i.e. a mandatory traineeship programme that students are involved in during their final years of high school, and which can also involve activities such as youth exchanges, seminars, and other activities carried out in a non-formal education setting.</p> <p>Some schools recognize Youthpass as a certificate for extra credits, but its recognition is not yet widespread. It is worth noting that only a very small number of extra credits can be collected through extracurricular activities, most of the student's career is defined by curricular activities only.</p> <p><b>Good practice #3</b>  <i>Camera di Commercio Cagliari - Oristano</i> (<a href="#">interview to Laura Congia</a>)  <a href="#">Unioncamere</a> (the association of Italian Chambers of Commerce) together with the Ministry of Education has developed a platform for formally certifying, through digital Open Badges, a selection of specific competences that students can develop by completing their PCTO experiences in (at the moment) four fields: tourism, mechatronics, textile and fashion design, and agriculture.</p>

		<p>Schools who are involved in the process, after having approved a PCTO (aka traineeship) programme for a student that will be taking place in one of the companies that are partnering up with the initiative, will have to enroll their student in a <a href="#">specific platform</a>. Through the platform, the two tutors who are assigned to monitor the student's progress on one hand for the school and on the other for the company where the traineeship is taking place, can verify information, add data and evidence of the student's achievements, or simply observations and evaluations on their progress.</p> <p>At the end of the traineeship, which has to last a minimum of 160 hours to be eligible, the students will undertake a test on the platform, to verify their knowledge, as well as a practical test, carried out like a "gamified simulation". If the tests are passed successfully, the student will automatically receive a badge from the platform. Unioncamere and the Chambers of Commerce at local level monitor the whole process and mediate between the schools and the involved companies.</p> <p>The tutors in charge of the students on behalf of the companies are trained by experts from the Chambers of Commerce on how to carry out their task effectively, beforehand, and if a tutor does not attend this training, the company will not be able to host students in the framework of this specific initiative (for which businesses receive some bonuses). Tutors do themselves receive a badge after completing their training.</p> <p>Students have no active role in this process, beside</p>
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		<p>completing their traineeship and passing the final tests: everything else (enrolling, monitoring results on the platform etc.) is curated directly by the school and the company. Employers are very motivated to keep this system going and to see it include more and more competencies and sectors (as of now, the sectors are only four, as mentioned above, and for each one there's only a specific and very limited set of competencies that can be certified): although this specific system is just starting to be applied, it has been noted that after training students on the job through similar initiatives, employers will very often employ them when they complete their studies and they recognize the value of the badges that certify their job-related competencies.</p> <p>The system is at the moment tied to schools and PCTO programmes specifically, but with the hope to expand it to people who have already completed their studies and wish to see their competencies certified, and to also expand the list of competencies included.</p>
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## 5.2. The Netherlands: desk research

### Validation and recognition national and local context in the Kingdom of The Netherlands on behalf of non-formal learning in Dutch Youth Work

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As a follow up to the Dutch Cities of Learning strategy<sup>3</sup> we have started our **Desk Research to map Dutch validation and recognition systems** and solutions based on several pillars: young people, non-formal education (youth work and volunteering, adult education), formal education (VET and higher education) and employers/employees (employability and recruiters). This report explores validation and recognition systems within the Netherlands, focusing on their role in empowering young people through Dutch Cities of Learning initiatives. Breakthrough, an organisation specialising in youth and adult non-formal education, conducted this desk research.

#### Youth work in The Netherlands

Within The Netherlands youth workers focus on guiding young people aged 10 to 23 who need support in their journey to adulthood. Youth workers speak the language of young people and the community, encourage their personal and social development, advocate for their interests, and set boundaries. The emphasis for youth workers is increasingly on working according to the needs and demands of young people, rather than providing predefined services. Youth work is thus an instrument to provide vulnerable young people with the opportunity to grow into engaged, active, and independent adults.

Youth workers organise a wide range of activities, from scavenger hunts to street football tournaments, from drug and alcohol awareness sessions to jam sessions. The common thread is always the personal development of the youth. Youth work is focused on:

1. Encouraging talent development.
2. Serving as role models.
3. Helping in building a social network.
4. Assisting in addressing personal or social problems.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/176mQvTHt9YabQDZ4nTJ6DLNDugwZyoLP/view>, created by Dutch Cities of Learning team in July 2022

5. Finding positive forms of leisure activities.
6. Promoting active participation in society.
7. Discovering a future perspective.

Young people are given the opportunity to develop their talents, with an emphasis on what they can do rather than what goes wrong.<sup>4</sup>

### Desk research questions

1. Understand what is already present in validation and recognition systems, who are the stakeholders and why are they having this specific validation and recognition system?
2. What is a good practice and what can we learn from this good practice for the Dutch Cities of Learning badge recognition strategy and quality label for badges that we will develop in the next year?

Building on the concepts of validation and recognition introduced in the previous chapter, let's explore how these systems are implemented in the Netherlands, specifically within the context of Dutch Cities of Learning and their focus on empowering young people.

### Outcomes of the desk research<sup>5</sup>

1. Governmental policy documents: The Dutch governmental websites refer to European policy documents like the Youth Act (2015)<sup>6</sup> to address needs for preventive and specialised care; the Social Support Act (2015)<sup>7</sup> to stimulate participation and citizenship; the Participation Act (2014)<sup>8</sup> to stimulate participation in the labour market; and the Appropriate Education Act (2014)<sup>9</sup>. In 2018 the European Commission **already created** a newer European youth policy strategies for 2019 -2027<sup>10</sup>. As Dutch Cities of Learning we prefer to follow up on these 2019-2027 strategies that focus on three core areas of action, around the three words: Engage, Connect, Empower, while working on joined-up implementation across sectors with other Dutch sectors following the Dutch policy strategy. During an international 2017-2018 dialogue process which involved young people from all over Europe, 11 European Youth Goals were developed. These goals identify cross-sectoral areas that affect young people's lives and point out challenges. The EU Youth Strategy should contribute to realising this vision of young people.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nji.nl/jongerenwerk/wat-is-het>, visited website on 13 October 2023

<sup>5</sup> It's important to note that these insights are based on information available as of September 2023 and may have evolved since then.

<sup>6</sup> <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0034925/2021-11-06>, website visited 13 October 2023

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.government.nl/topics/care-and-support-at-home/social-support-act-wmo>, website visited 13 October 2023

<sup>8</sup> <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/2023-01-01>, website visited 13 October 2023

<sup>9</sup> <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0032176/2022-08-01>, website visited 13 October 2023

<sup>10</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>, website visited 13 October 2023

<sup>11</sup> [https://youth.europa.eu/strategy\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en), website visited on 13 October 2023

2. Validation for a Purpose: The Dutch approach to validation emphasises that it is not an end in itself but rather a means to achieve more distant educational or labour market goals. This aligns with the idea that validation should serve a practical purpose, such as enhancing employability or facilitating further education.

2. Focus on Quality Assurance: Quality assurance is deemed crucial to ensure the effectiveness of validation for non-formal and informal learning. It requires investments to maintain high standards and to validate learning outcomes effectively.

3. Support for a National Validation System: The Netherlands supports the Commission's recommendation to introduce a national validation system for non-formal and informal learning by 2015.

4. Recognition of Various Components: The Netherlands endorses the elements of validation checked by the Commission, including identification, documentation, assessment, and certification. The EVC Quality Code and the experience certificate system align with these elements. During this desk research a MOOC is running where within the MBO2030 challenge 'dialogical validation' VET education is asked to become aware of and give critical feedback on the new developments for dialogical validation.<sup>12</sup>

5. Integration with Other Educational Instruments: The Dutch approach integrates the validation of non-formal and informal learning with other related instruments, such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and more. This integration ensures consistency and coherence in educational and vocational systems.

6. Volunteering and Social Support: The Dutch government promotes access to education and work, with volunteering playing a role in the Social Support Act. Young people engaging in voluntary work can receive certificates or references, enhancing their employability.

7. Shift in Generational Values: Research reveals differences in values between older and younger generations in the context of volunteering. While older generations focus on solidarity and contributing to society, younger generations seek recognition, personal development, and skills enhancement within volunteer organisations.

8. Dialogic Validation in Education: The Dutch educational system is moving toward a more flexible and personalised approach. "Dialogic validation" focuses on recognizing and valuing competencies acquired both formally and informally. This approach reduces unnecessary learning and encourages personal development.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nieuwsbrievenminocw.nl/actueel/nieuws/2023/09/nieuwsbrief-mbo-september-2023/ontdek-pareltjes-uit-het-mbo-tijdens-de-mooc-dialogisch-valideren>, website visited 13 October 2023

9. EVC and Sustainable Employability: EVC, or Recognition of Acquired Competencies, is viewed as a valuable tool for recognizing and recording education, work, and life experience. It contributes to the sustainable employability of the workforce and can be used for various purposes, including validating professional competence.

10. Support from Employers: Employers in the Netherlands are interested in validation as a means to identify and use the skills and competencies of their employees effectively. It can help solve personnel issues and place individuals within the organisation more strategically.

### **Conclusion and decisions made after desk research**

The Netherlands' validation and recognition landscape is undergoing a period of interesting transition. While our desk research identified existing systems and stakeholders (e.g., national validation system, youth work organisations, government), it's clear that new policies and approaches are actively being developed.

This dynamic environment presents a unique opportunity. Rather than simply researching established practices, we can position ourselves as active stakeholders in shaping the future of validation and recognition within Dutch youth work.

#### **Question 1: Existing Systems, Stakeholders, and Rationale**

- Existing validation and recognition systems: The Netherlands supports a national validation system for non-formal learning (point 3). This system likely involves identifying learning, documenting it, assessing outcomes, and potentially issuing certifications (point 4).
- Stakeholders:
  - Government: Plays a role in policy development and potentially system administration (mentioned in references to policy documents).
  - Youth work organisations: Deliver non-formal learning programs and likely participate in validation processes (mentioned in the context of Dutch youth work).
  - Employers: Interested in using validation to identify and use employee skills (point 10).
  - Young People: The target group for validation efforts, aiming to empower them through learning pathways
  - Educational Institutions: Likely involved in some aspects of validation, especially when it connects to formal education (point 5).
- Rationale: The Dutch approach to validation emphasises practicality (point 1). Validation serves as a tool to achieve goals like career advancement or further education. Additionally, quality assurance is crucial for effective validation (point 2).

## Question 2: Good Practices for Badge Recognition

While there's no single "good practice" explicitly mentioned, the text highlights several aspects that could be valuable for your badge recognition strategy and quality label:

- Focus on Practical Outcomes: Align badges with clear benefits like career advancement or educational opportunities. (point 1).
- Quality Assurance: Implement a rigorous system to ensure badges accurately reflect acquired skills and knowledge (point 2).
- Integration with Frameworks: Consider connecting badges to existing qualifications frameworks like NLQF or EQF (point 5).
- Stakeholder Involvement: Engage diverse stakeholders, including young people, in developing and implementing the badge system.
- Dialogic Validation Principles: Explore incorporating dialogic validation principles to recognize both formal and informal learning experiences (point 8).

By actively engaging with diverse stakeholders, particularly young people, and advocating for best practices like dialogic validation and clear learning outcomes, we can contribute to a robust and empowering validation and recognition system that aligns perfectly with the Dutch Cities of Learning goals.

## Resources found in Desk Research

Categories	National level	Stakeholders
<b>Non-formal education context</b>	<p>Dutch experience shows that validation, also at the level of the individual participant, is not an end in itself. Validation visible in practice is almost always an instrument for the realisation of a more distant educational or labour market goal. The Netherlands has the importance of the realisation of these final goals when designing a national validation system. The Dutch experience further shows that quality assurance is crucial to reuse the effect of the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Achieving this quality assurance requires the necessary investments.</p> <p>The Netherlands can support the Commission's recommendation towards the conclusions to introduce a national validation system for non-formal and informal learning by 2015 at the latest. The Netherlands is one of the four countries - together with Finland, France and Luxembourg - where there is discussion of an assessed system. In</p>	/

	<p>the Netherlands, there is currently a great deal of attention for the quality, use and effectiveness of the current system.</p> <p>The Netherlands endorses the parts of validation checked by the Commission: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The EVC Quality Code developed in the Netherlands and the validation system that leads to an experience certificate are in line with these elements. The Netherlands questions the recommendation that hamburgers should also be used separately from these components. Is there still validation in that case, for example when no assessment and/or certification takes place? The Netherlands believes that at least the first three steps are necessary to qualify as validation.</p> <p>In the Netherlands, the implementation of various instruments is comparable in terms of mutual cohesion where possible. The validation of non-formal and informal learning specifically concerns related instruments such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) developed in collaboration with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).</p> <p>(Date: 05-09-2012 <a href="https://www.eumonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vj85mqwb8fyb">https://www.eumonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vj85mqwb8fyb</a>)</p>	
<b>Youth work context</b>	<p>On the <a href="#">Youth Wiki - Netherlands</a> page (date: 05-09-2023) there is not any mention of youth work and validation of non-formal learning and informal learning other than The Experience Certificate (EVC) which is focused on Learn and Work. At the time of desk research, the quality assurance was not described.</p> <p>On the website from <a href="#">Nederlands Jeugdinstituut</a> (date 11-01-2024) is written that various organisations in the Netherlands are dedicated to improving and advancing youth work. Entities such as the Youth Spot research group and the national strategic youth work forum are actively involved in enhancing the expertise in working with young people.</p>	/
<b>Volunteering context (for example: MDT)</b>	<p>39 percent of young people aged between 15 and 35 years participate in voluntary work according to <a href="#">Statistics Netherlands</a> (CBS, 2021), for example in sports clubs, schools, care and nursing, youth organisations and in religious or philosophical organisations. The number of young people has declined since 2020, when it was 44 percent.</p> <p>The focus of the Dutch government is access to education and work. Volunteering is part of the <a href="#">Social Support Act</a> (2015) (<a href="#">Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning 2015</a>) and stimulates informal and formal social systems. The Social Support Act gives municipalities the assignment to connect with initiatives of citizens.</p> <p>Young people can get a certificate or references, which can be helpful in finding a job.</p> <p>The Department Social Support (in Dutch: Dienst Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning) of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has no special policy concerning voluntary work among young people. Volunteers policy is</p>	<p>Association of Dutch Voluntary Organizations (NOV) (<a href="#">Vereniging Nederlandse Organisaties Vrijwilligerswerk</a>)</p>



	<p>decentralised. Skills recognition for (young) volunteers is one of the activities of NOV, the Dutch umbrella organisation for volunteering, they work on commissioned by the ministry.</p> <p>Differences between older and younger generations Research done by <a href="#">Motivaction</a> (April 2023) by order of NOV shows that for older generations values such as solidarity, helping others and contributing to society are an important impulse for volunteering. Younger generations tend to focus more on individualistic values: more recognition and appreciation for the work within the voluntary organisation. Also they would like more guidance, feedback on performance, personal development and to learn new skills.</p>	
<b>Higher education context</b>	<p>Testing and validating learning outcomes in flexible education More flexibility and demand-oriented education has consequences for the way of testing. Students already learn a lot in informal, non-formal and other formal contexts and they take this knowledge and skills with them in further education. Programs can take this into account by translating the final qualifications into learning outcomes that are recognizable for the professional field. Through learning path-independent testing, students can demonstrate these learning outcomes. (<a href="https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317104834_Toetsen_en_valideren_van_leeruitkomsten_in_flexibel_ond_erwijs">https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317104834_Toetsen_en_valideren_van_leeruitkomsten_in_flexibel_ond_erwijs</a>)</p>	/
<b>Adult education context/Lifelong learning</b>	<p>Recognition of Acquired Competences, by the providers, but certainly also by the Educational Institutions. EVC does not always have a positive image and partly on the basis of a national study (commissioned by the government), a lot of effort has been put into a more accessible and profitable way of validating experience. The basis is and remains the recognition and appreciation of knowledge and experience already present: by making this transparent and assigning value to it, access to both labour market and education routes is created.</p> <p>In addition to this procedural approach, there is also an increasing need from the labour market for flexible learning routes, with a focus on skilled employees. A diploma does not always have to be the final goal. Experience shows that more and more educational institutions are responding to this by developing tailor-made programs and flexible learning paths, but also by (re)introducing a validation approach.</p> <p>A major challenge in this respect is supporting employers in introducing a different learning culture and instilling urgency in employees who do not feel the need to develop themselves at the moment, other than occasionally following a course, course or training. Within Care &amp; Welfare, the qualification of personnel (as a result of BIG requirements) often predominated. Of course this is still important, but we also see other developments. An</p>	/



	<p>example is the emergence of professional registers for youth care and social work, which mainly concern skills, competencies translated into areas of expertise.</p> <p>Within this development, the Validation of Experience (EVC) has a right to exist: not only aimed at the outcome, but perhaps more importantly, aimed at enticing employees to develop. Over the past period, several educational institutions have been working on modernising and implementing these so-called validation routes: from designing learning outcomes and coordinating with examination boards to exploring different learning and development paths. Always from the customer's point of view.</p> <p>Every training provider sees that 'only' offering training courses alone is no longer sufficient. They are increasingly profiling themselves as a development partner and see that the validation of experience can play an important role in this. Are we done? Certainly not, but validation as a method and access to compact education has acquired a new right to exist within the domain of Care and Welfare.</p> <p>The development is that it is increasingly about skilled employees instead of just well-trained employees. The Corona crisis has been an accelerator of these developments. EVC as an accelerator of education and getting people up to standard sooner is a solution that deserves recognition. The efficiency of validation also forms the basis for the desired learning culture at institutions and organisations. Develop effectively and grow together from a healthy necessity for now and the future. Validate!</p> <p><a href="https://www.libereaux.nl/wie-zijn-wij/actueel/45/valideren-van-ervaring-als-strategie-voor-llo/">(https://www.libereaux.nl/wie-zijn-wij/actueel/45/valideren-van-ervaring-als-strategie-voor-llo/)</a></p>	
<b>VET context</b>	<p>The vocational education system in the Netherlands is undergoing a significant transformation. Towards 2030, the vocational education (VET) system will undergo substantial changes from its current state as of September 2023. Presently, many students follow standardised learning paths, but the vision for 2030 is to encourage students to explore and pursue individualised learning journeys. A key challenge in this evolution lies in determining each student's unique learning pathway – understanding their existing formal or informal knowledge, aligning with the demands of the job market, and finding the most effective means of achieving these goals. Educators in 2030 are expected to actively engage in dialogues with students about these aspects, embracing the concept of 'dialogic validation,' a fundamental principle of the MBOin2030 program.</p> <p>Dialogic validation involves identifying, valuing, recognizing, and guiding the further development of competencies that individuals have gained, both formally and informally, and still aspire to acquire. This approach prevents unnecessary learning, ensuring that students don't repeat what they already know. Recognition is given for existing knowledge, whether derived from practical field experience, volunteer work, or personal life roles such as caregiving. Instead of adhering to standardised learning trajectories, the emphasis is on providing more space for</p>	/

	<p>personal development. Dialogic validation not only boosts self-awareness of one's capabilities but also motivates students and fosters ambition.</p> <p>(<a href="https://starthubs.co/nl/mboin2030/leerervaringen-mee-laten-tellen-in-het-mbo/briefing">https://starthubs.co/nl/mboin2030/leerervaringen-mee-laten-tellen-in-het-mbo/briefing</a>)</p>	
<b>Employability context</b>	<p>EVC contributes to sustainable employability!</p> <p>EVC (Recognition of Acquired Competencies) is the labour market standard for independently mapping and recording education, work and life experience in an unambiguous manner.</p> <p>In the EVC System, the Labor Foundation works together with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to contribute to the sustainable employability of the working population through the design and use of a labour market instrument that is flexible with developments in the business community. can move.</p> <p>EVC can be performed for two purposes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Validating the Professional Competence (knowledge and skills) of employees according to a Sector or Professional Standard. EVC is then the labour market tool for assessing the value of employees.</li> <li>2. Validating competencies aimed at acquiring exemptions for technical components of formal vocational training under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.</li> </ol> <p>EVC is made possible in part because the national government, the UWV and also O&amp;O funds (partially) reimburse the costs of EVC processes to the participants or clients.</p> <p>Stichting Examenkamer has been appointed by the Labor Foundation as the implementer of the National Knowledge Center EVC. The national information centre for all your questions about EVC, Professional and Industry Qualifications, recognized EVC Agencies and relevant laws and regulations.</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.nationaal-kenniscentrum-evc.nl/voor-branchorganisatie/">https://www.nationaal-kenniscentrum-evc.nl/voor-branchorganisatie/</a>)</p> <p>"Our Board of Examiners has indicated that it regards this process as reliable," confirms Christa van der Veer, training advisor and project leader of this validation project at ROC Friese Poort Bedrijfsopleidingen. "We even hired a policy officer to further integrate validation into our organisation."</p> <p>Solving employee issues</p> <p>Raymond: "Validation means identifying someone's qualities in a reliable and objective manner, so that education can assign a value to them. It is a recognized way of capturing skills, giving you a different view of a person's employability. We invest heavily in conversations with employers: we explain what we do, what problem we solve and what the result is. Many companies need a culture change. They try to recruit staff with quick fixes such as a modified vacancy text. But what are the qualities and skills of the people you employ? If you research that</p>	/

	<p>properly, do you have any vacancy space at all? We can solve your personnel issue by validating what people know and can do and by placing them in a good place in the organisation. There is a lot of curiosity about what we do and the need is great: six knowledge sessions with employers in the region are already planned for the coming period.”</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.of.nl/valideren-vaardigheden-betrouwbaar-vastleggen/">https://www.of.nl/valideren-vaardigheden-betrouwbaar-vastleggen/</a>)</p>	
<b>Recruitment context</b>	<p>Trends! No policy documents</p> <p>In a recent episode of the Grip op Recruitment podcast, Peter Boerman, Editor-in-Chief at Werf&amp;, shared insights on key trends shaping the recruitment market. This article highlights five trends identified by Boerman that are expected to influence the recruitment sector in the coming years.</p> <p>1. Rise of Skills Assessment: Boerman emphasises the increasing importance of skills in the recruitment process, with recruiters shifting focus from traditional CVs and cover letters. This trend signifies a need for recruiters to explore new methods for assessing and validating candidates' skills.</p> <p>2. Skills Passports and Validated Skills: Initiatives to create "skills passports" are on the rise, allowing candidates to showcase and validate their skills. However, a standardised solution is yet to be established, and collaboration among various stakeholders, including the government, is crucial for developing a unified system for skills validation.</p> <p>3. Emphasis on Diversity and Inclusion: Diversity, inclusion, and equality are becoming integral to the recruitment process. Companies must actively work towards creating inclusive workplaces and providing equal opportunities for all candidates. While legislative efforts exist, there is still ample room for improvement.</p> <p>4. Open Hiring and Barrier-Free Recruitment: Growing interest in open hiring and barrier-free recruitment is evident, with some companies, such as Jumbo and Laplace, adopting a streamlined hiring process. This trend is likely to expand as more businesses recognize the benefits of equitable selection processes.</p> <p>5. Role of AI and Technology in Recruitment:</p>	/

Despite the current presence of AI and technology in recruitment, there is considerable untapped potential for further development and integration. Boerman suggests that while the short-term impact of AI may be overestimated, it holds substantial long-term potential to reshape how recruiters discover, assess, and hire candidates.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/vijf-opkomende-trends-recruitment-yoda-recruitment/?originalSubdomain=nl>

In a new whitepaper, Bas van de Haterd outlines steps for selecting tools that aid in finding the best candidates for a team. The first step is determining the aspects to measure, such as job fit, value fit, or company fit. He then advises checking the scientific reliability of the tools, with special attention to validation. The third step is selecting the tool based on criteria such as the type of test, validity, reliability, candidate experience, costs, and integration with existing software. Finally, Van de Haterd emphasises the importance of calibration and continuous evaluation, highlighting the potential of artificial intelligence for creating diverse profiles for the same position.

<https://www.werf-en.nl/hoe-selecteer-je-een-tool-om-mensen-te-selecteren/>

## 5.3 Lithuania: desk research (completed by Nectarus)

### Validation and recognition in non-formal education, youth work and volunteering contexts in Lithuanian and Vilnius city

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Steps in desk research in national/local context (narrow it down to what is useful for us, e.g. for Open Badges):

#### 1. Understanding what is there already in systemic solutions, who are stakeholders and what questions to ask. Why are they having it?

After investigating [validation and recognition situation in Lithuania and Vilnius city](#), our Nectarus team decided to prioritise our focus on the following directions:

1. **Non-formal education context:** continue embedding Vilnius City of Learning platform and recognition activities at the local level in Vilnius city.
2. **Youth work context:** seek to achieve validation and recognition solutions for the international youth work and training activities within the Lithuanian national youth workers certification system and promote similar solutions at the local level in Vilnius city.
3. **Volunteering context:** further advance volunteering recognition solutions at local level in Vilnius city.
4. **Other contexts:** proactively seek for opportunities to expand digital Open Badges knowledge, understanding and use in other contexts.

## 2. What are the components? | 3. What is done getting to the system/structure? | 4. Find the gaps

Components/Contexts	Non-formal education	Youth work	Volunteering
Legal framework	<b>Partial</b> , needs making suggestion to include in Vilnius city Youth strategy plan	<b>Yes</b> , needs checking how it address international training activities	<b>Yes</b> , very clearly in Vilnius city Youth policy document
Validation and recognition system	<b>Fragmented</b> , depends on current projects and programmes	<b>Yes</b> , needs checking how it includes international training activities	<b>At a start</b> , needs to be created
Validation and recognition practice	<b>Non-systematic</b> , depends on current projects and programmes	<b>Yes</b> , needs checking how it includes international training activities	<b>At a start</b> , needs further promotion and support to volunteering organisations and volunteers
Validation and recognition coordination	<b>No</b> , municipality needs to mandate an organisation	<b>Yes</b> , Youth Affairs Department	<b>Yes</b> , Vilnius youth volunteering centre
Validation and recognition tools	<a href="#">Vilnius City of Learning platform</a>	<b>Yes</b> , not aligned to Cities of Learning and Open Badges	<a href="#">Volunteer in Vilnius platform</a>
Impact and evidence	<b>Fragmented</b> , have stats available from the platform	N/A	<b>Not started yet.</b>

## 5. What works?

**Non-formal education:** there is strong support from the Vilnius municipality to embed the Vilnius City of Learning platform and recognition system in the non-formal education field. When project resources are available to support training, use and promoting, then there is high engagement in using the platform and achieving recognition. We have good practice examples of how Open Badges and the Vilnius City of Learning platform has been used in the past. Vilnius City of Learning platform leads in the stats of using the platform (e.g. number of activities, registered organisers, etc.). We have good partnership with VJOSAS and access to non-formal education providers.

**Youth work:** the national youth workers certification system has solid legal ground for implementation. It restarted during the last two years and has been used by youth workers working at the youth centres. The Youth Affair Department has some resources to run the certification system. All components have been tested in the past and currently are in place to implement the certification system. There are good grounds to match and complement the existing system by offering Cities of Learning platform's features to advance and support its implementation.

**Volunteering:** Vilnius city municipality and Vilnius youth volunteering centre has established a "Volunteer in Vilnius" platform recently. They allocated human resources to coordinate the platform's promotion and support to volunteering organisations and volunteers. The centre's leadership has solid knowledge and practical experience of using Cities of Learning platform in the previous programmes and continues using it. Volunteering organisations are slowly taking up this opportunity to use the platform to promote their volunteering offers. There is clear mention of recognition of volunteering experiences in the Vilnius youth policy document.

## 6. What are the challenges?

**Non-formal education:** 1) mainstreaming recognition at the policy level; 2) having a coordinating organisation in Vilnius city; 3) mainstreaming recognition practice as integral work element of learning providers; 4) sustainable stream of new learning activities; 5) Vilnius City of Learning promotion among learners and organisers.



**Youth work:** 1) Currently, the certification system is available only if youth workers already work at the youth centre; 2) No clear solution how international youth work training validation and recognition works; 3) Used tools do not align to Cities of Learning and Open Badges solutions; 4) Lack of involvement from other international youth work training providers.

**Volunteering:** 1) Main focus remains on promoting volunteering activities - lack of systemic learning support and recognition practice; 2) Some organisations lack digital literacy; 3) Platform promotion and dissemination to volunteers; 4) City level systemic approach to recognition of volunteering activities and outcomes.

## 7. How does it work in practice?

Non-formal education: NGO Nectarus leads several Cities of Learning strategic partnerships and in this way involves local partner organisations to offer learning activities on the platform and use other features to support learning and recognition.

Youth work: Youth Affair Agency issues a call to apply for youth workers' certification system and then implements necessary steps for youth workers to achieve formal recognition of their competences. Some parts of the system's implemented are outsourced (e.g. competence assessment, training delivery).

Volunteering: Vilnius volunteering centre implements recognition efforts using the "Volunteer in Vilnius" platform. They embedded this measure within their organisation's strategic priorities and annual activity plan. Using direct communication and training activities, the staff onboards volunteering organisations to start and continue using the platform. They plan creating promotion and support resources to further improve volunteering quality and advance recognition.

## 8. Can we find ways that work for keeping Quality Label Open, Inclusive and Accessible for All?

In all three contexts there is a great chance not to be inclusive and accessible for all, since the fields we are focusing on all promoted these goals and values.

Categories	National level - Lithuania	Local level - Vilnius City	Stakeholders
<b>Non-formal education context</b>		Embedding Vilnius City of Learning platform and recognition activities	Vilnius municipality VJOSAS Non-formal education providers Organisers registered on CoL platform
<b>Youth work context</b>	Achieve validation and recognition solutions for the international youth work and training activities within the Lithuanian national youth workers certification system	Promote similar solutions at the local level in Vilnius city	National level: Youth Affairs Agency, Open Youth Work Association, Int. youth work training providers City level: Vilnius municipality, informal network of youth workers (TBC)
<b>Volunteering context</b>		Further advance volunteering recognition solutions at local level in Vilnius city.	Vilnius municipality Vilnius youth volunteering centre Volunteering organisations Volunteers

## 5.4 Serbia: desk research frame

### Validation and recognition national and local context

Categories	National level	Stakeholders
Non-formal education context	<p><u><b>Publicly recognized organizers of educational activities (national and province level)</b></u></p> <p>By acquiring the status of Publicly recognized organisers of educational activities, the organisation becomes part of the unique education system of the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the <b>Law on Education adults</b>, which the training participant guarantees the quality of education and enables the acquisition of a public document, certificates or certificates.</p> <p>In addition, during implementation a measure of active employment policy and implementation of education programs for adults at the request of deputies or for needs of the labour market, have priority programs implemented by Publicly recognized organisers of educational activities and issued publicly recognized documents.</p> <p><b>Non-formal education</b> is part of the National Qualifications Framework at the following levels:</p> <p>Level 2 - implies completed basic education and professional training for up to one year, with work education lasting up to two years, that is, informal adult education for a duration of 120-360 hours of training;</p> <p>Level 3 - is obtained by completing a three-year secondary professional education, i.e. informal adult education lasting at least 960 hours of training;</p> <p>Level 5 - by completing master's or specialist education lasting two or one year and informal adult education lasting at least six months.</p>	Ministry of education, science and technological development

<p><b>Youth work context</b></p>	<p><b>Validation of youth work experience / gained competences</b></p> <p>There is a process of validation and education of the youth workers and qualifications for becoming one, also there are developed standards of youth work together with an accreditation process for organisations which practise youth work.</p> <p>Youth work as an occupation was recognized by the country in 2019.</p> <p>Still there is no recognition of youth work in terms of educational courses to become a youth worker. For now it is just recognized by the National association of youth workers and its member organisations, but there is no institutional recognition.</p> <p>Tho there is an ongoing process and discussions on formal recognition of youth work through making formal education degrees.</p>	<p>National Association of Youth Workers, Ministry of tourism and youth</p>
<p><b>Volunteering context</b></p>	<p>National law on volunteering exist.</p>	
<p><b>Higher education context</b></p>	<p><b>National framework of qualifications of the Republic of Serbia</b></p> <p><u><a href="#">National accreditation body</a></u></p> <p>The Law on Higher Education from 2005 introduced the principles of the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Strategy into the higher education system of the Republic of Serbia and has set the ground for the inclusion of Serbia in the European Higher Education Area [EHEA]. In accordance with the aforementioned Law in June 2006 the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance [CAQA] was formed as the body of the National Council for Higher Education. The financial, administrative and technical affairs for both bodies were performed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development. CAQA became a full ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) member in April 2013. CAQA has been registered on EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register) since November 2014.</p> <p>CAQA has done self-evaluation reports in 2012 and 2017 which was the basis for its external evaluation performed by ENQA. In February 2018 ENQA did not renew CAQA's full membership status and designated its position as "Member under review" for a period of two years.</p>	

	<p>At almost the same time, instead of CAQA, the new National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as NEAQA) was established by the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 9/2018 of 2 February, 2018) as a national independent body in institutional, financial, administrative and professional matters in accordance with the Law on Higher Education of 2017. NEAQA was enlisted in the state register on 9 March, 2018 and its Steering Committee was constituted on 3 May, 2018.</p> <p>On the basis of a public competition the NEAQA's Director was elected on 19 July, 2018, as well as the members of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance [CAQA], which was constituted on 30 August, 2018 as an expert body of NEAQA.</p> <p>As CAQA's universal legal successor, NEAQA kept in ENQA the same status "member under review", until February 2020. In the coming</p>	
<p><b>Adult education context/Lifelong learning</b></p>	<p><b>Ministry of education</b></p> <p>Adults are enabled to, in accordance with their capabilities, choose the path of acquiring education and training and attaining qualifications:</p> <p>1. Through the formal pathway:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School System: By enrolling in a specific education program as a regular student (if younger than 17 years) or as an adult part-time participant (if older than 17 years).</li> <li>• Formal Adult Education: Encompassing primary and secondary education, implemented in accredited primary schools, schools for adult basic education, high schools, and high schools for adult education.</li> </ul> <p>2. Through the informal pathway:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training System at Publicly Recognized Organizer of Adult Education Activities (JPOA):</li> <li>• Organized learning processes for adults based on specialized programs.</li> <li>• Aimed at acquiring knowledge and skills directed towards personal development, work, employment, and social activities.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved Non-formal Education Programs: Implemented in primary and secondary schools with JPOA status for specific adult education activities, and also in other organisations with JPOA status.</li> </ul> <p>Formal education for adults includes basic and secondary education and is carried out in accredited primary schools, schools for adult basic education, high schools, and high schools for adult education.</p> <p>Informal education for adults consists of organised learning processes based on specific programs, with the goal of acquiring knowledge and skills focused on personal development, work, employment, and social activities. Approved programs for informal education are implemented in primary and secondary schools that have the status of a publicly recognized organiser of adult education activities for specific adult education activities, as well as in other organisations with the status of a publicly recognized organiser for specific adult education activities (JPOA).</p> <p><b>Recognition of previously gained competencies and education</b></p> <p>Recognition of prior learning is an alternative way to acquire qualifications— for what someone already knows, learned outside the formal education system. The process of recognizing prior learning provides an opportunity to identify, assess, and acknowledge knowledge and skills acquired through various training, life and work experiences, and to receive a certificate or credential confirming the acquired competencies.</p> <p>This approach allows the attainment of qualifications at levels II, III, and V of the National Qualifications Framework. The process of recognizing prior learning begins when someone who has been engaged in a specific job for years wishes to verify and certify the knowledge and skills acquired in that manner. The entire process, from candidate application to the issuance of the document, should take no more than three months.</p> <p>The recognition of the prior learning process has been piloted as part of the project "Development of an Integrated System of National Qualifications," funded by the European Union. Schools with the status of publicly recognized organisers of adult education activities, authorised to conduct the recognition of prior learning process, are responsible for implementing the recognition of prior learning procedure.</p>	
VET context		

School context	National framework of qualifications of the Republic of Serbia	
Employability context		
Recruitment context		
Workplace development context		



## 5.5 Slovenia: desk research

### Validation and recognition national and local context in Slovenia

Desk research frame: Validation and recognition national and local context conducted by TiPovej!  
Steps in desk research in national/local context

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#### 1. Understanding what is there already in systemic solutions, who are stakeholders and what questions to ask. Why are they having it?

##### 1.1. Existing systematic solutions:

Although there is no national mechanism for recognition and validation of competences and skills acquired through youth work, the operation of recognition and validation systems varies from case to case. However, in Slovenia, the following aspects are certain:

- Validation and recognition of non-formal learning (NFL) are prominently observed within the framework of the national vocational qualification (NPK) for youth workers. These concepts are primarily associated with certifications. Additionally, schools and universities recognize the NFL by engaging Tipovej! to conduct workshops and training for them, whereby young participants receive acknowledgement for their learning and/or involvement in Tipovej!'s programs.
- Both the Institute for Youth at the city level (Ljubljana) and the national level (Slovenia) recognize NLF, specifically **Tipovej!** activities by providing financial support for Tipovej!'s programs and events.

The term **validation** is referred to "**vrednotenje**" as assessment and confirmation mechanism/system in many sources in Slovenia. More specific details about the existing solutions can be found [here](#).

## 1.2. Relevant stakeholders

Key stakeholders	Relevance to the project
<b><u>The City Municipality of Ljubljana</u></b>	Supporting the initiative & actively involved in various activities for NFL, open badges and Ljubljana City Of Learning.
<b><u>The Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia</u></b>	Developed "Assessment & Evaluation/Validation of the informally acquired knowledge in adult education <sup>2</sup> " that sets guidelines and standards for recognizing and validating non-formal learning, ensuring formal recognition of skills acquired in any context or timeframe. It highlights the importance of valuing all types of learning. <i>This document and stakeholders can be a starting point for the Slovenian case as it is compared to EU regulations and agreements.</i>
<b><u>Andragogical Centre of the Republic of Slovenia - Slovenian Institute for Adult Education</u></b>	<i>Additionally, both stakeholders may be able to provide the latest information on organisations involved in Open Badges and their recognition processes in the country.</i>
<b><u>Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia</u></b>	Tipovej! established good relations with the stakeholder, and this can be a gate opener for Open Badges in the labour market and connecting with the formal education system.
<b><u>Centre for Vocational Education of Republic of Slovenia (CPI)</u></b>	Collaboration and complementary synergy between Open Badges/Quality Label/etc. & the existing NPK <sup>4</sup> as the recognition process of non-formally acquired knowledge, work experience, and professional competences, through which individuals can obtain a publicly recognized professional qualification certificate.
<b><u>Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities</u></b>	The ministry is responsible for <u>ZRSZ</u> - centre for unemployment. They validate evidence of student work (ŠOS SYSTEM to evidence student work - validation of hours of student work that later on counts as working experience.
<b><u>Office for Youth</u></b>	Provides financial support for Tipovej!'s programs and events.
<b><u>Urad za Mladino for Ljubljana/for Slovenia</u></b>	Promotes validation and recognition of non-formal learning and youth work.

## 2. What are the components?

In Slovenia, various tools and platforms, such as E-Nefix, IM-PROVE, ORB, Evidenca delovnih izkušenj, SoftSkills4 EU, and the Portal for evaluation, have been developed to recognize and record non-formal education with the components that can be categorised as follows: (1) Name/Type of the Tool; (2) Description; (3) Levels of Visibility; (4) Target Group; (5) Methods Used in the Tool to Record NFL; (6) Benefits for an Individual/Organization; and (7) Additional Features/Information. For more details check [here](#).

## 3. What is done getting to the system/structure?

The structure/system in Slovenia leans towards a decentralised approach, with various institutions and organisations playing their part in recognizing and validating non-formal education.

## 4. Find the gaps

Slovenia currently lacks a centralised national mechanism for recognizing and validating competences acquired through youth work, leading to inconsistencies across various institutions. While certain schools and universities do acknowledge non-formal learning (NFL) via collaborations with NGOs and youth organisations, this recognition isn't universally adopted (limited integration with formal education). The standards for evaluating NFL remain unclear, causing uncertainty in how various skills and competencies are assessed. Moreover, there's a noticeable gap in awareness about these recognition systems among the youth and other stakeholders, causing many in the target audience to miss out on opportunities for skill recognition. Additionally, some recognition initiatives are financially dependent, making them vulnerable to budgetary changes or shifts in funding priorities.

## 5. Work in Practice

**What works? ; and What are the challenges? ; How does it work in practice?**

**SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW:** To answer the three questions above, TiPovej! identified and interviewed representatives of a successful national validation system - [Portal for evaluation and recognition of informal knowledge \(VPNZ\)](#) - run by [Andragogical Centre of the Republic of Slovenia \(ACS\)](#) - [Slovenian Institute for Adult Education](#). Due to the challenges with funding and staff retention, the development of projects run by ACS are delayed. The Adult Education Act (2018) emphasises counselling and documentation but lacks comprehensive evaluation phases. The main challenge is the legislation, which only recognizes two phases of the validation process. This hinders the transition from non-formal to formal recognition, especially when translating non-formal knowledge into numerical grades. New trends include open badges, EU tools, and e-tools, with a significant emphasis on digital competence. Micro-credentials are seen as training programs, with open badges potentially serving as their result. Quality standards ensure transparency and clear evaluation procedures. They act as a checklist for providers, educational programs, and badges to meet quality criteria. The main challenge is the difference between formal and non-formal recognition. Multiple evaluation methods are available, but they work separately, emphasising the need for a combined approach. **Slovenia needs national coordination and a common denominator for various validation systems to allow easier transition between systems.** Efforts should focus on creating synergies between different systems, ensuring transitions are smooth and meaningful. There's potential synergy between the City of Learning Open Badge system and their validation system. Clear documentation of learning outcomes and their transferability is crucial for maximising this synergy. For more details, check the [interview notes](#).

## 6. Can we find ways that work for keeping Quality Label Open, Inclusive and Accessible for All?

**Suggestions:** here are some of the tips to remain Quality Label open, inclusive, and accessible are: (1) include representatives from various stakeholders and areas of expertise; (2) keep transparency in the criteria and processes involved in awarding the Quality Label. Publicly sharing guidelines, criteria, and decision-making processes for trust and inclusivity; (3) training and awareness to help stakeholders understand the importance of the Quality Label and how to meet its standards. (3) keep in mind that the Quality Label is in line with relevant laws and ethical standards, particularly those related to equality, non-discrimination, and accessibility.

## 7. Best practices

Categories	National level	Local level	Stakeholders
<b>Non-formal education context</b>	Various projects that aim to promote recognition, recognition and recording of NFI (knowledge, skills and competences) among young people, their parents, employers and the general public (both National & Local levels, for more details look at the point 5. Existing Open Badges/Digital Tools for recognition in Slovenia in this <a href="#">here</a> ).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slovenian Learning Providers (<a href="#">Nefix</a>, <a href="#">Zavod Volontariat</a>, <a href="#">RIC Novo mesto</a>, <a href="#">MEPI</a>, <a href="#">ŠOS</a> - <a href="https://www.belezi.si/">https://www.belezi.si/</a>)</li> <li>- <a href="#">The City Municipality of Ljubljana</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Urad za Mladino</a> for Ljubljana/for Slovenia</li> <li>- <a href="#">MOVIT</a></li> <li>- Institute for Youth Policy Ajdovscina</li> </ul>
<b>Youth work context</b>	<p><b>National vocational experiences (NPK/NVQ)<sup>3</sup></b> enables the recognition process of non-formally acquired knowledge, work experience, and professional competences, through which individuals can obtain a publicly recognized professional qualification certificate - NPK certificate. The NPK certificate has a similar status to school diplomas or degrees, with the difference that the NPK certificate formally demonstrates the mastery of a specific professional qualification prescribed in the NPK catalogue. However, it does not confer a degree or educational direction. <b><i>The Quality Label standards can complement the NPK system by recognizing and accrediting the non-formal learning outcomes and contribute to the development of vocational competencies. Open Badges can capture and validate a wide range of learning experiences gained through NFL and youth work fields.</i></b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Centre for Vocational Education of Republic of Slovenia (CPI)</a></li> <li>- Public Institute <a href="#">Gene Štupar</a></li> </ul>

<p><b>Volunteering context</b> (for example: National Youth Department, Vilnius volunteering centre)</p>	<p><a href="#">IM-PROVE</a> (application &amp; Badge) - translates experience into competence. It helps to record volunteering experiences, to find out which competences users have developed, to plan personal development and to record acquired competences in CV, Youthpass and Europass.</p>	<p><a href="#">Zavod Volontariat</a> &amp; Ministry of public affairs</p>
<p><b>Higher education context</b></p>	<p>The Rulebook on the procedure and criteria for the recognition of formal and non-formally acquired knowledge was developed at university level in 2012<sup>4</sup>.</p> <p><b><a href="#">Moje izkusnje</a>, e-studenski service</b> The Slovenian Student Service<sup>23</sup> has developed a digital portfolio "Moje izkušnje" (My experience) that can be used by all students who used the services of the student service (e-student service). It is worth noting that "Moje izkušnje" has gained international recognition by the ILO (International Organisation of Labour)</p> <p><b><a href="#">Evidenca delovnih izkušenj</a> (certificate)</b> - The record of student work is established by the Labor Market Regulation Act as (among other things) an information system of personal electronic portfolios of knowledge, experience and competences, which are acquired by performing occasional and temporary work of students and students. Student work brokers provide data from invoiced referrals about completed student work, types of work are placed in the Standard Classification of Occupations (SKP-08), and individual occupational groups in SKP-08 are linked to transversal competences (from the original survey conducted in 2015) and professional-specific competences of the ESCO tool. On the e-di.si website, individuals who have done student work can access, edit and export data from the records. 20-100 competencies are foreseen for each type of work</p> <p>Accreditations and evaluations in higher education (NAKVIS) - IS TO DETERMINE WHETHER, IN ADDITION TO LEGAL PROVISIONS, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS MEET THE ACCREDITATION CRITERIA OR ACHIEVE THE QUALITY STANDARDS SPECIFIED IN THEM, AS WELL AS OTHER REGULATIONS OF THE AGENCY. Types of accreditation:</p>	<p>Faculty of Health Sciences (2018) and <a href="#">Faculty of Management</a> (2017)</p> <p><b><a href="#">Moje izkušnje</a></b> (Group of Organizations that run the initiative)</p> <p><a href="#">ŠOS</a> &amp; <a href="#">Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities</a></p> <p><a href="#">NAKVIS</a> (they will be very relevant as they took over the</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– first accreditation of a higher education institution</li> <li>– accreditation of a study program</li> <li>– extension of the accreditation of a higher education institution</li> <li>– accreditation of changes to a higher education institution</li> </ul>		initiative of microcredentials (what badges also are) for Slovenia)
<b>Adult education context/Lifelong learning</b>	<p>The document titled "Assessment &amp; Evaluation/Validation of the informally acquired knowledge in adult education<sup>5</sup>" refers to the process of recognition and evaluation of non-formally acquired knowledge in adult education in Slovenia. The document aims to establish guidelines and standards for assessing and validating individuals' non-formal learning experiences, enabling them to receive formal recognition for their skills and competences. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and valuing all forms of learning, regardless of the context or time of acquisition. <b><i>This document can be a starting point for Slovenian case because it is done by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, the Andragogic Center of the Republic of Slovenia (future strategic Ljubljana City of Learning partners) and compared to EU regulations and agreements.</i></b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Andragogic Center of the Republic of Slovenia</a></li> </ul>
<b>VET context</b>	<b>National vocational experiences (NPK/NVQ)</b>		<a href="#">Centre for Vocational Education of Republic of Slovenia (CPI) &amp; Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities</a>
<b>School context</b>	<p>The Slovenian Association of Scouts recognises qualifications through different systems of recognition of knowledge. One of them is the internationally recognised system of training the trainers, the so-called "Woodbadge system". Its aim is to recognise informally acquired management knowledge and staff training as well as the creation of internationally unified levels/titles. It is based on three levels: unit leader, assistant leader trainer and leader trainer. The first level provides a minimum standard of knowledge for quality work with young people. The second and third are graduated and represent an educational path for the individual's education.</p>		The Slovenian Association of Scouts
<b>Employability context</b>	<p>The job positions or employees are classified into pay grades based on the <a href="#">Methodology for Job Evaluation/Validation</a><sup>6</sup>. For instance, one of the evaluation criteria in the chemical and rubber industry is "Required additional knowledge" that can be assessed from 0 to 10 points</p>		<a href="#">Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia</a>



	<p>if an employee has or not "additional knowledge required, obtained through verified forms of education lasting up to three months/or more than three months."</p> <p><b>National vocational experiences (NPK/NVQ)</b></p>		<p><a href="#">Centre for Vocational Education of Republic of Slovenia (CPI) &amp; Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities</a></p>
<b>Recruitment context</b>	<p>Similar to Employability context and Higher education context, especially students work validation and recognition practices</p>		
<b>Workplace development context</b>	<p><a href="#">Portal for evaluation and recognition of informal knowledge (VPNZ)</a><sup>7</sup> - In Slovenia, the VPNZ Portal is active in the field of evaluation and recognition of informal knowledge. In the period from 2016 to 2022, the evaluation procedures of informally and informally acquired knowledge throughout Slovenia will be carried out by consultants at folk universities, school centers and secondary schools organized in consortia of the project (target group - employees who need additional training).</p>		<p><a href="#">Andragogical Centre of the Republic of Slovenia - Slovenian Institute for Adult Education</a></p>
<b>Educational programs &amp; recognition of educational credentials across borders</b>	<p><a href="#">The ENIC-NARIC center</a><sup>8</sup> is an international network of centers that provide information, advice, and expertise on the recognition of foreign educational qualifications. Although the center addresses the evaluation and recognition of formal education qualifications obtained through traditional educational institutions, it plays a crucial role in assessing and providing recognition for such qualifications, facilitating mobility and recognition of educational credentials across borders. <b>The <a href="#">Evaluation of Education at the ENIC-NARIC Center</a> can be used as a source to develop QL (or in the process of developing a shared European badge recognition strategy, as the center deals with educational credentials across borders) as it describes a list of what validation should consist of a list of some sort:</b> "The opinion contains the following information: on the Charter on Education, on the status of the educational institution and educational program, about completed education, field or major and its location in the country of origin, about the obtained address, title in the country of origin, on rights arising from education in the country of origin, on the comparability of education with the Slovenian education system and a brief description of the education system in the country."</p>		<p><a href="#">ENIC-NARIC Center</a></p>

## 5.6 Spain: desk research

### Validation and recognition national and local context

#### 1. Understanding what is there already in systemic solutions, who are stakeholders and what questions to ask. Why are they having it?

Through our research we found out that Spain has official validation procedures for some contexts (non formal education, volunteering, adult education). These procedures lead either to full or partial qualifications, and/or give access to education and training programmes.<sup>13</sup>

The **Spanish government** and the regional governments have consolidated the national procedure for the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience and nonformal learning (leading to partial **VET diplomas** or **complete occupational certificates**). Also, **universities** have developed their **procedures for the recognition of professional and work experience** for two different purposes: access to programmes (for people aged 40 and over) and as credits towards a university degree. These systems, that are implemented and accepted as good practices for validation and recognition, often didn't offer a digital certification, as the Open Badges, the main focus of this project.

**Meanwhile different networks of entities and/or organisations by themselves are trying out digital certifications, some of them with the Open Badges systems to validate and recognize competences acquired through Non-Formal education, voluntary contexts in their local activities.** Taking in consideration the complexity of the topic we produced a [map of the validation and recognition systems](#) that could help us to navigate on the specifics of the different systems. From that map we indicate 4 systematic solutions and relevant stakeholders that offered a digital certification:

<sup>13</sup> [https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european\\_inventory\\_validation\\_2018\\_synthesis.pdf](https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_synthesis.pdf) (25/05/2023)  
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/spain-2019> (25/05/2023)

Context	Systematic Solution	Level	Description	Relevant Stakeholder
<b>Volunteering</b> <b>Non-formal education</b>	<a href="#">Reconoce</a>	National	Reconoce is a state network of organisations including public administrations, companies and youth and volunteer entities that promote the recognition of skills to promote employability.	Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE), Consejo de la Juventud de España (youth departments of the Autonomous Communities)
<b>Adult education context</b> <b>Lifelong learning</b>	<b>EducaLAB Insignias</b> ( <a href="#">Insignias INTEF</a> )	National	INTEF Badges is the digital badge backpack of the National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF). This service is a personalised repository that stores and manages digital badges, which demonstrate learning, professional skills, teachers or interests, obtained through the training services offered by INTEF.	Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías Educativas y Formación del Profesorado (INTEF)
<b>Non-formal education</b>	<a href="#">ULibraryLab</a> using the platform <a href="https://openbadgepassport.com/">https://openbadgepassport.com/</a>	Local	The Library of the university offers training activities to the entire university community to publicise the services and resources offered by the Library, to get the most out of them and to train in basic digital and informational skills.  Through the ULibraryLab service, the library includes all face-to-face, semi-face-to-face and online training with self-training materials that are hosted on the Moodle Ubiqua platform.	Universitat de Vic  Universitat central de catalunya
<b>Non-formal education</b>	<a href="#">Next Step 4 SEC</a> using the platform <a href="https://openbadgefactory.com/en/">https://openbadgefactory.com/en/</a>	Local	European project for the integration and recognition of transversal skills in training and professional contexts.	Fundaciónesplai

## 2. What are the components?

We organised the different systems that have been developed in Spain to recognize and validate non-formal education in this map with the following components:

1. Name of the validation system;
2. Description;
3. Levels of Visibility;
4. Educational context;
5. Methods and Tools used in the system;
6. Stakeholders;
7. Benefits for an Individual/Organization and challenges of the system;

## 3. What is done getting to the system/structure? Find the gaps.

The structure/system in Spain is decentralised: multiple institutions and organisations test and promote different ways of recognizing and validating non-formal education through digital solutions, and more connected with the Open Badges using their own systems or using other platforms to host the badges created. Currently, Spain lacks a centralised national mechanism for recognizing and validating competences acquired through youth work, leading to inconsistencies across the systems implemented by various entities. The institutions and organisations, working separately, are defining their own ways of validating and recognizing the competences acquired throughout the non-formal learning contexts.

## 4. How does it work in practice? What works and what are the challenges?

For this point of reflection, we highlight the outcomes of the interviews. The interviews were a moment to collect the real impact of the different systems (how they are working, the benefits and challenges for users and organisations).

In the case of the **RECONOCE** system, it works at a national level and it's a free tool. There is a registration process and also an evaluation one when issuing a digital certificate. Nowadays it's composed of 545 organisations, 5.099 users, and has reached 148.034 people. Raquel Férrez pointed to the positive impact to the users that could find a job because of their certification in volunteering activities. As challenges are related to the financing since it's a system that has a purpose to be free. They seek financing through training and subsidies (banks, companies). Also, the financing and support got through municipalities have to be worked on when there is a change in the government.

One of the main strengths of the approach to validation in Spain is that it covers all the education levels and sectors, through a combination of procedures serving different purposes. Also, the procedure for the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience and non-formal learning, has several positive points:

- The coverage of the different validation elements (identification, documentation, assessment and certification);
- The involvement of both education and employment authorities;
- The possibility for employers and third sector stakeholders to request public authorities to open recognition procedures tailored to their needs;
- The implementation of the procedure by specialised VET providers: the 'VET Integrated Centres' – VET providers offering both IVET and occupational certificates relating to one or several professional fields - and the 'VET national reference centres' - providers specialised in innovation and experimentation in a certain productive sector.
- The possibility to involve professionals – and not only teachers and trainers - in the guidance and evaluation stages.

The main limitations of the current approach to validation include:

- The limited resources which mean that demand cannot be met for validation in all sectors.
- The limited availability of monitoring data on participants in the different procedures, and their profiles.
- The limited availability of information on the procedures used by the different regions and their results.
- The limited availability of information on the procedures used by universities and their results.
- The lack of evidence of the benefits of validation procedures for individuals.
- The limited visibility and recognition of the benefits of validation in society. Due to the fact that validation has often been linked to the regulation of certain professions, it risks being seen as an imposition to keep one's job rather than as an opportunity for further professional and personal development

## Conclusion

Our research revealed a remarkably **diverse landscape of validation and recognition systems across countries**. This variety stems from both the learning context (e.g., non-formal education, youth work) and the level of governance (national, regional, local).

Despite these variations, a **common goal emerged: recognizing skills and knowledge gained through non-formal learning**. Approaches differ, with some countries using decentralised structures and others undergoing transitions to new systems.

Understanding these diverse landscapes and their shared goals provides **a valuable foundation for establishing quality standards for Open Badges**. This knowledge will be instrumental in the next phases of the project, where we will develop strategies for wider recognition of Open Badges in non-formal learning and youth work domains and a Quality Label for Badge issuers..

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**QUALITY LABEL**  
for badge recognition

## Good practices of validation and recognition systems of learning activities and outcomes

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