

## PROMOTE

Promoting and Validating Key Competences in  
Mobility and Traineeships in Europe



# PROMOTE: Survey

PROMOTE: Promoting and Validating Competences in Mobility and  
Traineeships in Europe

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### 1 Introduction

This survey is part of the PROMOTE project. The PROMOTE project aims at promoting and validating the following European Lifelong Learning competences:

- KC5: learning to learn
- KC6: social and civic competences
- KC7: sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

The project aims at setting up holistic, needs driven and competence oriented open learning environments to promote and validate key competences at the interface of academic education and learning in practice business contexts.

The first part of this survey is based on a desk research, carried out by PROMOTE partners in each partner country to understand and back-up the current state of implementation of European validation system, respective instruments and possible interfaces to the acquisition and validation of key competences for lifelong learning.

The second part (chapter 4) describes and analyses the results of the European wide survey, conducted by all different partners of the PROMOTE project. It aims at getting a good overview of the current understanding and awareness of the three main PROMOTE competences throughout Europe. Additionally, we aim at getting a more detailed idea about which sub-competences are being considered as important for both professional and personal life, and in which educational field and learning settings these competences can best be acquired.

Finally, in order to get an overview of existing methods and demands for the validation of the three key competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning settings, all PROMOTE partners conducted in-depth expert interviews. Chapter 5 covers this interview part. The report will end with an overall conclusion, showing a clear need for projects such as PROMOTE.



## 1.1 PROMOTE partners

The promote project is run by a multi-stakeholder consortium of six universities, two networks, six business partners and two public entities, comprising a large variety faculties and business sectors.

The following table shows the full list of all PROMOTE partners involved.

Table 1: List of PROMOTE partner

Partner	Country	Type of organisation
Die Berater	Austria	School/Institute/Educational centre – Adult education
Alden Biesen	Belgium	National cultural centre
Trendhuis BVBA	Belgium	Research Institute/Centre
CATRO	Bulgaria	Counselling body
Landkreis Kasse	Germany	Regional Public body
Blinc eG	Germany	EU-wide network
BUPNET	Germany	School/Institute/Educational centre – Adult education
Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis (AUTH)	Greece	Higher education institution (tertiary level)
Scuola Superiore di Studi e di Perfezionamento Sant'Anna	Italy	Higher education institution (tertiary level)
Materahub	Italy	Small and medium sized enterprise
Vilnius University - Faculty of Economics	Lithuania	Higher education institution (tertiary level)
VŠĮ Švietimo ir kultūros mobiliųjų technologijų institutas – IMOTEC	Lithuania	Small and medium sized enterprise
Vytautas Magnus university	Lithuania	Higher education institution (tertiary level)
Polytechnic Institute of Leiria	Portugal	Higher education institution (tertiary level)
EUCEN	Spain	EU-wide network
University College London (Centre for Applied Archaeology)	UK	Higher education institution (tertiary level)
Q21 – Agentur für Qualifizierung und Transfermanagement GmbH	Germany	School/Institute/Educational centre – Adult education

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### 1.2 Methodology

#### 1.2.1 Target group

The target group of this survey consists of educational stakeholders and potential users of the techniques pioneered by PROMOTE, mainly decision makers in both the private, public and social profit sectors. Note that we use the term decision maker throughout this report to mean respondents in places of importance in the private and public sectors and NGOs.

#### 1.2.2 Research method

In order to understand and back-up the current state of implementation of European validation systems, respective instruments and possible interfaces to the acquisition and validation of key competences for lifelong learning throughout Europe all partners conducted a national desk research.

To get a well-rounded view of the opinions, experiences and preferences of our target group we conducted both a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative in-depth interviews. All subjects of the questionnaire and interviews are related to the validation and acquisition of the three key competences ‘Learning to learn’, ‘social and civic competences’ and ‘sense of initiative and entrepreneurship’.

#### 1.2.3 Desk research

Based on the desk research delivered by the different national partners this survey starts with a review of the different national situations regarding the general knowledge of validation of the key competences. Ten European countries are treated in this review, namely: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. This review is described in section 3 of this report.

validation of key competences and

#### 1.2.4 Questionnaire

In order to get a first overview of the needs and demands of the PROMOTE target group regarding to the validation of the key competences we conducted a questionnaire by a broader, European-wide population. In total 477 questionnaires were taken, with respondents from the different European countries. The analysis of the questionnaire is described in section 4 of this report.

#### 1.2.5 Interviews



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To get a wider and more in depth understanding of the needs and demands for validating informal and non-formal learning within different fields of education and professions the questionnaire was substantiated by in-depth interviews with experts. Every partner conducted three to ten in-depth interviews with national experts and in one case with experts from different European countries. Moreover, these interviews give a view on the potential pitfalls signalled by the target group in regard to the validation and acquisition of the three key competences.

All the in-depth interviews were conducted according to the Delphi-method (more specifically mini-Delphi or Estimate-Talk-Estimate). In this way interviewees are encouraged to revise their earlier statements on the subject, and they are steered towards a consensus on the subject discussed. Anonymity of the participants is guaranteed in this process, names of interviewees will thus not be released. Reference will only be made to their occupations as to sketch the composition of the expert panels. The results of the in-depth interviews will be discussed in section 5 of this survey.





## 2 Summary

In the framework of the PROMOTE project a comprehensive survey was carried out. It aimed at identifying and analysing available IT-supported validation, assessment and evidencing solutions at the interface between formal and informal learning. It was designed to understand the demands of different target groups and educational sectors with regard to validation of service-related learning outcomes.

The survey focused on the level of knowledge and awareness of the main PROMOTE competences, the European Lifelong Learning-key competences Nos. 5.6.7: „learning to learn“, „sense of Initiative and entrepreneurship“ and „active citizenship“.

The desk research showed that the approach of VINFL (Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning) is still in an initial stage in most European member states even though a development on awareness and knowledge on the approaches in the last years could be identified. Comprehensive approaches do not exist and innovation and development is triggered by projects in most of the cases.

When it comes to the PROMOTE key competences there is a great awareness about their importance but a lack of suitable instruments and approaches to make them visible and valid. IT solutions to promote and validate key competences are completely missing – up to 2015 only isolated or sectoral approaches could be identified.

The online questionnaire was answered mostly by educational professionals (>70%). The level of awareness about the key competences is relatively high. There is a high familiarity with the key competences and all of them are considered to be very important in most professional and life contexts. While more than 70% consider the validation of key competences as very important (less than 5% consider validation as not important) nearly 40% of the respondents do not know any validation instruments for it. Less than 50% (25-50%) of the respondents are well familiar with

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European validation instruments, obviously due to the target group 50% with ECVTS while ECVET is only little known.

The interviews revealed that (despite the results of the online questionnaire) there are different understandings and connotations of central terms like “competence”, “entrepreneurship” or the concept of key competences. Here also differences among professions became obvious. However all PROMOTE key competences are considered being very important, ‘sense of initiative and entrepreneurship’ with a higher value for professional development and ‘active citizenship’ for private life. Learning to learn competences were valued most important for all purposes.

The need for validation is almost universally recognized by interviewees. Ways, and particularly tools, to do it are not well-known. There is a strong demand for the diffusion of knowledge on these issues across Europe and all interviewees clearly stated a large support in the field of validation.





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### 3 Desk research

To provide us with a generalized view of the situation of VINFL and the recognition of key competences in the different parts of Europe, the different partners in ten countries provided us with a review of their national situations. The countries treated are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

This section is structured by country. Each country review is based on a number of subjects, namely: the national legal framework in VINFL, the national situation regarding the validation of key competences, the national situation regarding assessment tools and certification, and the VINFL implementation in practice.

#### 3.1 Austria

##### National legal framework on VINFL

Current situation concerning VINFL in Austria: Currently, there is little national legal activity concerning validation of learning outcomes from informal or non-formal learning within the Austrian national education system, apart from a mention in the Austrian Strategy for lifelong learning (which has officially been published in 2011), the establishment of a coordination point for the NQF and several pilot projects for validation. A recent OECD review of vocational education and training explicitly recommended the institution of a joint advisory body in Austria to improve the recognition of prior formal and informal learning (Musset et al., 2013, p. 36).

The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs has recently launched a public consultation on the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Results of this consultation will only become available later in 2015/2016. In fact, there is no comprehensive and coordinated system for the formative validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences in place so far (cf. BMBF, 2015, p. 9). As opposed to this, there are many options available to acquire certifications and qualifications of formal education in a non-traditional way by passing final exams (ibid., p. 12) such as "außerordentlicher Zugang zur Lehrabschlussprüfung" (exceptional admission to pass the final apprenticeship examination), "ExternisInnenprüfung" (possibility to pass the school leaving examination through adult learning courses), or "Befähigungsnachweis für Zugang zu reglementierten Gewerben" (certification for regulated professions).

Understanding of formal/non-formal and informal learning in Austria: Austria has a longstanding tradition of formal education with a strong emphasis on its widespread dual vocational training system which still has a very good reputation (similar to Germany). Vocational education remains an

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important pillar of the Austrian education system: In 2012, 76% of students who were enrolled in upper secondary education participated in pre-vocational or vocational programmes, the second highest percentage in the OECD (cf. OECD, 2014).

Over the last couple of years, several approaches for the validation of non-formally/informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences have been developed with the aim of facilitating vocational re-orientation (c.f. paragraph 1.3). However, these instruments are stand-alone solutions and not embedded into an integrated political strategy. Overall, there is little systematic coordination in regards to validation of non-formal or informal learning in Austria (cf. BMUKK, 2011, p.46).

The affective dimension in formalized assessment systems in Austria: The tools for competence assessment that are currently being offered in Austria are at least based on a minimal definition of competences which includes the three dimensions of knowledge, skills and attitudes/virtues/values. So clearly, the affective dimension is being acknowledged, however, these assessment formats are not formalized in a way that allows for official recognition of the assessed competences (i.e. no recognition in the national education system).

### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

In Austria, the level of qualification of a person is primarily determined by his/her certificates from legally regulated institutions (e.g. schools, universities). Training courses, learning at the workplace and other non-formal and informal learning activities on the other hand are less relevant. Accordingly, the recognition of personal/social/entrepreneurial skills and competences in formal settings is – as far as we know – not given high importance.

One sector, where non-formally or informally acquired competences and their assessment already play a prominent role is the voluntary sector. Several formats have been developed to assess competences of volunteers (see next section). Furthermore, the importance of formative competence assessment has increased in the field of vocational guidance.

The Austrian universities of applied sciences (UAS, "Fachhochschulen") offer a more practically-orientated university-level education than the "scientific universities". Their focus is more on preparing the students optimally for their careers than offering them a broad scientific education. On certain conditions, Fachhochschulen are entitled to provide admission to applicants who have not passed a formal Reifeprüfung (upper secondary school-leaving exam) examination. Many UAS programmes incorporate a compulsory work experience in their curriculum (to be completed in Austria or abroad, varying duration of several weeks up to a semester) and might be more open to integrate the assessment of competences into their profile.

The approaches that are currently in use are rather open as far as domains of competences are



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concerned and not restricted to either personal, social or entrepreneurial skills (see next section).

### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a relatively new and not yet fully embraced concept in Austria. So far, we are only aware of the profession of adult educator that already offers a well-elaborated validation system for the qualification and recognition of adult educators (wba-Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich/Austrian Academy of Continuing Education).

Although several formats for formative competence assessment exist and are being used by various institutions in the spheres of adult learning, lifelong guidance and vocational orientation, there is currently no formal process or system in place for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences (particularly not in higher education).

“Assessment” tools that are currently being used include the following (with very varying dissemination):

- Kompetenz+ Beratung (supported by the Ministry of Education): This approach has been offered since 2012 and provides a standardised format which has so far been used by approximately 2000 persons. It combines workshops with a final individual coaching which leads to a competence protocol and an action plan. In contrast to other formats, the focus is on some distinct activities which have led to relevant competences that are needed in the future of the client instead of a whole-life competence assessment. The focus of this approach is furthermore on *acknowledging* competences (i.e. help clients to become aware of them) rather than *validating* them.
- Kompetenzbilanz (developed by Zukunftszentrum Tirol): actually a coaching process including a start workshop, two individual coaching sessions to make participants aware of important experiences and skills and a final coaching session to develop next steps and goals for the future. The Kompetenzbilanz approach has been copied and adapted by several institutions in Austria.
- Kompetenzprofil ([www.kompetenzprofil.at](http://www.kompetenzprofil.at)): This approach consists of 4 group workshops and 20 hours individual work, provided by the Volkshochschule Linz.
- Competence portfolio for teens WIK:I (supported by the Ministry of Family and Youth): The main outcome of the WIK:I workshops is an evidence of competences that can be added to job applications.

Other tools have been developed particularly for competences of volunteers, such as the “testimony of volunteering activities” promoted by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the competence portfolio for volunteers, and the SLIC competence workshop for senior volunteers. And of course, the Youthpass is a tool that is in use in Austria, too.





It is important to note that the NQF is little known in Austria and definitely not a common issue of discussion between job-seekers and employers. The same is true for VINFL.

In addition, there is rather little importance given to the concept of “competences” in the corporate and public sector when it comes to external communication. The OECD explains this phenomenon as follows:

*„A number of social and cultural conditions prove to influence adult education substantially. Perhaps the most important of these is the concept of a Beruf, a way to describe an occupation that has no precise equivalent in English. A Beruf is more than simply a job or an occupation; it is a source of both personal and social identity, of deep meaning and pride; it provides a clear contribution to society, requires exceptional skill and therefore preparation, and applies equally to high-level professional positions (like lawyers and doctors) and to lower-level positions like technical workers, sales personnel, or bakers. It is closer to the English concept of a vocation or calling, or the French term métier; [...] The implication for adult education is that Berufsbildung, or the development of a Beruf, requires an extensive process and a considerable amount of time, compared to programs in countries without the tradition of the Beruf. Many of the adult education programs, especially the second-chance programs (zweiter Bildungsweg or second ways to learning) follow the tradition of Berufsbildung and are therefore longer and more arduous than comparable program in other countries. In contrast, some programs – particularly the labour market programs aiming to get individuals back into employment as quickly as possible – stand out because they do not adhere to the philosophy of Berufsbildung. In addition, the OECD review team did not hear too much about recognizing prior learning (or PLAR, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition), the effort in many countries to recognize experience and informal learning on the job or in other settings, and to provide academic credit or qualifications for such forms of experienced-based learning. PLAR may be inconsistent with Berufsbildung, which stresses instead the amount of time needed to develop the expertise for a Beruf rather than finding short-cuts.“ (OECD, 2004, p. 4)*

So, in our perception there is more communication about Berufe and how well one practices his/her profession than about competences.

### Conclusion desk research Austria

This desk research stresses that the validation of competences that have been acquired in non-formal and informal learning is a relatively new concept in Austria. There is no streamlined strategy or process in place and the relevance of validation of competences and learning outcomes is relatively low in education and employment. Although various institutions offer formative formats for competence assessment, we could only identify one profession that fully embraces the concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning and that is the profession of adult educators (including managerial positions, teaching, counselling and librarianship). Overall, the political discussions as well as the educational system are strongly focused on certificates.



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The consultation process on the issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning which has recently been started by the Austrian Ministry for Education will be monitored closely by the Austrian project team in order to remain alert about current trends and developments in the field of VINFL in Austria and to see how and where the PROMOTE project could fit in.





## 3.2 Belgium

### National legal framework on VINFL

Within Belgium all three communities (Dutch-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking) have their own responsibilities concerning education and Lifelong Learning. Although most political responsibilities in Belgium are either federal or organised by geographical region (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels-Capital-Region), the educational system is mainly organised by the communities. Therefore most policies and projects concerning formal, informal and non-formal learning are focussing on one of the specified communities. For this reason this report will focus on the educational system of Flanders / the Dutch speaking community.

Since almost a decade the importance of the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning has been put on the policy agenda in Flanders. For example, in July 2000 “The right to recognition of non-formal and informal learning” was acknowledged as a priority by the Flemish government (OECD, 2014). In 2002 a law was passed that gave every employee the right to be assessed to identify and validate skills outside the formal educational system. Following this, in 2004 a decree was declared to make higher education more flexible in order to encourage the process of informal and non-formal learning (OECD, 2014).

On January 20 2009 the Flemish government signed the ‘**Pact 2020**’. This pact, consisting of 20 different goals, has been functioning as a guidance for policy making in Flanders for the last few years. One of the goals is to let Flanders grow into a learning society, where in 2020 at least 15% of the population is participating in Lifelong Learning. The pact underlines:

- the importance of employees’ personal development
- the right to a personal-development-plan
- the accreditation of obtained competences (VESOC, 2009).

The pact does not specifically note the importance of non-formal or informal learning, but focusses on the importance of a competence-based educational system. Competence development is hereby seen as a shared responsibility between all social actors.

Echoing this long-term strategy, the Policy Research Centre Work and Social Economy (Steunpunt WSE) highlights the lack of consistent tools or indicators to validate Lifelong Learning and informal learning in Flanders and the necessity to develop such tools and indicators (WSE, 2009).

Some effort has been made to develop a national system using RAC (Recognition of Acquired Competences, explained in 1.3) to recognize informal and non-formal learning for educational opportunities, training or even jobs. Nevertheless, nowadays RAC is still mostly fragmented across different sectors, with each sector using their own arrangements. (Geets, Wets & Timmerman, 2007)

There exists significant fragmentation in labelling, defining and in the procedures concerning recognition of acquired competences. For example, each Ministry regulates the recognition of acquired competences within its own sector. For example the Flemish educational system is based on



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so called ‘final objectives and development goals’. These objectives and goals are considered the minimum learning objectives in terms of knowledge, comprehension, skills and attitudes for a specified cohort of learners. Naturally they differ for primary school, high school, vocational-, higher- or adult education. Within these learning objectives a distinction is made between:

- **course-specific:** related to formal learning goals
- **general objectives:** related to informal and non-formal learning objectives

The general objectives consists of competences that differ per level of education. In higher education the general objectives are specified into 18 different competences. In all levels of education the obtaining of the competence ‘learning to learn’ is one of the key goals.<sup>1 2</sup>

The other two PROMOTE-competences are not included, although some of the general objectives can be seen as part of one of these PROMOTE-competences. It is important to notice that responsibility for the realisation of these general objectives are with the educational institutions and not with the Flemish or federal government. Furthermore, no official validation of these competences takes place.

The Department of Work and Social Economy uses an ‘Certificate of Work Experience’ (ervaringsbewijs) to validate competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning<sup>3</sup>. This certificate can be obtained through an official assessment and will then be granted by the Flemish government. This project, however, did not continue and as of 2015 the ESF-funding for this project has been stopped<sup>4</sup>.

Within the cultural and youth sector the focus is mainly on participation. For example they make use of the tool Oscar. Oscar is a portfolio where users can note their experience in non-formal and informal learning environments. This way non-formal and informal learning is validated without the use of official certifications. See section 1.3 for more information about Oscar.

To conclude: there are some methods currently available to validate non-formal and non-formal learning, nevertheless, they mainly differ according to sector and cooperation is needed more than ever. A comprehensive and multi-sector validation system of the PROMOTE-skills is still missing in Flanders and Belgium.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/curriculum/secundair-onderwijs/vakoverschrijdend/uitgangspunten.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/curriculum/secundair-onderwijs/vakoverschrijdend/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ervaringsbewijs.be/ervaring.php/wat>

<sup>4</sup> Interview with the managing director of ESF-Flanders







### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

Following the European Qualification Framework, the Flemish government developed the Flemish Qualification Framework (Vlaamse kwalificatie structuur – VKS). VKS aims at integrating formal and non-formal learning in education and formulates qualifications on 8 levels, subdivided in professional qualifications and educational qualifications (developed in 2009; implemented in 2012)<sup>5,6</sup>. This framework is, among others, the basis for the Recognition of Acquired Competences (RAC).

The procedure for RAC in Flanders generally exists of three separate steps, namely<sup>7</sup>:

1. **Recognition:** the individual competences will be identified and made visible. This does not necessarily result in certification, however it could function as a basis for certification.
2. **Documentation:** the individual competences will be measured based on evidence according to the set standards. It is not clear what exact form this ‘evidence’ should take.
3. **Acknowledging:** competences acquired in a non-formal or informal setting will be validated by an accredited institution on the basis of previously defined criteria. Ideally, acknowledging will lead to certification.

Within this national framework, assessments are typically used to validate skills and competences obtained in a formal, informal and non-formal learning setting and can lead to a certificate.

Since 2005 the process of introducing non-formal and informal learning in higher education is being initiated. Universities are responsible for the implementation. In other words this system is decentralised. No coordination exists, all higher education organizations are formulating their own rules and procedures. These procedures result in a proof of acquired competence. This proof, however, does not have to be accepted by employers. Procedures often involve:

- Portfolio
- Assessment
- Interview
- Behavioural observation.
- 

All centres for adult education work through course profiles approved by the Flemish government and deliver mutually interchangeable certificates. Exemptions can be granted on the basis of credits for prior learning or evaluation of competence often including:

- Portfolio
- Observation in simulated situation
- Observation in real situation

<sup>5</sup> <http://vlaamsekwalficatiestructuur.be/wat-is-vks/meer-info-en-downloads/files/Brochure-Wegwijs-in-kwalificaties-EN-2012.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://vlaamsekwalficatiestructuur.be/>

<sup>7</sup> [www.evcvlaanderen.be/over\\_evc/wat\\_is\\_evc.html](http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/over_evc/wat_is_evc.html)

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There is a clear commitment that validating non-formal and informal learning should lead to certification.

Besides these more formal ways of validation tools, some other sectors choose to keep the validation more informal. For example in the previously described OSCAR project. This tool is mainly based on experience within the voluntary and cultural sector. The validation takes place through recommendations from previous employers.

#### VINFL implementation in practice

The three PROMOTE-competences seem to be becoming better known in both the social and private sector in Flanders. For example the Flemish Youth Council (Vlaamse Jeugdraad), in an advisory on the validation of informal and non-formal learning in the sector, states that the focus has to be on a holistic approach of the individual. Active citizenships is seen as one of the most important competences in our current day multicultural society (Vlaamse Jeugdraad, 2012).

According to the managing director of the Flanders public employment service (VDAB), seven important key competences can be distinguished. All of these seven skills can be classified as soft-skills. For example, the ability to connect with other people and the flexibility to adapt to different environments are considered as highly important competences in order to function in a modern knowledge-society (interview).

The same trend is observed by the professionals interviewed for this project. The HR-manager of a company focussing on the development of interpersonal competences stated: “you can be extremely intelligent, but if you don’t know how to connect to other human beings you won’t come far in our networking/knowledge society.”

VDAB is making use of a tool called ‘mijnloopbaan’. This digital portfolio gives job-seekers the opportunity to visualise their social and personal competences. This way the VDAB aims at informal competence-matching recruitment instead of formal diploma based recruitment.

As will be described later in the interview section, the importance of social and personal skills and the PROMOTE-competences are increasingly recognised by both public and private parties.

#### Conclusion desk research Belgium

Following the European-policies on Lifelong Learning, the awareness of the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning did grow in Flanders for the last decade. For example the Flemish Qualification Framework was implemented. Furthermore, there is an official procedure for the recognition of acquired competences, although it was not significantly updated since 2010. A notable fragmentation exist between the different government departments on the validation of informal and non-formal learning. The lack of a comprehensive approach is illustrated by the ESF-funding cancellation of the “Certificate of Work Experience”.

Within the educational system students and learners are supposed to obtain ‘general objectives’ which matches the PROMOTE-competences. There is, however, no validation of these competences



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and a comprehensive approach is non-existent. The system is decentralised, meaning that every educational institute has its own methods.

Private initiatives, such as the OSCAR project, also exist. Adding to the fragmented landscape of validation of informal and non-formal learning.



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### 3.3 Bulgaria

#### National legal framework on VINFL

One of the main challenges for the EU economy is "improving the relationship between vocational training and education and the labour market." This requires the development and use of methods for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. At present, Bulgaria has still not developed and implemented a system for validation of competences acquired in the work process of formal or informal learning. Given the profile and the nature of the labour market in the country the majority of employees in Bulgaria practice professions other than those that have formal education. Moreover, the private enterprises place high requirements for a job opening, so that the demanded labour force's quality has a key role in enhancing the competitiveness of companies. Despite increased investment in human capital, the demand for qualified staff often do not meet adequate supply. Moreover, 66% of the registered unemployed have no profession and qualification certified by documents or certificates, and probably some of them have the knowledge and skills acquired by experience or informal learning. Therefore, a key priority for The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies is building a system for validation (evaluation, recognition) the knowledge and skills acquired through informal learning.

There is a project strategy from 2009 in Bulgaria, elaborated by an experts' group from the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth (MEYS) with National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) for validating of professional competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. This project was followed by several other projects under the framework of the Operational Programme Human Resource Development, funded by ESF. As a result of these projects, some major law amendments have been made in the last years.

In Bulgaria there is no special law dealing with the validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through formal and informal learning. The Law on Vocational Education and Training regulates the recognition and certification of professional knowledge, skills and competences acquired as a result of formal and informal learning. In addition, the Law on Employment Promotion introduced in 2001, allows assessment and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences of adult acquired outside formal education. For the first time published in 2008 a National Strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2008 - 2013 aims to bring together and build a system for validation and certification of the results of formal and informal learning.

As mentioned before, the topic for validation of competences for adults in Bulgaria became to be part of the governmental agenda in the past few years. So, the development of model system for validation of professional competences acquired through formal and informal learning started to take place. The development of such a model becomes the basis of current legislation and a number of project initiatives aimed at exploring different European systems for validation.

During the period 2010 - 2012, it was developed and tested model for validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through formal and informal learning of skilled staff during the



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implementation of the project ValidAid<sup>8</sup> funded by the European Commission. The model was applied to the profession "Cashier" in the sectors - "Finance", "Trade" and "Information and communication technologies". Validation was conducted on the basis of standards that were developed by working groups of experts. Three working groups formulated 10 key standards for each sector, based on state educational requirements. Each of the ten standards has its sub-standards described upon the requirements for knowledge, skills and competences.

Another project that has established a competence validation system for non-formal informal learning is CREATE<sup>9</sup> – "Validation of learning and transfer of credits in the areas of web design and computer animation" (with the support of the "Leonardo da Vinci" of the EU). The aim of the project is to provide useful information and guidance for the assessment, validation and recognition of the results of learning in creative professions (in this case - web design and computer animation).

Finally, in 2013-2014 a national-wide project managed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth implemented a project "New opportunities for my future", BG051PO001-4.3.03-000, funded by ESF<sup>10</sup>. The project aims to establish and pilot a system for identification and validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills and competences. The system has been elaborated together with the Bulgarian Industrial Association, the large employers and employees' associations in order to consider all relevant aspects. Since January 2015 the system has been officially launched, and a detailed manual for all the specific elements for the implementation has been published. Unfortunately, the communication process regarding dissemination of information about the piloting system, and all the benefits - for the individual, and for the employers, is not that successful – only the involved institutions and some of their partners know about the validation start in Bulgaria, and CATRO has the chance to know experts from the Bulgarian Industrial Association who informed us about the existence and the launch of the system. They have also trained around 100 consultants in validation who are responsible for individual consultation and clarification of concrete questions regarding the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>11</sup>.

Overall, till the national legal framework for validation of informal and non-formal learning is established as set in the National strategy for Lifelong learning – national experts from different sectors have already started working on similar validation systems for specific sectors and/or professional occupations. The next logical step in the development of a national validation system can be based on the good practices of the already elaborated projects which standards have to be unified.

Based on the various projects on national level as well the exchange with international experts (Germany, France etc.) different ideas and perceptions of validation have been incorporated in the

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.validaid.eu>

<sup>9</sup> <http://create-validate.org/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://validirane.mon.bg/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bia-bg.com/>



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national legal framework, mainly regarding the process and the system for validation itself, such as Objectives, Target groups, Activities, Principles, Methodology, Validation methods, Results of the Process of Validation, Organisation and Management, Main Bodies, Resources, Tools, Monitoring and Samples of potential Documents. Thus, so far there is a more formal understanding of what validation is and could be used for which might change in the future, towards expanding with more soft skills elements.

As far as the national institutions are still working in cooperation on different legislations regarding the unified competence validation system, so no affective dimensions were elaborated upon the key competences on a national level – the process for introduction of the validation system to the formalized assessment system is still a planned next step in Bulgaria.

### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

As already described above there are a lot of projects and initiatives, including on national level for assessment and validation of skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal way. However, most of these projects and systems are related more to the professional/hard skills and almost none of them really tackles the issues of assessing or validating soft skills so far. As our desk research shows, the personal, social and entrepreneurship skills in PROMOTE are recognised and validated only within some private and non-governmental projects.

One of the projects that validate 10 key personal competences that make you better employable is AdValue<sup>12</sup>. The main aim of the project is to help people realize what they have already learned at school, at work and in life in order to make visible all their qualities and skills obtained in non-formal or informal ways. The project promotes validation of non-formal and informal learning and help adults develop and assess key transferable skills during lifetime. The 10 competences covered in the project are: personal effectiveness, self-awareness, personal presentation, self-esteem, leadership, problem solving, communication skills, sense of initiative, multicultural communication and collaborative work.

The social competences are still not well recognized on a national level as a key factor for the society development. There are different private or non-governmental initiatives who work for their popularization within wide audience. One of which – the National Alliance for Volunteer Action (NAVA)<sup>13</sup> works for the development of competences and their validation through volunteering. The foundation organises workshops where through assessment methods they recognise the educational competences acquired through non-formal, informal learning and develop the identified potential through volunteering initiatives. They believe that the practical experience develops the competences and particular when talking about social skills and competences – the best trainer is the volunteerism.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.advalue-project.eu/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://navabg.com/>





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The level of the recognition of entrepreneurial skills and competences is high, even though no validation system is developed, yet.

There are already some project and programs, assigned to entrepreneurship for kids.

- **Junior Achievement Bulgaria**<sup>14</sup> fulfilled 3-year project “Increasing the impact of entrepreneurship competences and employability skills in the educational system in Bulgaria” financed by the America for Bulgaria Foundation from 2009 till 2011. Now they implement a new 3-year project to build upon the results of the first project – Developing Entrepreneurship through soft skills, business and creativity hands-on education.
- **Junior Achievement Bulgaria** organizes also a summer entrepreneurship academy for kids.
- **HiAchievers**<sup>15</sup> is a private company which main focus is to organize Leadership programs for developing entrepreneurship skills in 13 – 18 years old children.

A lot of other initiatives and projects **for adults are** available:

- **9Academy**<sup>16</sup> is a business academy, in which experts and experienced professionals from the business sector transmit their knowledge, skills and experience of 50 young people through interactive teaching methods and experiences that last a lifetime. It supports personal and professional development of people through practical knowledge, skills and experience provided by interactive and accessible way. One of the main objectives of the Academy is promote and foster entrepreneurial skills among young people in Bulgaria.
- **SOS entrepreneurial foundation**<sup>17</sup> is focused on promotion and development of entrepreneurship and private initiative in Bulgaria. The main activities SOS Foundation are related to the creation of information materials and databases, development of studies, manuals, analyses and strategies; supporting civic initiatives, projects of non-governmental organizations and entrepreneurs; organizing and participating in workshops, roundtables, conferences and thematic forums, seminars and trainings; creation and development of networks of cooperation and participation in such networks, exchange of experience, mutual learning and partnership initiatives; disseminating information and promoting public debate, study and promotion of "best practices" and innovative approaches among entrepreneurs in Bulgaria.
- **The Institute for Postgraduate Studies at the University of National and World Economy** launched the project "Development of innovation and entrepreneurship in European regions"

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.jabulgaria.org/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://hiachievers.com/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://9academy.com/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://sos-predpriemachi.com/>



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(Furthering Innovative Entrepreneurial Regions of Europe - FIERE). Its main aim is to enhance regional public and voluntary organisations with innovative entrepreneurship skills that can facilitate bottom-up regional development and tie-in with top-down regional development policies, across six European countries.

#### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

##### ***Which assessment systems for these skills / competences exist in your country?***

MyCompetence is informational system for assessing specific competences (group of competences) as managerial skills, development potential, etc. and it also provides assessment tools (tests and questionnaires)<sup>18</sup>.

MyCompetence is created within a project "Development of a Workforce Competence Assessment System by Sectors and Regions" carried out by the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA) in partnership with the Confederation of the Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) and the Confederation of Labour „Podkrepa” financed by the European Social Fund. The competences included in the platform are grouped into three main clusters: core competences, managerial competences and specific competences. The selection and description of competences is done according to the qualification levels set out in the National qualifications framework (NQF). Each competence is related via a code to the clusters created in MyCompetence and the respective NQF qualifications.

##### ***Are the existing certification systems an integrated part of Higher education, or part of a personal Competences Development plan?***

The desk research in Bulgaria did not identify any existing certification systems that are integrated in the Higher Education or are part of a personal competence development plan.

##### ***To which degree can the recognition of those skills and competences be strengthened?***

Competence based assessment or certification systems can be integrated in the secondary education, universities and colleges. As companies in the business have developed internal systems for competence assessment, we believe that such an evaluation is valuable to happen even in the school learning environment. Like that, the transition for the young people from school/university to the world of business will be much easier, faster and more efficient. By strengthening the competence evaluation earlier in their development, the young people will be aware what key skills and competences they need in order to develop their career path.

##### ***Which tools does your country have to bridge the gap between formalized and informal learning?***

- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) - ECTS is a credit system designed to make it easier for students to move between different countries. Since they are based on the learning achievements and workload of a course, a student can transfer their ECTS credits from one university to another, so that they are added up to contribute to an individual's degree programme or training. The students can choose the courses alone and it reinforces the concept of

<sup>18</sup> <http://en.mycompetence.bg/assessmenttool/>





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student-centred learning. It is used for all kind of educational programs, incl. online and distance learning. The system is applied in all the universities in Bulgaria.

- The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training is integrating the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training, referred to as ECVET, is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and (where appropriate) accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification.

Proposals for the application of the ECVET model in the EU for the food and tourism sectors are already open. Public educational standard for qualification in the profession System Programmer, Cooker and Baker-pastry are already integrated.

#### *Who is the owner of these tools?*

- Ministry of Education and Science
- National Agency for Vocational Education and Training

#### *Who has access to these tools?*

- Private and public universities
- VET institutions

### VINFL implementation in practice

#### **Which cross-cutting competences are considered as important by enterprises, companies, private and public employers?**

Social and personal competences are considered as very important for organizations both in the private and public sector. According to a survey within a project Get Ready 2 Work<sup>19</sup>, which CATRO Bulgaria made 2013 among 50 middle and large companies in various economic sectors in Bulgaria, communication skills, team-work, problem-solving skills and customer orientation (esp. in the service sector) are of crucial importance for employing young people. In another survey in 2014 within the project GEP VET<sup>20</sup>, among companies and VET centres in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Germany and Portugal, entrepreneurial competences as creativity, flexibility, pro-activeness, risk-taking and problem-solving skills were ranked as the top competences for developing successful entrepreneurial mind-set and culture within organizations.

As already stated above, the PROMOTE skills and competences are highly recognized and appreciated in the representative sample of companies which took part in the surveys of CATRO Bulgaria. These competences are partly integrated in the competence models for assessing employees' performance and potential, but not across all companies. Others – as the competence learning to learn are just part of their organization culture, esp. in companies in the IT sector, where the rapid business and technology development requires great desire and continuous inspiration for non-stop learning and implementing newly acquired knowledge in the practice.

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<sup>19</sup> [www.getready2work.eu](http://www.getready2work.eu)

<sup>20</sup> [www.gepvet.eu](http://www.gepvet.eu)



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In most of the cases these competences are not communicated to the public in a very popular way, they might be integrated in their mission statement, values and goals, but are more internally oriented, towards the employees, and not that much to the clients and the society as a whole.

The following institutes and organizations are involved in working on VINFL in Bulgaria:

- The Ministry of Education and Science
- The Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs
- The Employment Agency
- The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training
- The Bulgarian Industrial Association
- The Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce
- Social partners as national employers and employees associations

#### Conclusion desk research Bulgaria

Since 2008 there are various projects about validation of non-formal and informal learning on national level, funded by the European Funds that have created the basis also for some legal amendments, esp. in the last 2 years. The most relevant project, run by the Ministry of Education and Science, resulted in piloting of a national-wide system for identification and validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills and competences<sup>21</sup>, which was launched in 2015. It covers mainly the professional competences in the VET sector but after a certain period of testing it could be transferred to other sectors, as well.

The personal, social and entrepreneurship skills in PROMOTE are recognised and validated only within some private and non-governmental projects, such as AdValue<sup>22</sup> or within the frame of volunteering actions. Among them the entrepreneurial skills are the ones that are more often recognized, assessed and validated in different programmes and educational settings (primary, secondary and tertiary sector, as well as adult education).

There is one national-wide system for visualization and assessment of various professional and soft skills. Which also provides assessment tools as tests and questionnaires – MyCompetence.bg, run by the Bulgarian Industrial Association<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://validirane.mon.bg/?p=5>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.advalue-project.eu/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://en.mycompetence.bg/assessmenttool/>



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Social and personal competences are considered as very important for the corporate sector in Bulgaria - as proved by some surveys of CATRO Bulgaria. However, currently there are no unified tools for their assessment and validation, and some of the employers (which have been interviewed for PROMOTE) expressed the opinion, that they might not need such validation tools, esp. regarding personal and social skills, VINFL might be more appropriate for hard skills.





### 3.4 Germany

#### National legal framework on VINFL

In Germany no legal framework and no standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning currently exists. Due to the allocation of responsibilities within the complex educational system, there is a variety of approaches, particularly below political level.

The recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is legally not on an equal footing with the recognition of formal learning. There are barely any regulatory provisions governing the recognition of cross-cutting competences, or specialised competences (as distinct from occupation-specific qualifications and skills). Moreover, the issue is widely viewed as less important by those involved in policy and practice. The federal system has few nationwide provisions on the recording and certification of informal education. Little use is made of competences acquired informally for the formal education system in terms of admission procedures, training and study programmes, and certification at upper secondary level and in higher education. The various qualitative and quantitative certification procedures (examination boards, assessments etc.) are not used in a differentiated way, and any coordination of such procedures does not exist.

The most important tool for assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes is admission to final examinations under Section 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (*BiG*), known as the “*Externen-Prüfung*” (*examination for external candidates*, i.e. those not involved in a formal vocational training programme). Under this provision, people can be admitted to a final examination for a recognised occupation requiring formal training (training occupation) if they furnish evidence that they have been employed in the occupation for which they wish to take the examination for a period at least one and a half times as long as is prescribed for the period of initial training.

Credit can be obtained for a higher level of general educational attainment, such as the *Fachoberschulreife* (*entrance qualification for specialised upper secondary school*), which shortens the period of employment for which evidence must be produced. A previous relevant programme of initial vocational education and training (IVET) in a different training occupation can also be credited towards the required periods of employment. Source: Germany Country Report, CEDEFOP: [https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2012/2012\\_CR\\_DE.pdf](https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2012/2012_CR_DE.pdf), 2012

When it comes to recognising professional qualifications the situation looks different. On 1 April 2012, the “Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Feststellung und Anerkennung im Ausland erworbener Berufsqualifikationen” (German Act Improving the Identification and Recognition of Professional Qualifications Acquired Abroad) (Recognition Act) came into force. With it, the possibilities of recognising vocational qualifications acquired abroad for the professions within the jurisdiction of the federal government have been expanded. By the end of 2013, corresponding state recognition laws were passed in 11 states for the professions which are based on state regulations. 10,989 applications were made for the recognition of a professional qualification acquired abroad in the reporting period. Almost 80 % of all applications relate to the recognition of a regulated profession;



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the remaining 20 % relate to non-regulated professions. There is a particular interest in recognising medical, healthcare professions. Over half of all applicants aspired to have a medical licence granted. The internet portal “Recognition in Germany”, launched in April 2012, offers information on the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications in English and German. The demand for information on the procedures of professional recognition continued to grow in 2013. A total of 559,708 visitors used the portal.

Source: Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training: VET data report Germany 2014 VET - Facts and analyses accompanying the Federal report on vocational education and training – selected findings

In contrast to other European countries, in Germany most of the approaches are established below political level (i.e. below regulative level), aiming at the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal learning as a precondition for a possible later “further” validation connected with entitlements. By means of public funds, many different approaches at regional and national level have been developed for different target groups in recent years.

The will to animate the idea of lifelong learning concerning the validation of non-formal and informal learning has become more and more explicit in recent years. A number of key publications have been developed: the 2004 “Strategy for lifelong learning in the Federal Republic of Germany”<sup>2</sup>, the 2007 recommendations for further education and the 2008 recommendations for vocational education and training.

All in all, validation in Germany can today be described as a colourful mosaic of local, regional and national approaches. An overall framework is lacking up to now.

### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

There is no credit system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany. Furthermore, there is neither a unit-based nor a modularised system. However ‘Training modules’ (*Ausbildungsbausteine*) in vocational education represent a step in the right direction. A relationship between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and credit systems can only be seen in two fields. First of all, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) plays a role in the accreditation of vocationally acquired qualifications at university. Secondly, the national implementation of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is being tested in a pilot initiative (DECVET). These two main initiatives have been launched by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. They are currently in the development, testing or evaluation phase and have not yet been rolled out. The credit systems complement validation procedures in a quantitative way, because through them non-formal and informal learning can be quantified in the form of credits.

As mentioned before, there are no officially and nationally recognised systems in place that support the recognition and validation of learning outcomes acquired in informal or non-formal settings. Also the interviews underpinned that there is a certain level of uncertainty about what validation actually is and what its benefit could be. There is a general agreement that it is important that learning



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outcomes of informal learning can be recognised and thus appreciated. On the other hand, when it comes to professional competences hard evidence is necessary to provide reliable and comparable proofs.

In general social, personal and organizational competences (SPOC) are considered of high relevance for success in working life. This is reflected in the high amount of training offers in the adult education sector in Germany. SPOC are addressed in specific training offers and are an informal element of other skills related courses on the German market.

Courses which explicitly aim at the development of SPOC competences often address the management dimension of companies, as recent scientific research has proved the social working climate to be one of the main determining factors for successful performance.

In regard to the training of unemployed persons the SPOC competences are also addressed in many ways as being seen as precondition to employability. Also in the area of low skilled persons SPOC form an added value to be communicated towards employers.

When it comes to the question of the recognition and validation of SPOC there is a large variety of instruments applied in a rather random way, depending of what is known and available.

An expert working at the interface between school and work revealed that SPOC are seen increasingly important also from the employers' side. However, as they are neither "taught" in school nor in VET they are predominantly acquired in practical work and life situations, e.g. during an internship or an apprenticeship. But also in these learning settings they are neither deliberately planned nor validated.

From our research we can derive that there seems to be lack of a combined learning approach that matches the demands of potential employers and the competences of the intern/candidate. This would afford not only a validation approach but also a flexible and customisable approach of an integrative learning on the job.

#### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

Actually there are a number of tools and in place that can generally be found below political level.

Here are some examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives:

- "Career choice pass" (*Berufswahlpass*) – an instrument for the preparation of career choice used particularly in schools
- "Thematic study group competence diagnosis" (*Facharbeitskreis Kompetenzfeststellung*) – different approaches are developed to improve the integration of migrants in the labour market
- "Competence certificate for voluntary work" (*Kompetenznachweis Ehrenamt*) – an instrument for the documentation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in voluntary contexts
- "Competence balance for vocational returnees" (*Kompetenzbilanz für BerufsrückkehrerInnen*) - instrument for documentation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired during parental leaves





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- “Competence certificate culture“ (*Kompetenznachweis Kultur*) - instrument for documentation of knowledge, skills and competences gained while participating in cultural events guided by skilled personnel
- “Competence panorama for migrants“ (*Kompetenzenpanorama für Migrantinnen & Migranten*) – portfolio for making competences visible and improving the process of integration
- “Qualipass“ (*Qualipass in Baden-Württemberg*) – instrument for analysing particularly activities of pupils outside school supported by coaches
- Youthpass – instrument for recognition of non-formal and informal acquired competences in the field of youth work anchored in the Youth in Action Programme
- The ANKOM-initiative in contrast to the above approaches is located on a political level and aims to facilitate access to higher education for qualified workers. This initiative, funded by government, has developed and tested approaches of crediting vocational experience for access and accreditation to higher education.

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Some of the initiatives mentioned above provide personal support in the period of the initiatives’ development and testing. Afterwards information, instruction manuals and records for validation are only available via the internet.

There are specific approaches which are tailored to domains such as family, honorary posts or migration, which are often launched in the context of projects. Different stakeholders are involved in the publicly promoted projects. Take for example the “cultural competence record” (“Kompetenznachweis Kultur”), a project initiative promoted by the Ministry of Education. This portfolio document is given to young people who actively take part in artistic and cultural events.

Another example is the Youthpass, which is part of the European Commission’s strategy to foster the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This is a tool to visualise and to validate learning outcomes gained in the “Youth in Action” programme. It documents the added value of “Youth in Action” projects and visualises and supports active European citizenship of young people and youth workers. As a Europe-wide validation instrument for non-formal learning in the youth field, the Youthpass contributes to strengthening the social recognition of youth work by making visible and validating key competences through a certificate.

A report on Volunteering in Europe identifies a number of initiatives in Germany to record competences and skills acquired through volunteering. In the youth sector, voluntary activities can be recognised by certificates, cards and documentation in school reports. An example is the card for youth leaders – the ‘Jugendleiter/in-Card’ or ‘Juleica’ which is the most common certificate for young volunteers in Germany (around 3,000 cards are issued each month).

Another example is the certificate which is given to young people who have carried out a Voluntary Year of Social or Ecological Service. This certificate confirms the nature and the duration of their voluntary service and sometimes also includes a performance rating and the vocational qualifications the young people acquired during their service.



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Moreover, there are company-specific as well as sector-specific approaches which are used within companies. Large and medium-sized companies with a HR department are involved, whereas in the SME sector such measures are often taken by publicly promoted projects in which different stakeholders take part. One example is the project for the Development of a model certificate for SMEs to evaluate the potential and competences of immigrants, commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology. A second example is the current project “ProfilPASS in der Wirtschaft” (ProfilPASS in the economy). This project aims at testing, evaluating and adapting the ProfilPASS-system to the needs of private companies. In this respect, the ProfilPASS represents an auspicious instrument that supports companies in establishing a systematic competence management system which especially considers informally acquired competences.

The previously listed approaches for validation in Germany, which are located below political level, are not connected with the legally fixed recognition approaches.

Universities are exclusively responsible for the recognition of vocationally acquired qualifications and competences as well as for access for vocationally qualified people to university and the accreditation of their competences. The universities generally develop their own approaches according to the legal regulations of the Länder.

Competent authorities (Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of industry and commerce and Chambers of farming) are responsible for awarding degrees in vocational education. They grant an accreditation of vocationally acquired competences with regard to access to the External students’ examination. For this they take as a basis the content of the training regulations.

There are two examples of legislative provisions relating to validation that can be found in the field of vocational education and training:

- the External students’ examination under § 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and § 37 (2) of the Crafts Code (HwO) – and
- in higher education – from 2009 access for qualified workers is regulated by the decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder.

Both lead to entitlements in the formal system. The External students’ examination leads to the award of a full qualification (there is no difference between this qualification and a regular acquired qualification) in a recognised apprenticeship trade and access to a higher education course can be granted through the access for qualified workers route.





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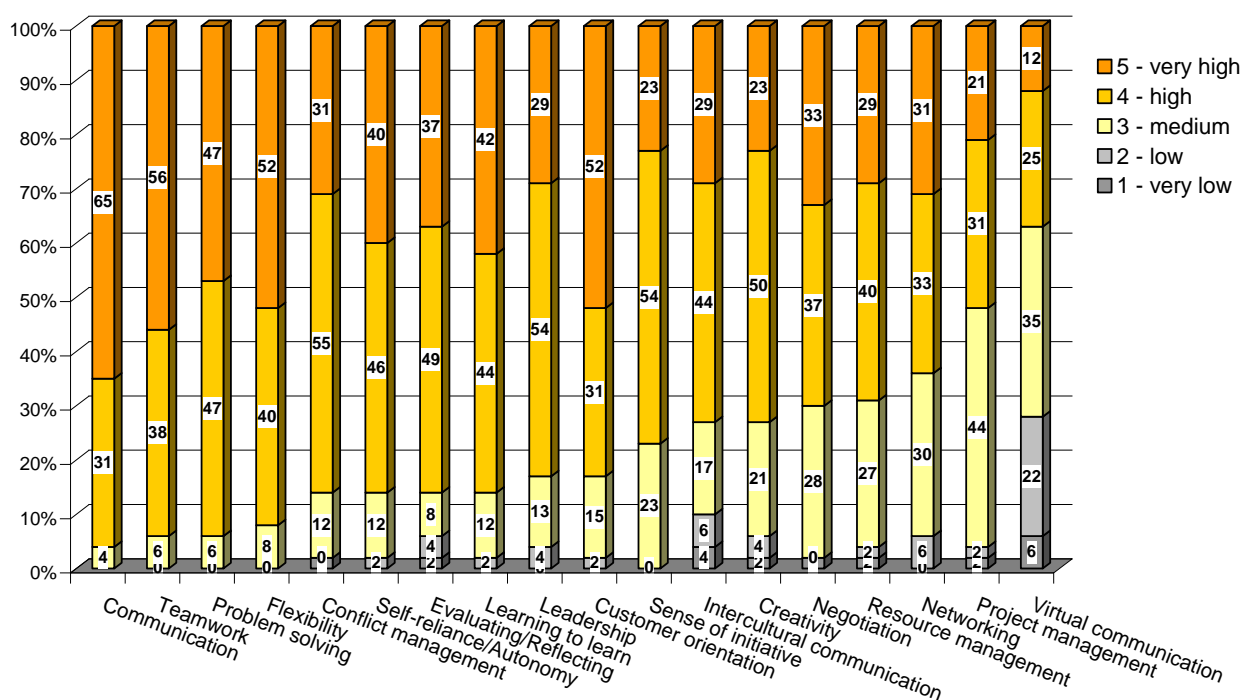
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### VINFL implementation in practice

In the EU-funded project VITA we carried out a European survey among employers to find out which cross-cutting competences they consider as being most important. The survey was answered by 165 respondents from the private and public sector.

**Importance of certain competences for respondent's core business**



The graph shows that competences such as *communication* are of paramount importance to all respondents.

The full answers to the online questionnaire can be retrieved by following this link: <https://appv3.sgizmo.com/reportsview/?key=56958-1620723-42b30b28f0f057df9bbce1cc2996be4b>

These findings were consolidated in a number of interviews with employers and representatives of job agencies in Germany carried out in the framework of the VITA project. Also the interviews carried out in PROMOTE showed the same tendencies and confirm the findings of the VITA project.

The 2014 Amway Global Report on Entrepreneurship<sup>24</sup>, realized in collaboration with GfK (Germany's largest market research institute and the fourth largest market research organisation in the world) and the Technical University of Monaco (TUM), focused on the role of training in an

<sup>24</sup> Amway, (2014), *Global Entrepreneurship Report 2014, Global Entrepreneurship Report. Advancing Entrepreneurship Education*, Nuremberg: GfK. Retrieved from: [http://www.amwayentrepreneurshipreport.tum.de/fileadmin/w00bfs/www/2014/Amway\\_Global\\_Entrepreneurship\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.amwayentrepreneurshipreport.tum.de/fileadmin/w00bfs/www/2014/Amway_Global_Entrepreneurship_Report_2014.pdf) [accessed on 22 July 2015].



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entrepreneurial path, with particular attention to the opinion of young people (aged 14-99 across 38 countries including Germany) on the self-employment. The study revealed that among the following aspects of entrepreneurship education the business skills considered crucial by the respondents to prepare people to start their own business are:

<i>Skills</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
Basic business skills (e.g. in financial controlling, marketing or computer applications )	42%
Leadership and management skills and rhetorical abilities (e.g. decision making, customer management, leading and motivating employees)	37%
Entrepreneurship in practice (e. g. business plans, business competitions/business simulations, mini-company programs)	37%
Innovation (e.g. teaching of creativity and solution approaches to problems)	31%
Entrepreneurial role models (mentoring programs and personal interaction with entrepreneurs)	28%
Learning from analysing entrepreneurial success stories	24%

Also here we have one third of respondents who consider cross-cutting competences such as leadership, management skills and rhetorical abilities as important.

In a number of European projects carried out between 2008 and 2015, we have carried out many surveys and interviews to explore the validation practice in Europe. These revealed a huge gap between current European policy – the Council Recommendation of December 2012 has called upon Member States to establish systems that allow individuals to identify, document, assess and certify (=validate) all forms of learning in order to use this learning for advancing their career and for further education by 2018<sup>25</sup> – and the actual practice of validation of competences.

In the context of many projects, particularly below political level, awareness-raising has changed for the better in recent years. But still a lot of people do not know about validation opportunities. Besides, a great lack of transparency concerning existing procedures can be identified. Internet, information meetings and written information are typical channels of information. Contents are presented in a target-group specific manner.

As mentioned before no legal framework and no standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning currently exist. Still there are a number of approaches that have been developed below political level. Among them are many that are company-specific or sector-specific. Large and medium-sized companies with a HR department have their own validation system,

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>



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whereas in the SME sector such measures are often taken by publicly promoted projects in which different stakeholders take part. This might indicate that there is an actual need for validation approaches.

When it comes to provision and support there is no nationwide range of counselling that covers every existing approach. Rather, approach-specific counselling exists. Within the ProfilPASS-system for instance a specific counselling concept has been developed. Apart from the ProfilPASS-counsellors, there are nationwide ProfilPASS-dialogue-centres which promote the prevalence of the ProfilPASS-system in their region. They are field workers which cooperate in networks with the counsellors. Heading the ProfilPASS-process, the users receive information about informal learning, recognition and the ProfilPASS-approach. Within the approach, the identification of competences takes place before the personal and individual educational planning on the basis of the previous results is carried out. The provider is responsible for the counselling; that is why the range of counselling is tailored to the target group of the providers. The consultation is always individual-related, since the ProfilPASS is an individual and personal tool.

Because the HE access example still has the status of single projects no data is available on the provision of guidance and support in this area – in any case guidance and support vary from project to project.

In the context of the External students' examination, the range of support carried out by the Chambers is often significant. The consultation always aims at a successful application for admission to the regular final examination. The users receive advice and, if necessary, a recommendation for additional training. In the case of a successful admission, the users receive further information for the preparation of the examination. Similarly the BMBFprogramme "*Perspektive Berufsabschluss*" aims to reduce the number of unskilled workers by improving access to the use of external students' examination.

An own study (2013<sup>26</sup>) carried out in the above mentioned VITA project revealed that there are a number of IT-based assessment tools that are being applied in Europe. In Germany, due to the fact that there is no overall framework for validation, there are some IT-based tools that are used on national level – like the eProfilpass (see hereafter) – or strictly on company level – like the CAB (see hereafter). There are also European initiatives that seek to develop validation tools in the framework of European funded project, as it is the case for LEVEL5 (mentioned also in the Inventory of informal learning, CEDEFOP) or the eCOTOOL. These tools have one thing in common – they are all used below political level.

Name of the tool	eProfilPASS
URL	<a href="http://www.eprofilpass.de">www.eprofilpass.de</a>

<sup>26</sup> IT based Assessment and Validation systems for Social, Personal and Organisational Competence: [http://www.vita-eu.org/uploads/media/01\\_a\\_VITA\\_survey\\_ICT\\_part.pdf](http://www.vita-eu.org/uploads/media/01_a_VITA_survey_ICT_part.pdf)





Country	Germany
Who provides the tool?	DIE - Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung – Leibniz-Zentrum für Lebenslanges Lernen e.V. (German Institute for Adult Education)
Who are the users of the tool?	Individuals who want to reflect on their vita and competences in order to become aware on own assets and for planning further steps.
How is the tool accessed? (e.g. by the assessor or the assessed?)	By the assessed, the e-Profilpass is a self-assessment instrument along guiding questions.
Which IT services does the tool offer? (e.g. validation, certification, assessment)	Assessment and documentation
What is the purpose of the tool?	It is a portfolio, which successive collection is supposed to help structure one's experiences and competences as data base for planning future steps. Supplementing (online) counselling offers are connected to the Profilpass.
Which competences are validated	Professional, personal, social and organisational competences
Which competence dimensions are assessed?	Knowledge and skills
Which role does the tool play in relation to validation of prior learning?	It is part of a larger context, as it helps providing and structuring biographical information to foster a self-reflection and awareness process. The Profilpass also exists in hardcopy in form of a folder. It is a preparatory step to a real validation of prior learning.
Technical specifications, interfaces to other validation systems	unknown

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Name of the tool	eCOTOOL
URL	<a href="http://www.competencetools.eu">www.competencetools.eu</a>
Country	Europe
Who provides the tool?	University Duisburg-Essen and a transnational consortium, Project eCOTOOL
Who are the users of the tool?	VET institutes, certification bodies, final beneficiaries
How is the tool accessed? (e.g. by the assessor or the assessed?)	By VET organisations
Which IT services does the tool offer? (e.g. validation, certification, assessment)	It provides a framework in which the learning outcomes can be assigned to an EQF conform framework. Hence it serves validation purposes that lead to a formal certification
What is the purpose of the tool?	Supplement to EQF, ECTS, EUROPASS and others
Which competences are validated	Professional competences and learning outcomes for farmers in vineyards; tested in the agricultural sector
Which competence dimensions are assessed?	Knowledge, skills
Which role does the tool play in relation to validation of prior learning?	Eco tools as solution to make the EUROPASS interoperable amongst any given IT system (e.g. participants' databases, certification software etc. by describing the IT-interfaces.)
Technical specifications	It contains specifications as meta-information that serves the interoperability of the tool. Example: The tool can be used to describe learning outcomes that relate to certain EQF-levels in a certain profession, here for the piloted vineyard farmers.  The (hidden, metatext) specifications lead to a correct



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	transfer if they are sent to another institution. Through the standardised structure also other professions may use the tool to describe VET related competences and learning outcomes. The meta-text serve as hidden descriptors that lead the software to put the information (e.g. learning outcome at LEVEL3) to the right position.
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Name of the tool	<b>CAB (Computergestütztes Auswahlverfahren für den gehobenen Polizeivollzugsdienst/</b> Computer-aided personnel selection for higher police service Hesse)
URL	<a href="http://www.polizei.hessen.de/icc/internetzentral/nav/e73/e7340527-bab6-4021-3104-182109241c24.htm">http://www.polizei.hessen.de/icc/internetzentral/nav/e73/e7340527-bab6-4021-3104-182109241c24.htm</a>
Country	Germany
Who provides the tool?	Police Hesse, Germany
Who are the users of the tool?	Applicants for police
How is the tool accessed? (e.g. by the assessor or the assessed?)	Online
Which IT services does the tool offer? (e.g. validation, certification, assessment)	Psychological assessment tests and ratings
What is the purpose of the tool?	Test applicants
Which competences are validated	Social and personal competences
Which competence dimensions are assessed?	all
Which role does the tool play in relation to validation of	none



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prior learning?	
Technical specifications	unknown

Name of the tool	Landesnachweis NRW (National Evidence North-Rhine Westphalia)
URL	<a href="http://www.engagiert.in.nrw.de/aktuelles/meldungen/meldungen_be_ue_alt/F_reinander_Miteinander1/index.php">http://www.engagiert.in.nrw.de/aktuelles/meldungen/meldungen_be_ue_alt/F_reinander_Miteinander1/index.php</a>
Country	North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany
Who provides the tool?	Ministry of Family, Youth, Culture and Sports supported by Employers and Business Associations in North Rhine-Westphalia
Who are the users of the tool?	Volunteers in the field of social affairs, environment and agriculture
How is the tool accessed? (e.g. by the assessor or the assessed?)	Via intermediate organisations authorised by the ministry. These organisations offer access and consultancy for the volunteers
Which IT services does the tool offer? (e.g. validation, certification, assessment)	Certification
What is the purpose of the tool?	Commitment Proof North Rhine-Westphalia »Für-einander.Miteinander - Engaged in voluntary social work" documents and pays tribute to civic engagement in North Rhine-Westphalia. The commitment evidence proves the technical and social skills of civic volunteers and certifies these.
Which competences are validated	Commitment proof contains information about the sponsoring organization, the volunteers and their field of application, a general job description and a thanksgiving. At the request of the volunteers, the detection can be supplemented, for example, specific information on the activity and the specific personal achievements. These include the acquired key skills. These are, for example, team and communication skills, creativity and ability to abstract and



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	specific performance and commercial knowledge. Also craftsmanship, educational and psychological skills or the organizational skills of volunteer assets to be listed in the proof of commitment.
Which competence dimensions are assessed?	Knowledge and Activity
Which role does the tool play in relation to validation of prior learning?	Its intention is to provide proof of prior learning in the informal setting of volunteering.
Technical specifications	unknown

Name of the tool	LEVEL5
URL	<a href="http://www.reveal-eu.org">www.reveal-eu.org</a>
Country	Germany / Europe
Who provides the tool?	REVEAL community
Who are the users of the tool?	Educationalists, HR managers, evaluators, individuals
How is the tool accessed? (e.g. by the assessor or the assessed?)	Via the REVEAL community
Which IT services does the tool offer? (e.g. validation, certification, assessment)	<p>The software contains the following features:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning projects, groups and singular learners can be fully described and documented.</li> <li>2. Individual learning outcomes ("topics") can be defined, fine-tuned and also combined in so called "topic sets".</li> <li>3. Contextualised reference systems can be set up for each selected topic (aspired learning outcome).</li> <li>4. An appropriate assessment method can be chosen and</li> </ol>







	<p>described in detail. The evaluation time-stamps have to be defined in order to prepare the process-oriented visualisation of competence development.</p> <p>5. Learners’ competences can be rated and reasoned in order to give full evidence of the individual development. The results may also be documented in an automatically generated PDF-certificate.</p>
What is the purpose of the tool?	Assessing, visualising and validating competence developments in informal and non-formal learning projects
Which competences are validated	The focus is on social, personal and organisational competences in informal and non-formal settings, such as in mobility, volunteering work, learning on the job, European projects etc.
Which competence dimensions are assessed?	Knowledge, activity related and affective level
Which role does the tool play in relation to validation of prior learning?	LEVEL5 looks rather at the development of competences within a defined period of time. It assesses the competence level at the beginning of the learning activity and at its end. Thus it shows the potential of the learner rather than the performance.
Technical specifications	available

Due to the lack of legal framework and standardised system for validation, there is neither a central institution nor a standardised institutional framework. The variety of approaches corresponds to a variety of responsibilities, particularly below political level.

When it comes to validation of occupation-specific competences the ‘competent authorities’ are responsible under § 71 of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) for the admission to the External students’ examination. Competent authorities are mainly the Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of industry and commerce and Chambers of farming – the responsibility depends on the recognised occupation requiring occupational training.

For access to higher education, the German Rectors’ Conference has defined the framework for validation. Concrete regulations and procedures are established by the respective university. The ProfilPASS-system, a national service-centre was established in 2005. Currently it supports 55

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local dialogue-centres. The system is built up by multipliers who qualify counsellors. The counsellors work in educational institutions or free-lance.

Moreover, companies use their own company-specific or sector-specific approaches. Large and medium-sized companies with a HR department are involved, whereas in the SME sector such measures are often taken by publicly promoted projects in which different stakeholders take part. Some federal states have their own system for certifying competences. The ‘Qualipass’ in Baden-Württemberg for example documents practical experiences and competences of young people (aged 12 to 25 - acquired through voluntary activities, traineeships, time spent abroad etc.). Other examples are the *Hamburger Nachweis*, *Berliner FreiwilligenPass* and the *EhrenamtsCard* in Hessen

### Conclusion desk research Germany

In Germany, the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is legally not on an equal footing with the recognition of formal learning. There are barely any regulatory provisions governing the recognition of cross-cutting competences, or specialised competences (as distinct from occupation-specific qualifications and skills).

No legal framework and no standardised system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning currently exist. Due to the allocation of responsibilities within the complex educational system, there is a variety of approaches, particularly below political level.

Examples of legislative provisions relating to validation can be found in the field of vocational education and training:

- the External students’ examination under § 45 (2) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and § 37 (2) of the Crafts Code (HwO) – and
- in higher education – from 2009 access for qualified workers is regulated by the decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder.

Both lead to entitlements in the formal system. The External students’ examination leads to the award of a full qualification (there is no difference between this qualification and a regular acquired qualification) in a recognised apprenticeship trade and access to a higher education course can be granted through the access for qualified workers route.

By means of public funds, many different approaches, which are located below political level (i.e. below regulative level) have been developed at regional and national level for different target groups in recent years. Among them are many that are company-specific or sector-specific. Large and medium-sized companies with a HR department have their own validation system, whereas in the SME sector such measures are often taken by publicly promoted projects in which different stakeholders take part. Also, the third sector has developed specific approaches which are tailored to domains such as family, honorary posts or migration, which are often launched in the context of



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projects. This shows that there seem to be a need for a tool that support the validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences that are not necessarily occupation-specific but relate also to cross-cutting competences such as social and personal competences.

When it comes to provision and support there is no nationwide range of counselling that covers every existing validation approach. Rather, approach-specific counselling exists.

All in all, validation in Germany shows a wide range of local, regional and national validation approaches. An overall framework is lacking up to now.





### 3.5 Greece

#### National legal framework on VINFL

National authorities officially recognised the importance of validating learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (2010 law on Lifelong Learning). In 2011, all the relevant national agencies have been merged in a single organisation and training, guidance, certifying qualifications acquired through non-formal/informal learning, knowledge-skills-competences examination and the assessment-validation system falls under the authority of EOPPEP.

The Hellenic Qualification Framework announced on 10 July 2013 but till 2014 was under development and validation practices were ready but fragmented. The certification of the workforce qualifications deriving from non-formal education and informal learning is connected to education, vocational training and employment and it has to be based on National Standards, which include educational standards and vocational standards whose function is described within EOPPEP's certified vocational profiles, evaluation, validation and certification standards. The Law 4186/2013 (17/09/2013) identified institutions offering non-formal learning that can lead to recognised certifications.

Referring to different levels of formality/informality, the system for classifying qualifications obtained through non-formal education and training and informal learning is not yet fully developed. Although significant steps have been done, EOPPEP mostly takes into account learning coming from specific providers and/or the candidate is examined on a particular knowledge package that officially is given from EOPPEP. Only in the vocational training schools and IEKs (IVET), created by the 2013 law, the professional experience of a student is recognised as equivalent to part of the curriculum/or traineeship. It is not a validation, but recognises informal learning in official education processes.

The national legal/institutional framework to regulate procedures for the accreditation and recognition of qualifications through prior learning or work experience has not been finalized. The country facing economic crisis gave emphasis in vocational training, youth employment and entrepreneurship or other priorities. The 2010 Law introduced a National Committee on LLL consisted by all key stakeholders and Prefectural committees for vocational training in order to identify the real needs of their labour market. This solution, according to the literature, didn't work perfectly. Furthermore, LLL Directorates have not been established in every prefectural according to the law 4186/2013.

#### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

Excellent projects recently took place (public and private sector) providing indications that the development of core skills could contribute to the reinforcement of Greek peoples' ability to become



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more creative learners, job seekers, professionals, educators, parents, colleagues, citizens. The response of the participants was encouraging and social awareness has been raised. Although the results of these projects can add significant value to validation, they have not been adopted or used by public bodies. In short, an assessment of PROMOTE skills through the development of a system based on standards does not exist in Greece or it is still at its initial stage. In the context of formal education, there is considerable reflection over how these competences should be defined and implemented and there is a manifest need for enhancing the importance of apprenticeships within all types of studies as well as for improving the role of all the stakeholders in apprenticeship schemes. On lifelong education and vocational training these skills are officially promoted through teaching methodology and validated through job counselling process that is embedded almost in every educational action. Alternatives to the state implemented measures to address youth unemployment and develop entrepreneurial initiatives in Greece are independent consultancy agencies based on many different fields of expertise (like Ergani in Thessaloniki) or creative initiatives on the part of NGOs (like the creativity platform team) based on the promotion of the initiative and creativity of young people. In a current research, employers in order to have access to human resources with the right soft skills into the future, they express their willingness to collaborate with VET schools in order to develop a more suitable training system, and this could be used as an indicator on how important are these skills to the Greek economy.

#### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

Written tests is the main tool in most processes of validation/certification in Greece. IVET graduates, professionals of private security without formal qualifications and adult trainers of non-formal learning, have the opportunity to be assessed both with written exams and practical tasks like oral tests, case studies analysis, demonstration of skills and competences and teaching simulation. Regarding the PROMOTE skills evaluation, both written and e-portfolios are developed and used in Greece as a documentation method in national level (by ministry of education and EOPPEP). In private sector PROMOTE skills usually are evaluated through checklists for responses on required knowledge, but currently we have learned about several best practises for software testing and tools. During the past years, a lot of effort(s) has been made for this domain from NGOs whose citizenship education or/and entrepreneurship is one or their main concern. Well known self-awareness tools among young people in Greece are Europass CV and Youth pass. Referring to best practices and/or specific validation tools we can also mention:

- the program for training of teachers organized by the Ministry of Education (2011) which had as one of its primary goals the development of teachers' core skills;
- the definition, of PROMOTE skills as one of the basic components of the professional framework of adult educators by the Ministry of Education (2012);
- the *ARTiT* (EU project) (2010-12), which introduced a method that is focused on the development of the critical and creative ability of educators;
- The Back to Work project which targeted employment counsellors in assisting migrants and unemployed to re-enter the labour market and although the project did not validate non-



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formal and informal learning per se, created opportunities for the use of relevant tools or based on the tool, competences can be certified;

- VITA (EU-funded project) which is a validation tool appropriate for a wide range of competence types and also it is based on the EQF incorporating learning outcomes;
- ASKILLS (EU-funded project) a workshop in **piloting and evaluation of assessment tools (social skills and application guide) which gave the opportunity for twenty adult educators to use innovative tools, which can apply to vocational training programmes, with the aim to evaluate social skills;**

MASS (EU-funded project) for teaching and development of Soft Skills to disadvantaged and disaffected from education young people, with the aim of facilitating their social inclusion and enhance their employment perspectives.

#### VINFL implementation in practice

The growth in employment in the services sector has resulted in an increasing need for people-oriented and self-management skills.

The lack of core skills has been confirmed quite clearly one decade before by a research study on Greek youth (Koulaidis, 2003). Among its finding was that few participants had a positive attitude towards core skills, such as curiosity to look for opportunities to learn, to use alternative sources for studying or interest in networking for social and professional purposes. With the development and implementation of ‘The Youth Action Plan Launched in January 2013, a concentrated effort has been made to create a cohesive framework that includes youth related actions initiated by several ministries, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The most recent research about cross-cutting competences that are considered as important by private sectors’ employers in Greece was carried out in 2015 within the EU co-funded project “Evaluating the soft skills of unemployed youth” (EVA SKILLS)/Action: Strategic Partnership for VET 01/09/2014-31/08/2-16. According to this research, highly required skills demanded from enterprises according to the opinion of in-house trainers/VET providers and the opinion of the employers are skills referring to communication, influencing and negotiating, assertiveness and diplomacy, leadership, supervisory, problem solving, team-working, conflict resolution, flexibility, coaching-counselling, mentoring and creativity.

VET providers and trainers believe that their trainees have largely the above mentioned skills. Given that the measure scale ranges from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very important) they estimate, for example, that in actively listening to other, “3.67” reflects their trainees’ real qualification in this field, and continuously, “3.53” reflects their ability in *being able to express who s/he is, what s/he needs and think*, “3.93” their ability in *working in a team and collaborative skills*, “3.67” reflects their *loyalty*, “3.80” their ability to *handle conflicts*, “3.60” reflects their capacity in *problem solving*, “3.73” their *liability* and “3.67” the ability to *deal with changes*. Furthermore, according to the above answers,





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trainees seemed to be less equipped in *being able to express who s/he is, what s/he needs and thinks* and *Problem Solving Ability*.

From the other side, employers consider as very important all the above mentioned skills but they give emphasis in *dealing with changes, team work/collaborative skills and loyalty*.

### Conclusion desk research Greece

The National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) is competent for creating and developing the Hellenic Qualifications Framework and for referencing it to the European Qualifications Framework.

HQF is a tool that can be used for classifying, describing and evaluating all qualifications awarded in Greece, the titles of study that have been obtained upon completion of a learning process. The structure of the HQF is: Levels - Learning outcomes - Descriptors - Qualification types. The quality of HQF is assured through the collaboration with representatives of the competent bodies and social partners, the operation of the competent Advisory Committee and the involvement of experts with knowledge and international experience in the development of Qualifications Frameworks. It is not yet fully developed the system for classifying qualifications obtained through non-formal education and training and informal learning.

The level of integration of PROMOTE skills in the educational system of Greece is quite low. An important consideration derived from literature is that education and training do not equip youth with the skills and attitudes required in the labour market referring to teamwork, entrepreneurship, flexibility, creative thinking, problem solving and fast and creative learning. Several attempts have been done, but although national authorities concerns and promote the recognition and validation of PROMOTE skills an assessment through the development of a system based on standards does not exist. Interesting efforts in identifying, teaching and assessing these skills can be found in Private sector, NGOs and trade unions.

In conclusion, in the five last years there have been important reforms in the governance structure and crucial movements took place towards the validation of qualifications through prior learning or work experience. By reading and discussing **relevant literature**, it is obvious in this stage, that public dialogue workshops with representatives from all the stakeholders, experts, professional chambers and organisations, social partners and scientific associations could help this effort in order to be successfully implemented in the future.

Some professionals disagree with the idea of “skills or competence based learning” and propose substantial –as they claim- measures and programs. It is their firm belief that active and critical teachers/educators, oriented to reforms and based on self/social awareness through holistic education and training models can bring better results. For them, one basic idea of skills oriented learning, that the unemployment is linked with the lack of specific skills is incorrect.







### 3.6 Italy

#### National legal framework on VINFL

Since 2012, a national legal framework on validation of informal and non-formal competences has been developed. The most relevant normative reference dealing with formal and informal learning and its validation is Law 92/2012 on the Reform of the Job Market of 28 June 2012. In particular, the implementing legislative decree no. 13 of 16 January 2013 gives clear definitions of how the different types of learning are to be understood. Also, it establishes that competences acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings are subject to identification, assessment and attestation and sets out, to this aim, a national repertory of qualifications in education and training and vocational qualifications as a unitary framework for the certification of skills in informal and non-formal learning.

In general, the education system in Italy is organised according to the subsidiary principle. Competences and responsibilities are thus shared among different institutional actors, namely the State (the Ministry of Education, University and Research for general education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for the VET system), the Regions, and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano.

According to art. 117 of the Italian Constitution, the State has exclusive competence on:

- the definition of general issues on education, such as the architecture of the school system;
- the determination of basic principles of the Republic that regions should comply with within their competence;
- Minimum standards to be guaranteed throughout the country.

Conversely, Regions and autonomous provinces have:

- Residual competences on those matters not expressly reserved to State law;
- Exclusive competence on the planning, management and provision of vocational education and training (VET) through regionally accredited institutions.

#### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

Traditionally in Italy the qualifications system favours formal LO and the recognition of LO developed in NF and IL settings and in non-market activities is quite neglected. The same can be said for the recognition of personal and social skills.

The main demand for systems recognizing LO comes from the labour market. The aim should be to match skills and labour market needs and thus angle the recognition of non-formal and informal LO towards skills in short supply on the market, while offering employment opportunities to disadvantaged groups, thereby achieving two aims at once.

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Before 2012, in the absence of a national system for VINFL, regions have been striving to define, experiment and implement VINFL strategies at regional level, with very diverse and fragmented results. There have been several interesting practices with regard to VINFL, but they remained as local experiences not constituting a real nationwide validation system.

Since 2012, a national legal framework on VINFL has been developed. The measures approved in 2012-2013 are an attempt to define a regulatory intervention aimed at increasing the integration between the systems of education, training and work. However, these measures do not seem to respond to the need of recognizing and validating personal and social competences.

Besides the national level, some regions have introduced tools for the VINFL, adopting three different approaches. In the first case, they have included the opportunity to see learning validated and recognized if competences were acquired non-formally or informally and have stated that as an individual right. In the second case, VINFL has been linked to the recognition of credits for the access to formal training or education. In the last case, the process of validation promotes the professionalism of individuals facing integration and re-entry into employment.

Moreover, at local and micro level, there have been projects aimed at recognizing and validating entrepreneurial skills developed in non-formal and informal settings.

### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

The Legislative Decree 13/2013 sets the three steps for process standards for validation and certification:

1. **IDENTIFICATION:** *phase aimed to identify and bring transparency to the individual's competences relating them to one or more qualifications. In case of NF and IL this step involves a specific support in the analysis and documentation of the experience of learning and in correlating the results to one or more qualifications.*
2. **ASSESSMENT:** *phase to ascertain the mastery of the competences related to one or more qualifications. In the case of NF and IL this stage involves the adoption of specific assessment methods and evidences as proof of the competences actually possessed.*
3. **ATTESTATION:** *step aimed at issuing validation documents or certificates, standardised in accordance with this decree, documenting the competences identified and validated or certified related to one or more qualifications.*

The most common assessment methods are: observation, simulation and evidence extracted from work, and tests and examinations. Existing certification systems are mostly integrated part of Higher Education.



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Many Training Centres recognize credits at the beginning of each course, after an evaluation and validation process of formal learning but also of skills acquired in different contexts, like the workplace, social and private life.

Finally, the Libretto formativo del cittadino (Citizen Training Booklet or National Portfolio of Competences) represents a fundamental initiative at a national level to collect, summarize and describe the learning experiences of workers, as well as their competences obtained in school pathways, training courses, work or daily life. It describes in greater or lesser detail the LO (regardless of whether or not this was formal) and therefore incorporates the idea of documented evidence and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

### VINFL implementation in practice

According to a recent survey (February 2015), 33% of the Italian respondents believe that the experience "on the field" is the determining factor to do business successfully and 35% of Italians aged 35 and under declared that chambers of commerce and non-profit organizations are engaged in successful entrepreneurship learning activities by providing specific training programs.

With regards to the formative factors, Italians consider basic business skills (such as accounting, information technology and administration) essential to start a business and 64% of respondents consider insufficient the training provision in Italy.

Then, the respondents prioritised the 10 pre-defined entrepreneurial key competences taken from EUCIS-LLL 2013 as follows:

Rank	Competence
1st	Ability to prioritize
2nd	Ability to plan
3rd	Ability to take decisions
4th	Willingness to explore
5th	Leadership
6th	Taking initiative
7th	Creativity
8th	Ability to think critically
9th	Digital competences
10th	Competitiveness

From the Italian entrepreneurs' point of view, the lack of key skills acquisition is the main obstacle to the professional development of young Italian entrepreneurs who are not educated to competitiveness nor accompanied in the development of their business ideas.

In another recent report (2010) surveyed entrepreneurs indicated the following most needed skills of



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higher education graduates for an enterprise:

- willingness to learn in any method,
- computer skills on the level allowing to process normal professional matters,
- ability of critical thinking.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient and unofficial data that may provide any relevant indication on how both educational institutes and enterprises cope with competences recognition and validation needs as required by learners/workers on one hand and private and public employers on the other hand.

Also, regarding Open Educational Resources (OER), there is not a comprehensive plan, a common direction or even an analysis of the current state of the art and the same difficulties apply to the use of IT-aided assessments tools for validation.

### Conclusion desk research Italy

The Italian national legal framework for the recognition of skills and competences is relatively new since it was established in 2012 and the implementation phase as defined in the Legislative Decree no.13/2013 has just ended<sup>27</sup>. In general, in a context of economic crisis and a recently reformed Italian labour market, the possibilities offered by NFIL recognition represent an important asset for the Italian economy. The best practices of the ‘local’ Italian schemes are very important in this perspective, having the ability to boost the implementation of the national framework at further levels. Also, more attention could be given to the assessment, validation and certification of personal and social competences, which at the moment are neglected.

Moreover, it would be appropriate to link the national repertory of qualifications to classification and encadring systems provided for by national employment contracts. This would improve the match between skills supply and labour market demand.

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<sup>27</sup> The implementation phase lasted 18 months, from March 2013 to September 2014.





### 3.7 Lithuania

#### National legal framework on VINFL

Non-formal adult education and learning is provided in accordance with the Law on Non-Formal and Continuing Adult Education, the Action Plan of Development of Non-formal Adult Education 2014-2016, Law on Education, National Education 2013-2022 strategy and other legal acts.

The purpose of The Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education is to provide legal guaranties for a person to implement his/hers natural right to life-long learning, to ensure the possibility to gain knowledge and competences, to discover new meanings of life, to foster the creation of meaningful leisure time, and to become an active member of a democratic society.

The action plan of Development of Non-formal Adult Education 2014-2016 foresees the initial evaluation of formally and non-formally and informally acquired competences in the state's vocational education institutions funded by EU funds. The second task in this action plan is to prepare and implement a system for formalising non-formally and informally acquired competences in the higher education institutions.

No sectors are given priority within the new arrangements for validation, but more comprehensive initiatives, projects and actions have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented in the areas of Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET). The majority of bottom-up initiatives have taken place in HE, and most top-down initiatives have taken place in the VET sector.

#### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

In order to ensure quality and transparency of the assessment process, the competence assessment and validation process has been separated from the system of formal vocational education and training and can be undertaken by an accredited social partner or another legal entity of the Republic of Lithuania or other member state of the EU, or an organization /its unit not holding the status of a legal person.

Lithuania does not have a national strategy for validation as a separate comprehensive policy document; however several laws were amended in recent years to pave the way for validation of non-formal and informal learning on a more mainstream basis, both at national and sectoral levels. General "Recommendations on the Assessment and Recognition of Non-formally acquired Competences in Higher Education Institutions" are used for organizing the process at HE establishments.

Validation results can be used to provide further guidance to the candidate for accessing and admission to formal education and training. Validation can be used at levels I-V of the EQF in the area of VET. A similar approach is being applied in the system of Lithuanian higher education as well. Here, however, the amount of study credits acquired through the validation of candidate's competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning shall not exceed 75 percent of the amount of credits of the study program that the candidate intends to study.

Some initiatives, projects regarding validation of personal, social and entrepreneurial skills and



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competences were implemented. Some discussions at national level were initiated by the Symposium on Recognition of Youth Work and of Non-formal Learning, in 2011. The entrepreneurship skills and competences formally are recognized as a part of separate study courses at HE institutions. Individual initiatives promoting the entrepreneurship of different target groups and issuing certificates confirming acquired skills and knowledge are implemented.

#### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

Recommendations on the Assessment and Recognition of Non-formally acquired Competences in Higher Education Institutions are used for organizing the process at HE establishments. However, the process itself, assessment methodologies and methods as well as assessment criteria are developed and approved by the HE institution.

An accredited competence assessment authority has the right to assess the competences acquired in formal and non-formal education programs, employment activities or informally. The list of accredited competence assessment bodies is published on the website of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre under the Ministry of Education and Science. The Description of Requirements for Competence Assessment Bodies and procedures of their Accreditation were approved in February, 2012.

The assessment and recognition of non-formally acquired competences proceeds in four stages:

- Briefing. During this stage the candidate is introduced to the evaluation - its principles, procedure, assessment conditions, possible results, studies corresponding to individual needs.
- Consulting. The candidate prepares for the assessment procedure through group or individual consultation.
- Assessment.
- Decision-making (evaluation).

A competence portfolio is the main method for validation of non-formal and informal learning in Lithuania. Competence portfolios tend to use a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents showing an individual's skills in different ways (such as self-assessment based on a questionnaire or a set of given criteria collecting evidence from work experience or other practices, interview(s) with a third party and or an assessment centre and competence exams in some cases).

#### VINFL implementation in practice

The role of private sector actors is most evident in the processes of validation in VET sector and the labour market. These processes are very similar because a separate process corresponding to the specific needs of the labour market in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning has not yet been developed.

An accredited competence assessment authority (mainly sectorial and employers' associations, training centres of large companies and similar) has the right to assess the competences acquired in formal and non-formal education programmes, employment activities or informally.



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General responsibility for monitoring, assessing and delivering short term forecasts of the labour market needs and qualifications as well implementing active labour market intervention measures falls to Lithuanian Labour Exchange under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and its 10 regional offices. However, no initiatives in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning are undertaken by this organisation as yet.

More specific responsibility for more strategic and long term forecasts on the labour market needs and qualifications which are then linked with the development of sectoral qualifications standards and VET standards is assigned to The Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre which closely works with an extensive range of social partners through sectoral partnerships.

At the moment labour market needs for validation of non-formal and informal learning is compensated by the process in VET sector. On the other hand, a number of training centres of major companies in Lithuania, business and professional associations have acquired the right to validate non-formal and informal learning in their operation areas according to the procedure led down in the Description of the Order of Evaluation of a Person's Acquired Competences (i.e. equivalent to the process in VET sector).

#### Conclusion desk research Lithuania

As National Audit Office has stated that the national system of validation of non-formal and informal learning has been developed, however its practical implementation is behind schedule.

In order to ensure quality and transparency of the assessment process, the competence assessment and validation process has been separated from the system of formal vocational education and training and can be undertaken by an accredited social partner or another legal entity of the Republic of Lithuania or other member state of the EU, or an organization /its unit not holding the status of a legal person.

Lithuania does not have a national strategy for validation as a separate comprehensive policy document; however several laws were amended to pave the way for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Non-formal adult education and learning is provided in accordance with the Law on Non-Formal and Continuing Adult Education, the Action Plan of Development of Non-formal Adult Education 2014-2016, Law on Education, National Education 2013-2022 strategy and other legal acts.





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### 3.8 Portugal

#### National legal framework on VINFL

The Validation of Informal and Non – Formal Learning in Portugal had a large development in the adult learning sector, with the centres for new opportunities “Novas Oportunidades”. In the higher education, HE, domain the validation of the curriculum allows also the attribution of ECTS credits at undergraduate or graduate level; the processes are managed by the scientific board of the HE institutions. In the VET domain the National Agency for the Qualification of the VET in Portugal (ANQEP: [www.anqep.gov.pt](http://www.anqep.gov.pt)) has the mission to develop the VINFL system.

New opportunities centres (NO) created in Portugal in the context of long life learning started to use a VINFL methodology based in the personal trajectory of each individual, validated according to a referential composed by four main areas of competences:

- Citizenship and employability; Information and communication technologies; Language and communication; Mathematics for life.

In 2001 there were 28 centres, also called RVCC, until the end of 2006, 274 of these centres were created and this methodology was also extended to the high school level (12<sup>th</sup> year).

Between 2006 and 2010, more than 1 million of people registered in the program “Novas Oportunidades” and more than 400 thousand certificates were given.

In 2011 the government changed and it started the process of replacing the New Opportunity centres. They were officially closed in 2013 and replaced by Centres for the qualification and vocational learning (“Centros para a Qualificação e Ensino Profissional” CQEP). The goal of the CQEP is to inform and to guide young and adult people who are looking for academic or vocational education or who are looking for integration in employment with qualification. Continuing with the development of processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC), combined with some kind of education and qualification. In August of 2015, these new centres had already concluded 1062 processes of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC).

#### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

In our desk research it was possible to find the national agency that has the mission to develop a Validation System, mainly in the VET domain, the National Agency for the Qualification (ANQEP: [www.anqep.gov.pt](http://www.anqep.gov.pt)). Nevertheless, considering the PROMOTE skills and competences as: Entrepreneurship and initiative, Civic competences, Learning to learn, it was not possible to identify projects directly on the validation of these competences.

Within the frame of the New Opportunities program, already mentioned, it may be considered that the validation of the “Citizenship and employability” is somehow related to civic competences, namely the citizenship domain.

The entrepreneurship and sense of initiative competences are frequently object of study in all the sectors, from adult learning to higher education and VET. In the HE the validation of entrepreneurship competences can be validated and certificated by the attribution of ECTS credits related to the subject in the graduation plan. In the adult learning there are also some offer of small



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courses around entrepreneurship, nevertheless it was not possible to find references to validation or certification of informal or non-informal learning.

Learning to learn competences are a rather new concept in Portugal, in our desk search the expression “aprender a aprender” has no results in Portuguese, only Brazilian and Spanish sites appear in the search, nevertheless similar aspects with different expressions are present in some Higher Education institutions.

#### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

From the desk research not much was found on tools to validate, assess and certificate, there was however a dissertation presented to Porto University in 2008, by Teresa Mota, intituled: “Plataforma técnico-pedagógica para o Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências” that can be translated in to “Tecnico pedagogical platform to the recognition, validation and certification of competences” and can be found in: <http://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/60047/2/Texto%20integral.pdf>.

In the English summary of the above mentioned thesis it is possible to read: “The platform developed according to the principles of user oriented design aims to support the activity of all the intervenients in the RVCC process. It aims, in one side, to help technicians delivering their work more efficiently, through the complete digitalization of the process and the use of artificial intelligence (neural networks) and data visualization techniques to analyse and validate data, and on the other side to provide high levels of autonomy, inclusion and participation of candidates, while building their own dataset and personal portfolio on-line. “. In the same thesis are mentioned several platforms, like the See-K, VAMOS and SIGO that are partially related to VINFL.

See-K was developed by Trivium Soft, funded by Michael Authier and Pierre Levy in 1992 that also developed Gingo software to create competence trees and Umaps. See-K is used by 3 entities: the learner, explorer entities and facilitators. Each learner inserts his competences in a form, like a Brevet, where he mentions the acquired knowledge and the resources

The VAMOS platform supports the management of insertion paths, it was developed within the project NÓS (Integrated Initiatives of Orientation-Learning and Insertion), it incorporates the AVEC platform, developed by the enterprise ATONIS Technologies, in cooperation with the ASMOUNE association, in France, within the project EQUALENTREP’PONTES. The VAMOS platform is designed for technicians and users of the integrated system for support to the reinsertion and employment to manage the path of the learner in the network.

The “Sistema de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa (SIGO)” is a platform that integrates the educative and formative offer, it was used by the new opportunities centres and now by the National Agency for the Qualification in Portugal.

#### VINFL implementation in practice

VINFL practice in Portugal has a practical example in the New Opportunities Centres. The New Opportunities Centres (NO) centres had the task of certificating adult candidates who did not have concluded the basic education (9 years). In these centres, the candidate had to prepare a personal dossier, with his personal, familiar and professional experiences, in which documental evidences of



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the competences developed should be included. If the professionals of the centres considered needed the reinforcement/acquisition of some competences, the candidate should do some extra education, with a maximum time of 25 hours.

The validation of competences consisted in a formal act. The most important and visible stage of the validation involved a jury with the mission of analysing and evaluating the dossier presented by the candidate.

The jury decides on the position of the candidate in a level for each key competence: B1 (corresponding to the primary school, 4<sup>th</sup> year), B2 (corresponding to the 6<sup>th</sup> year), B3 (corresponding to the 9<sup>th</sup> year, the end of basic education). If the candidate could not complete all the competences, he/she would only obtain a document with the indication of what was validated and there was not a certificate. In this case, the adult would have 3 years to complete the corresponding qualification, using the education for adults system available. He/she could also choose to acquire the missing competences on his/her own and go back later to the centre to obtain the certification.

The third and last stage of the whole process was the certification of competences, which was a process of confirmation of the competences acquired by the adult, registering them formally in a “Carteira Pessoal de Competências-Chave”, a kind of key competences CV and the emission of a certificate (with the level 1, 2 or 3, as previously described).

### Conclusion desk research Portugal

The desk research showed that in Portugal the New Opportunities Centres had some experience in the validation of informal learning, certifying it with formal recognition considering a reference set of competences. Within these activities some platforms were adapted or developed. Since 2013 this centres were replaced by Centres for the qualification and vocational learning, CQEP, that keep the development of processes of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC), with a different main goal, that is to inform and to guide young and adult people who are looking for learning opportunities.

It was also possible to find the national agency that has the mission to develop a Validation System, mainly in the VET domain, the National Agency for the Qualification, but, considering the PROMOTE skills and competences as: Entrepreneurship and initiative, Civic competences, Learning to learn, it was not possible to identify projects directly on the validation of these competences. Some related competences can be mentioned like the “Citizenship and employability” that may be related to civic competences, or the entrepreneurship and sense of initiative competences are frequently object of study in entrepreneurship subjects or courses.





### 3.9 Spain

#### National legal framework on VINFL

The official definitions of **formal**, **non-formal** and **informal** learning given by the Spanish Ministry of Education <http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/mc/mecu/aprendizaje.html> are:

- Formal learning: the learning resulting from an institutionalised education, meant and planned by public bodies or accredited private ones which are part of the educational system of the country. It refers, essentially, to the education acquired prior to the entry into the job market.
- Non-formal learning: it also the result of an institutionalised process, planned by any given education provider. It represents a form of education alternative and complementary to the one acquired in the framework of the formal education system. It is intended to for all age groups, and it is given, in general, in the form of short-term courses, seminars or workshops.
- Informal learning: it is the non-institutionalised learning, which is nor planned or intentionally acquired, although it can be oriented. It refers to the experience gained along one's everyday life, within the family, the workplace or the local environment. It includes those experiences by which we learn how to speak, how to walk, how to interact...

It is important to note that, despite these official definitions, there is substantial agreement on the understanding of formal and informal learning, but little agreement on the exact understanding of non-formal learning, which is delivered by educational institutions but also by non-educational institutions such as groups of people with a similar interest that organise sessions, NGOs, etc.

#### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

Spain has developed its qualifications framework for lifelong learning (ESQF) known as Spanish Qualifications Framework (Marco Español de Cualificaciones, MECU). This is based on learning outcomes and aims to link and coordinate different education and training subsystems. The framework will include qualifications obtained in compulsory, post-secondary and higher education, and will integrate validation of non-formal and informal learning processes.

The Royal decree on the introduction of MECU is the legal basis for its implementation, although this decree has yet to come into force. It defines levels and level descriptors for referencing the MECU to the EQF levels. It was developed in consultation with main stakeholders and supervised by the national advisory bodies.

The higher four levels of MECU will be linked to the qualifications framework for higher education (Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior) (MECES), which has been put in place separately.

The ESQF aims to support lifelong learning, link initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing VET, and improve access and participation for everyone, including the disadvantaged. Through the ESQF – it is expected – it will be easier to identify, validate and recognise all kinds of learning outcomes (including non-formal and informal learning), regardless of

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the way they were acquired. It will support better use of qualifications at national and European level.

Another important aim is to support transition and progression possibilities within the various sub-systems of education and vocational training; examples include progression from short cycle to university programmes and opening up higher education for non-traditional learners, who might have no school leaving certificate. Another challenge is to put procedures in place for recognising non-formal learning and to reduce early school leaving (18 to 24 age group).

The framework is not yet operational. The Royal Decree on the introduction of MECU will establish the legal basis for its implementation but this has yet to come into force. The draft Royal Decree recommends establishing a MECU committee, including stakeholders such as ministries, representatives of professional associations, trade union and business representatives and qualifications framework experts from different sectors. The committee will be mandated to decide on assignment of framework levels to the Spanish qualifications and to submit proposals to the government for approval.

Qualifications from formal education and training will be assigned first; no major challenges are expected. More challenging is the inclusion of qualifications resulting from validation of non-formal or informal learning. These processes are more recent and consolidated experiences are still weak.

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of MECU and MECES development and implementation. However, as reported for the Cedefop study on learning outcomes (Cedefop, forthcoming), the notion of learning outcomes is a new concept in the Spanish context and not widely shared. A new Organic Law 8/2013 has been recently adopted (Government of Spain, 2013), aiming to improve quality and promote lifelong learning, mobility and coherence of the nation system in line with international standards. Framework curricula should include ‘the standard and measurable learning outcomes’.

Spain does not have a comprehensive national strategy for validation; different laws frame validation, targeting different education sectors. The Organic Law of Education and the Organic Law of Universities incorporate actions to validate non-formal and informal learning, such as access exams to VET and university studies aimed at those people who do not have the required qualifications. Royal Decree 1224/2009 (Government of Spain, 2009) established recognition of skills acquired through work experience. This decree provides the possibility of evaluating professional competences through non-traditional assessment methods; this is common to gaining qualifications from the employment administration (certificados de profesionalidad) and the education administration (IVET programmes) through specific calls for validation. The procedure only validates professional competences acquired through work experience or non-formal learning pertaining to specific units of competences registered in the national catalogue of professional qualifications. The calls for validation and accreditation of professional competences are usually restricted to selected economic sectors, depending on available financial resources and sector needs.

There are challenges at different levels. First, dialogue and interaction with, and developing trust among, different stakeholders from education and employment is considered a cornerstone and key success factor for the development and implementation of a comprehensive NQF.





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Second, including VET qualifications, especially at levels 3 and 4, seems to be a challenge because VET qualifications at these levels are not only awarded by different bodies (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour), but are of different nature, workload, delivery and quality assurance mechanisms, some of them less regulated. There seem to be less confidence and trust in the ways these qualifications can be mapped together. Putting the framework into the lifelong learning perspective and including non-formal and informal aspects of learning in the framework is regarded as complex. Including qualifications resulting from non-formal or informal learning uses recognition and validation processes widely implemented only in recent years.

NQF development in Spain also shows the importance of political processes and cycle on the implementation of European tools, such as the EQF. Adoption of the Royal Decree on MECU is an important step towards the MECU implementation.

Sources: CEDEFOP Inventory 2014, website [www.observal.es](http://www.observal.es), website of OBSERVAL-Net project <http://www.observal-net.eu/>, website of the ES Ministry of Education, website of INCUAL <http://www.educacion.gob.es/iceextranet/>

In brief, it has been put into practice marginally only at the level of professional competences, thanks to the National Institute of Qualifications (hereinafter INCUAL) created by Royal Decree 375/1999 of 5 March 1999. INCUAL is the technical instrument, endowed with capacity and independence, which supports the Spanish General Council of Vocational Education and Training in order to attain the objectives of the National System for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training (known in Spanish as SNCFP). The Law 5/2002 on Qualifications and Vocational Training made INCUAL responsible for defining, developing and updating the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications and the corresponding Modular Catalogue of Vocational Training.

[http://www.educacion.gob.es/educa/incual/ice\\_incual\\_ing.html](http://www.educacion.gob.es/educa/incual/ice_incual_ing.html)

With regards to the validation of professional competences, though, much is left to the single autonomous regions of Spain, with some regions being more active than others (e.g. Basque Country) depending on the availability of financial resources at regional level.

Social and cultural perception of informal and non-formal learning is on average not very well perceived. This is mainly due to the failure of the educational system to effectively promote a good opinion and to the fact that, although a national legal framework has been established, it has never been fully developed in practice nor adopted. Therefore, only formal learning is perceived to have the dignity and the acknowledgment necessary to allow for a full integration into the educational and professional system. Socially speaking, it is very difficult that someone not possessing a title obtained through formal education, is considered qualified. At the same time, at the job market level, to have a title is sometimes not as relevant as it may seem from an academic perspective. In fact, many professional sectors tend to develop their own level of standards and recognition of professional competences and to obtain them is essential to enter in the work market.



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### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

In Spain the following assessment systems for the three key competences exist:

- The National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications and its corresponding Modular Catalogue of Vocational Education and Training.
- A procedure to recognise, assess, accredit and register professional qualifications.
- Information and guidance concerning vocational education and training, and employment.
- The assessment and quality improvement of the National System for Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training to provide pertinent information about the operation of the System and its adaptation to the learning needs of individuals and of the productive system. ([http://www.educacion.gob.es/educa/incual/ice\\_ncfp\\_ing.html](http://www.educacion.gob.es/educa/incual/ice_ncfp_ing.html))

Sometimes assessment reaches the pre-university level, for each professional sector. But the Higher Education level is not concerned.

### VINFL implementation in practice

Although the public sector affirms that validation of competences is important, in practice it does little to promote and adopt the system. Private companies seem more and more interested in the issue of validation and some industries started to develop their own standards for the development and accreditation of professional competences.







### 3.10 The United Kingdom

#### National legal framework on VINFL

The systems of validation of VINFL exist in the UK for over a decade. The systems are mostly related to the role played by Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) within the national education and training system (Colardyn et al. 2004, 72). National qualification system standards are under the responsibility of the National Occupational Standards. They form the basis for the NVQs and the GNVQs (Colardyn et al. 2004, 74). The assessment and validation of non-formal and/or informal learning lead to formal certificates as well.

Currently, there are four main routes by which individuals can have their prior learning validated: 1) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), linked to formal qualifications, mainly offered through the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF); 2) Recognition of non-formal certificated learning via the QCF; 3) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (formerly referred to as Accreditation of prior (Experiential) Learning, APL/APEL) in relation to Higher Education (HE); 4) Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA), which relates mainly to adult and community learning. These four routes each apply to different types of learning and they are already analysed in depths (European Commission et al. 2014a). As part of the UK, Wales makes use of the same routes, but also as a devolved power, it also sustains The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) that provides a means of recognition of non-formal learning through its Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) pillar (European Commission et al. 2014c). Scotland has a significantly different education and training system than the rest of the country. Therefore, it operates in a more distinct manner and its approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL) is linked to its national qualifications framework. RPL in this context covers prior formal, non-formal and informal learning in all sectors and can be used for both formative and summative outcomes (European Commission et al. 2014b).

Although national framework exists in the UK, it is generally agreed that in all parts of the UK and especially in England ‘there are gaps in the infrastructure enabling progression from informal learning to formal qualifications and employment’ (Building Learning Societies 2014).

#### National situation in regards to the validation of the key competences

The actual assessment and validation methods for validating the skills and competences are not prescribed at national level in the UK, and can vary considerably from one institution to another. The four stages of the validation process – identification, documentation, assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning – do exist in most cases and should recognise different ability levels, and offer different assessment approaches, including the use of reflective models (Building Learning Societies 2014).

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The guidelines available nationally and for different parts of the UK state that the validation (or an application for it) should be supported by the portfolio of evidence and background information. The evidence provided should describe/identify the learning process and its outcomes. There are no formal requirements for individual assessors though and different providers of the validation may impose their own requirements for the assessor and validators. The learning providers are the institutions that need to choose how to implement the process (for details, see: European Commission et al. 2014b; 2014c; 2014a). Some methods of self-evaluation are also being practiced in different parts of the country.

Despite the existence of different validation approaches, as far as the project partners in the UK are aware, there is no comprehensively proven mechanisms such as LEVEL5. Within the PROMOTE project framework, the UK partner intends to use LEVEL5 as it was previously tested as part of the EDUCCKATE project. Previous experience showed that using LEVEL5 is possible to validate the skills and competences, but important feedback was also gathered as part of the EDUCCKATE and as part of this research that will be taken into account in validating PROMOTE outcomes.

#### National situation in regards to assessment tools and certification

There are several institutions/projects that promote different assessment tools and certifications methods. Although most of them work with the similar principles and goals, there is no unified system that provides commonly-accepted assessment tools of certification guidance. European-funded and European Commission/Union supported initiatives are making an impact in this area and the methods are becoming more mainstream among the learning and validation providers. Use of European Europass and Youthpass tools are also in the rise in the country. However, the need for developing a learner-facing and assessor-facing toolkits and guidance materials on validation and assessment tools that uses less ‘technical’ terminology is also regularly highlighted. The training of the specialists and additional work to provide information, advice and guidance will be crucial for the successful implementation of validation systems in a long term. Currently awareness of validation/ RPL opportunities amongst individuals and institutions is low (also see: Building Learning Societies 2014; European Commission et al. 2014a).

In absolute majority of the cases, the assessment and validation of non-formal and/or informal learning lead to formal certificates, although the value and acceptability of the certificate vary greatly. Modules to achieve credits are largely used and recognised by the National Qualification Framework. Credits and credit transfer schemes also exist. For documenting a portfolio and for the assessment of the process, the evidence should be presented in order to demonstrate the applicability of the competences in the real life situations. (Colardyn et al. 2004).

#### VINFL implementation in practice

In practical terms, VINFL is turning from something obscure and little known about to more mainstream and relevant. There is an understanding that moving towards the European recommendations and European systems on the validation of non-formal and informal learning is a priority. It is also clear that many institutions see the potential benefits of using the systems that are already in place, such as accredited learning and Europass. The research of the UK partner indicates



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that different stakeholders are keen on raising awareness of existing cases on to share experiences with others. There are suggestions of creating a database of the cases and the European funded projects such as PROMOTE could contribute in that are by making its findings and descriptions of its progress widely available on open web and through direct communications with the interested parties.

In addition to the works that are being done by the partner itself, there are several cases for optimism that were discovered during the research phase by the UK partner. For example: The Trades Union Congress ([www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)), an influential body in the country where the trade unions are significant force, created Unionlearn ([www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)) that assist the trade unions in the delivery of learning opportunities for their members. Unionlearn also manages Union Learning Fund ([www.unionlearningfund.org.uk](http://www.unionlearningfund.org.uk)) which supports union learning projects to transform the lives of their members in developing skills, achieving qualifications and promoting lifelong learning opportunities within the workplace. The Union Learning Fund funds projects under several themes, and ‘Engaging Disadvantaged Learners’ and ‘Tackling Skills Gaps and Shortages’ are among those themes. Unionlearn also places emphasis on things such as Informal Adult and Community Learning (see: unionlearn 2015). The cases like this have a clear significance for VINFL in the future.

### Conclusion desk research United Kingdom

In general, the situation in each part of the United Kingdom is different, decentralisation of Wales and Scotland contributing to their differences from England and Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, overall patterns of developments are similar and entire UK came a long way in the last decade to accept the understanding of the need for informal and non-formal learning, for validation of the outcomes of that learning and for EU-wide integration. The fact that several large public bodies are taking up the European initiatives on this and the existence of number of projects in researching and supporting both the learning and the validation suggests the growing trend and understanding. The partnerships are forming between trade unions and universities, as well as between the businesses and the universities to recognise and validate the learning in its different manifestations. It is very likely to contribute to further refinement of the national systems and it is expected to improve the vision for the VINFL in the country. Informal learning in the workplace and beyond is expected to increase due to the possibilities that the development of the web/internet brings (also see: Garcia - Penalvo et al. 2012) and with increasing presence of the distance learning, e-learning and also social media the role of informal learning as well as mentoring is expected to rise.





### 3.11 Conclusion desk research

This desk research was conducted in the framework of the PROMOTE project. This project aims at promoting and validating social, personal and organisational key competences such as entrepreneurship, civic competences and learning to learn with the help of an innovative, self-directed learning approach at the interface of higher education and business. In this desk research the European partners of the PROMOTE project researched available approaches and projects related to the validation of key competences in the partner countries.

Even though there are some national differences, a general picture across the different participating partner countries emerges. In fact, there is no comprehensive and coordinated system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VINFL) in place so far.

Knowledge of the PROMOTE key competences – entrepreneurship, civic competences and learning to learn – is increasing, but this knowledge is rarely translated into the validation of these key competences. A considerable lack of suitable tools and instruments for the VINFL can be identified in the desk research. For instance, IT solutions to promote validation are completely missing– up to 2015 only isolated or sectoral approaches could be identified.

More and more initiatives are emerging for VINFL, but in most countries the labelling, defining and procedures for the recognition of acquired competences is fragmented. No existing certification systems are integrated in higher education. There is a need for comprehensive programmes, tools and indicators to adequately validate different key competences.

The volunteer sector seems to be a pioneer in the validation of key competences in for example Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria and Germany. The tradition of vocational education in Austria and Germany also provides a useful source of inspiration. Another example is the use of VINFL in Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom. They allow people to acquire a certificate although they did not complete certain levels of education.

We can conclude that the validation of informal and non-formal learning is still in an initial stage in most European member states even though a development on awareness and knowledge on the approaches for VINFL can be identified.



## 4 Questionnaire

In this section we present and analyse the results of the questionnaire. Firstly, the characteristics of the respondents are described. Secondly, the results are analysed according to different subjects, namely: familiarity with the key competences, importance of the different key competences, identifying important sub-competences and importance of learning environments and validation tools. We concluded this section by analysing how opinions diverge depending on the occupation of the respondent.

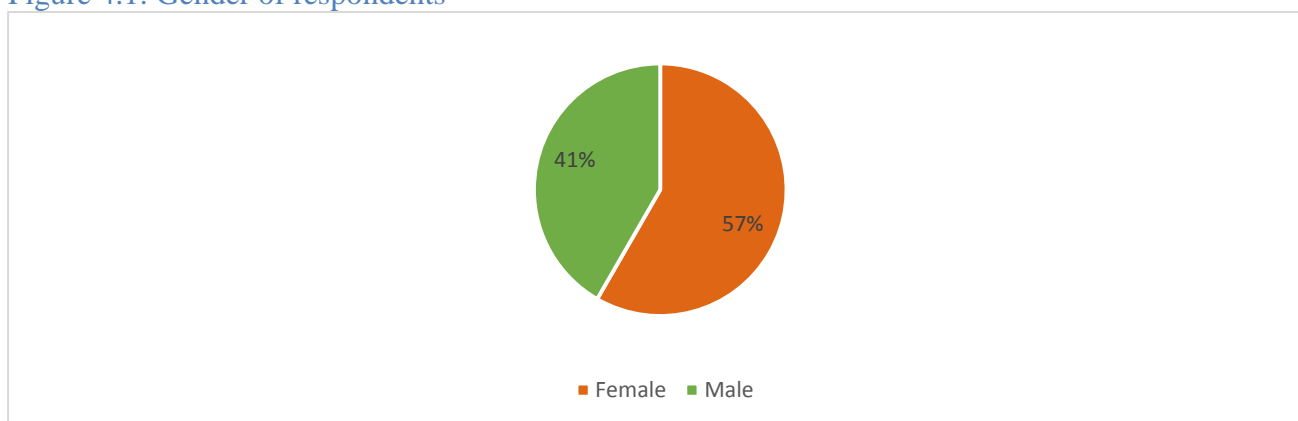
### 4.1 Description of sample

In total 477 respondents took part in the survey, of which 365 finalized the complete survey. The large majority of the respondents having an educational professional background, about 35% in HE, 22% in AE, 8% in school and 6% in VET. Business, (8%), NGOs (6%), public administration (4%) and youth (2%) are representing the non-educational sector, which comes to around 20%. It's important to note, that the distribution (>70% educational stakeholders, with a large majority of HE institutional members) has effects to the results.

#### 4.1.1 Gender

Among the respondents we see a predominance of women, with females amounting to 57% of the total amount of respondents. Among the respondents who completed the entire survey this number increases further, to 59.2% being female. 216 females reaching the end of the survey compared to 145 men (4 people not filling in their gender). This predominance, however, does not impact the results of the questionnaire. The female and male respondents are from the same countries, professional backgrounds, ages, and hold largely the same opinions in the survey.

Figure 4.1: Gender of respondents





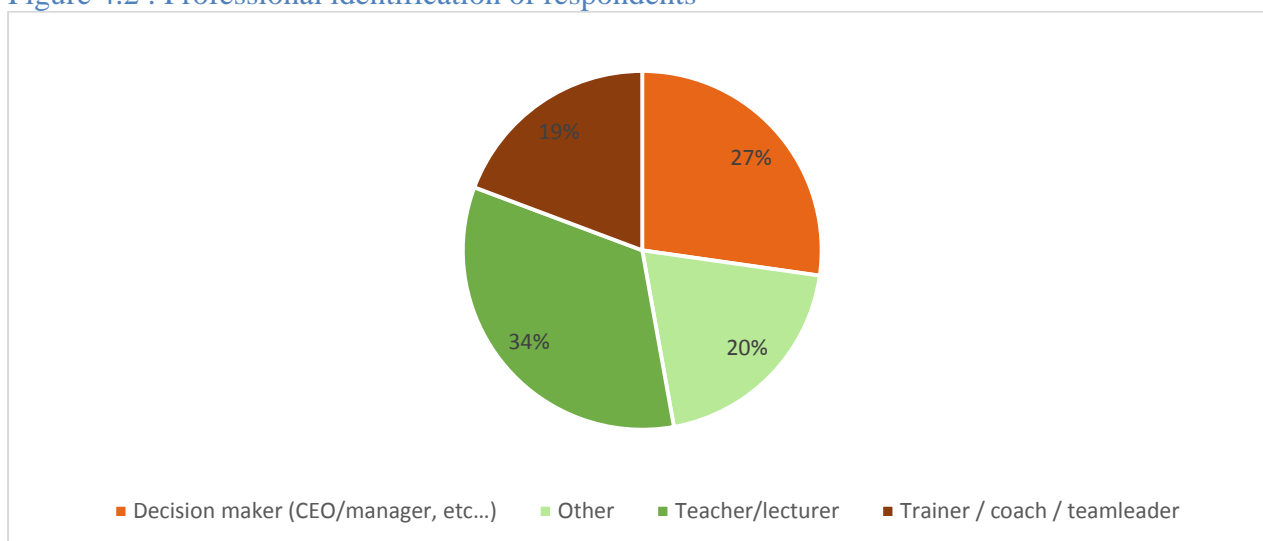
### 4.1.2 Geographical distribution

The geographical distribution of the sample shows an imbalance between countries. Some countries provide high numbers of respondents, other countries only contribute a handful. Nevertheless when we consider the regions of Europe the number of respondents is in balance, with at least one country in either Southern, Western or Eastern Europe being a strong contributor. For Southern Europe this high scorer is Greece, with 81 respondents, for Eastern Europe this would be Lithuania, with 69 respondents, and for Western Europe this would be Belgium, with 86 respondents. Each of the areas furthermore has secondary high scorers such as Italy, Portugal, Bulgaria, Germany and the United Kingdom. Thus even though the respondents tend to concentrate around a number of countries, they still are able to provide us with a clear picture of European opinions on the validation of informal learning. Only Scandinavia has the issue of having too few respondents to make wider conclusions, their high scorer being Finland with only five respondents. That PROMOTE does not include a partner in Scandinavia probably contributed to this gap.

### 4.1.3 Profession

The questionnaire set out to study perceptions in both educational stakeholders and potential users of the developed techniques. Particularly this first category is strongly represented in the survey with teachers/lecturers composing 34% of the total amount of respondents. Respondents engaged in educational activities are also contained under the fourth category (for example trainers and coaches) and under the second category (other) in which we see quite a number of academics. Decision makers are also prominently represented, not unimportant seeing that this group will eventually have to adopt the tools developed by PROMOTE. All in all we can conclude that the target groups have been reached by the questionnaire.

Figure 4.2 : Professional identification of respondents



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A more detailed survey of the respondents yields similar results. All target groups have been reached to varying degrees. And, except for the category youth, all categories have sizeable quantities of respondents.



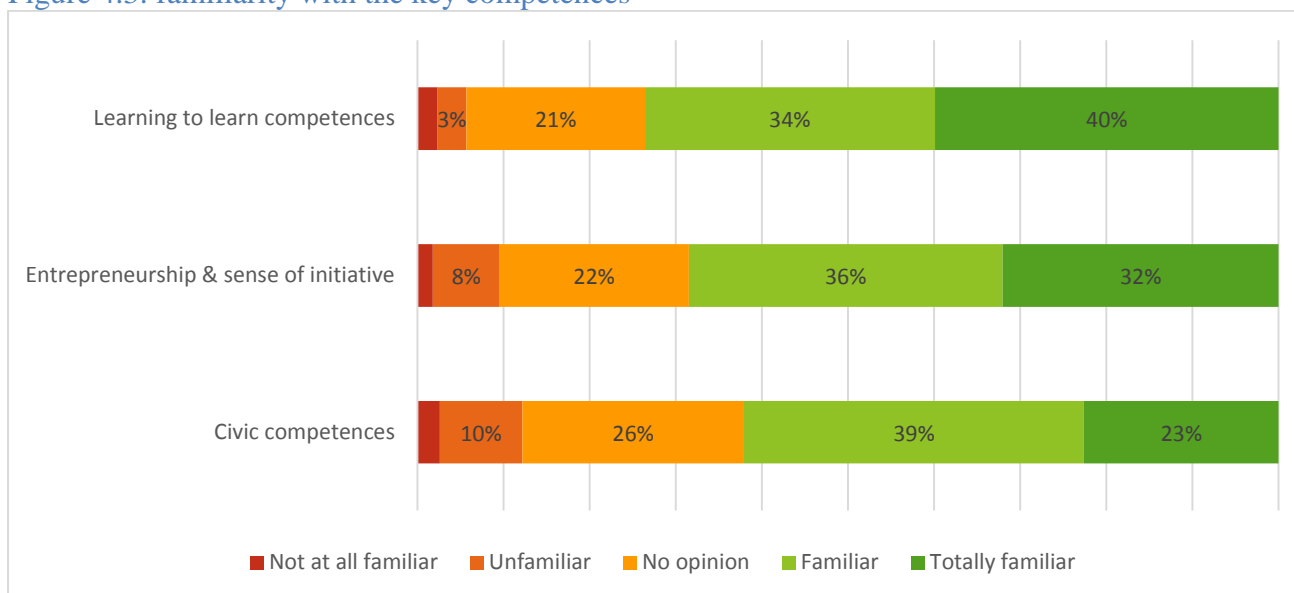




## 4.2 Familiarity with the key competences

The three key competences tend to be quite well known among the respondents. Learning to learn being the most well-known of the competences, with more than one in three of respondents (40%) signalling they are totally familiar with the competence. Civic competences being the least well-known, with “only” 23% of the respondents signalling total familiarity. More than half of the respondents see themselves as familiar (in categories four or five) with each one of the three competences. A general strong familiarity with the three PROMOTE competences is thus present among the respondents.

Figure 4.3: familiarity with the key competences





### 4.3 Importance of key competences

Certain competences and sub-competences are regarded as being more important for employability related areas than others.

The learning to learn and entrepreneurship competences are considered to be the most important competences when referring to job-related areas, mainly the first three characteristics: career development, continuing professional development and job opportunity. Civic competences are considered the least important in relation to work. The ability to learn is valued besides entrepreneurial behaviour, although entrepreneurship still scores higher than learning to learn. Learning to learn, however, has a high overall score in all of the five job-related characteristics.

Figure 4.4: Importance of entrepreneurship and sense of initiative in relation to ...

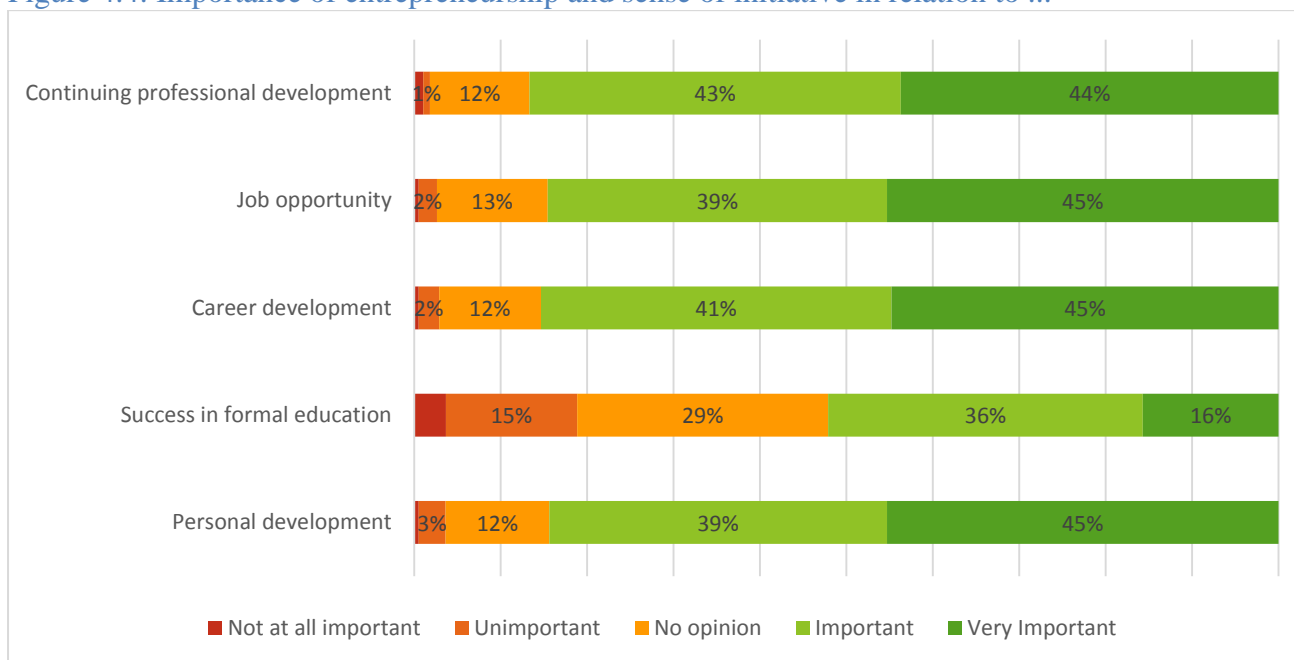




Figure 4.5: Importance of civic (active citizenship) competences in relation to...

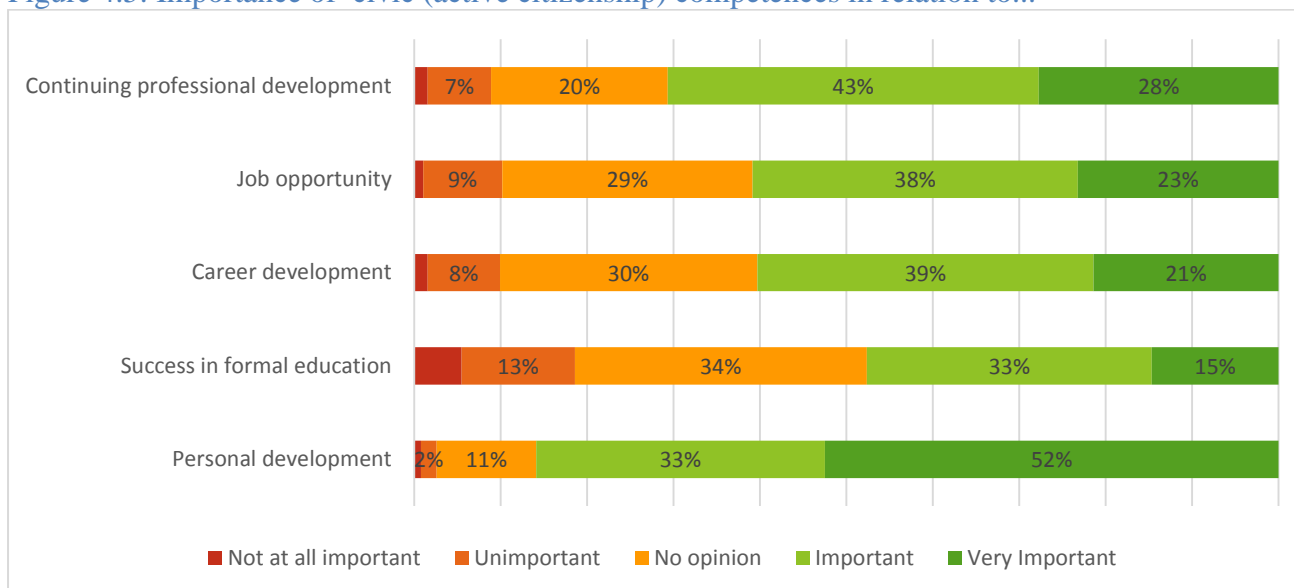
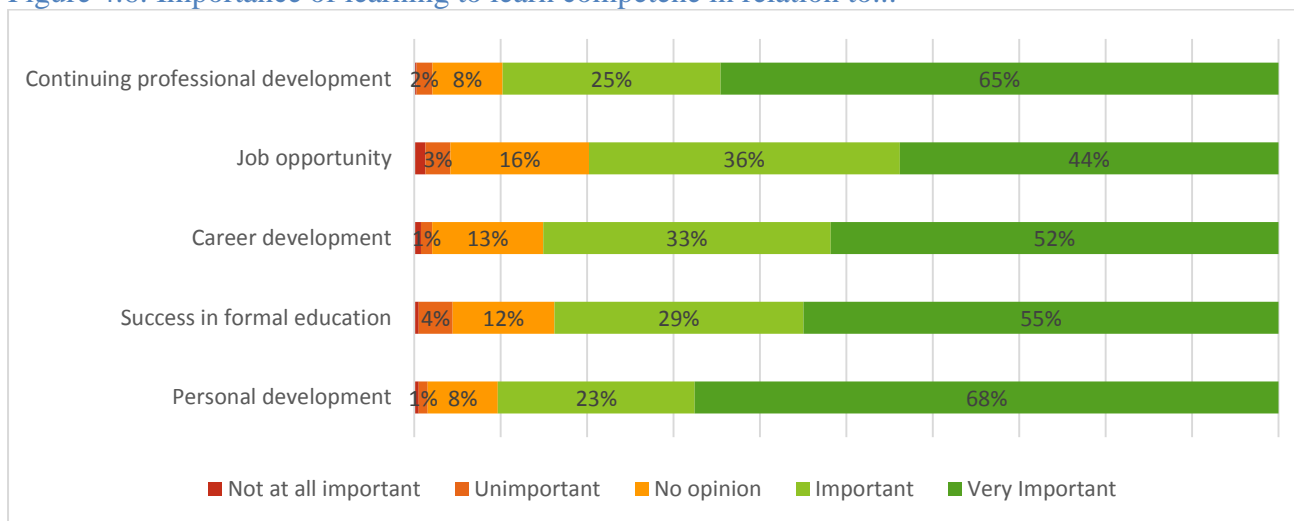


Figure 4.6: Importance of learning to learn competene in relation to...



### 4.3.1 Sub competences

When we look for the top three sub-competences for the two competences regarded as being most important for employability we come to: leadership, communication and creativity for entrepreneurship, and: critical thinking, self-reliance/autonomy and evaluation/reflection in the case of learning to learn. Giving us six sub-competences that are regarded by the respondents as being the most important for employability.

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There is a high familiarity with the key competences and all of them are considered to be very important in most professional and life contexts. Asked about the importance of specific sub-competences in regard to these key competences the participants of the online survey answered according to the following ranking:

*Tabel 2: Ranking of sub-competences*

Rank	<b>entrepreneurship competences</b>	<b>civic competences</b>	<b>learning to learn competences</b>
1	Communication	Communication	Critical Thinking
2	Leadership	Intercultural Communication	Self-reliance/ Autonomy
3	Creativity	Critical Thinking	Evaluation, Reflection
4	Teamworking	Teamworking	Knowledge and Skills management
5	Networking	Conflict management	Problem Solving

However, all other proposed sub-competences that will be further processed in PROMOTE received relevant percentages except “virtual communication”.

### 4.4 Informal learning environments and the key competences

Informal learning settings are in general perceived less favourable among respondents for acquiring the different competences. Something that can partly be ascribed to the strong presence of educational experts in the sample. Even though the general level of affirmative answers is similar compared to questions regarding formal training environments, stretching between 55% and 70% affirmative answers, outliers are more prominently present. Opinions on the use of informal learning environments for learning the three competences are thus more marked, with some scoring relatively high while others do not.

Out of informal learning environments entrepreneurship can, according to the respondents, be best learned at the workplace and would least likely be learned with family and friends, with only 36% of respondents signalling family and friends as an environment for learning entrepreneurship compared to 72% considering the workplace as a good site to learn the competence.

Family and friends, together with voluntary work, on the other hand are considered to be the most



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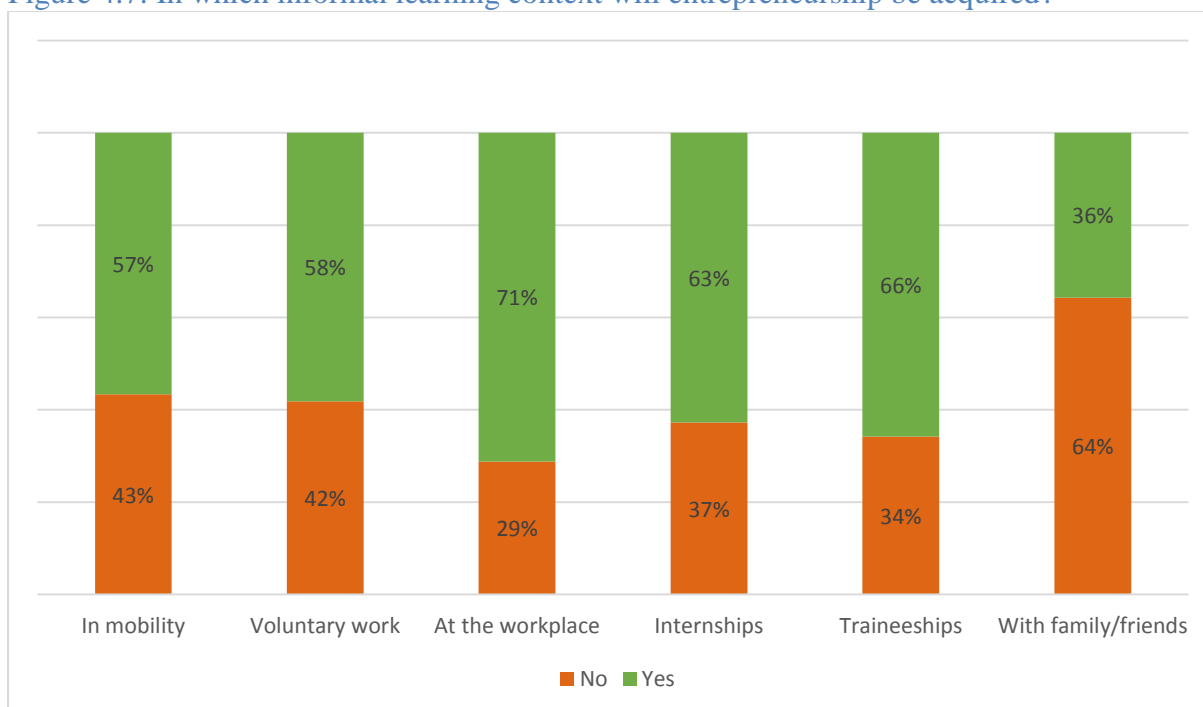
important informal learning environments for civic competences, 72% answering affirmatively for family and friends and 79% for voluntary work. The workplace, internships and traineeships on the other hand are received quite negatively in regards to civic competences.

Traineeships, however, are considered to be quite important sites for the learning to learn competence with 77% answering affirmatively. Friends and family again losing out, with only 44% of the respondents regarding it as a site for learning to learn competences.

When singling out traineeships we can see that their importance is regarded as moderately strong in regards to entrepreneurship, 66% of respondents seeing it as a site of learning that competence. A low importance is attached to traineeships for civic competences. And a very high importance is attached to it in regards to learning to learn.

Mobility is quite the average scorer throughout the three competences. 57% seeing it as a site for learning entrepreneurship, 59% seeing it as a site for learning civic competences and 64% seeing it as a site for acquiring learning to learn competences. Concluding we can say that mobility is regarded as a moderately important site of learning the three competences throughout, yet, this it never reaches high importance for any of the three competences.

Figure 4.7: In which informal learning context will entrepreneurship be acquired?



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Figure 4.8: In which informal learning context will civic competences be acquired?

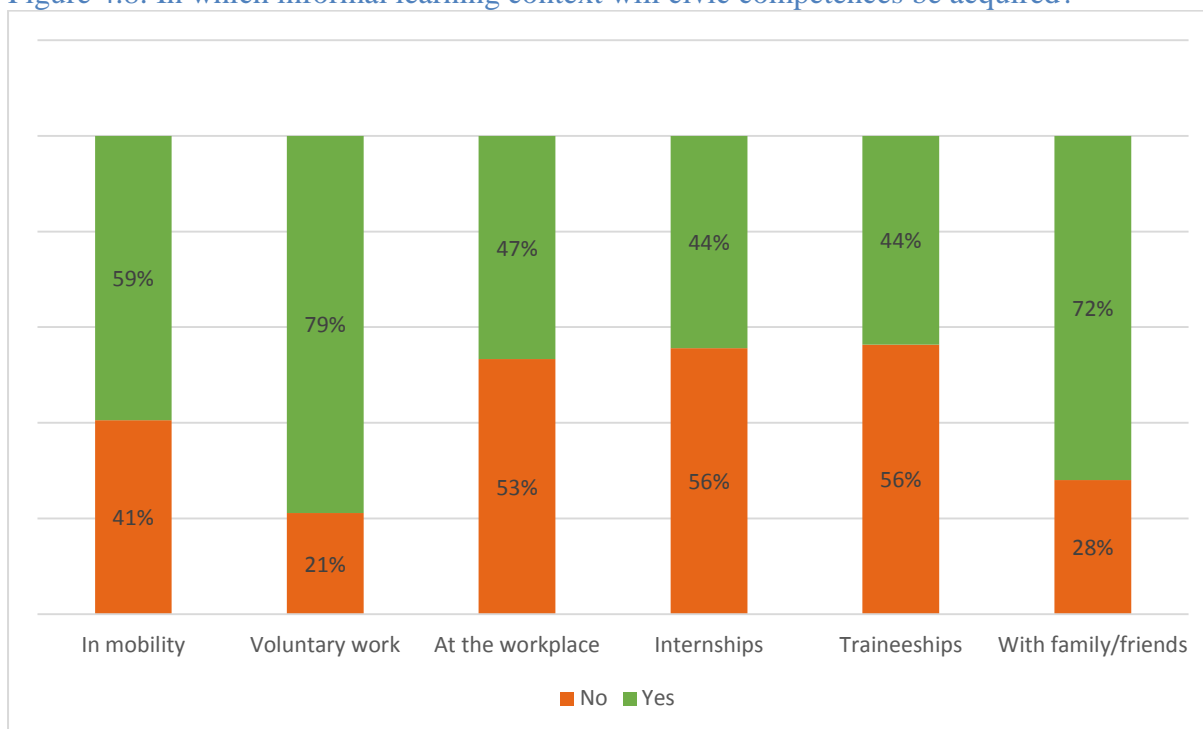
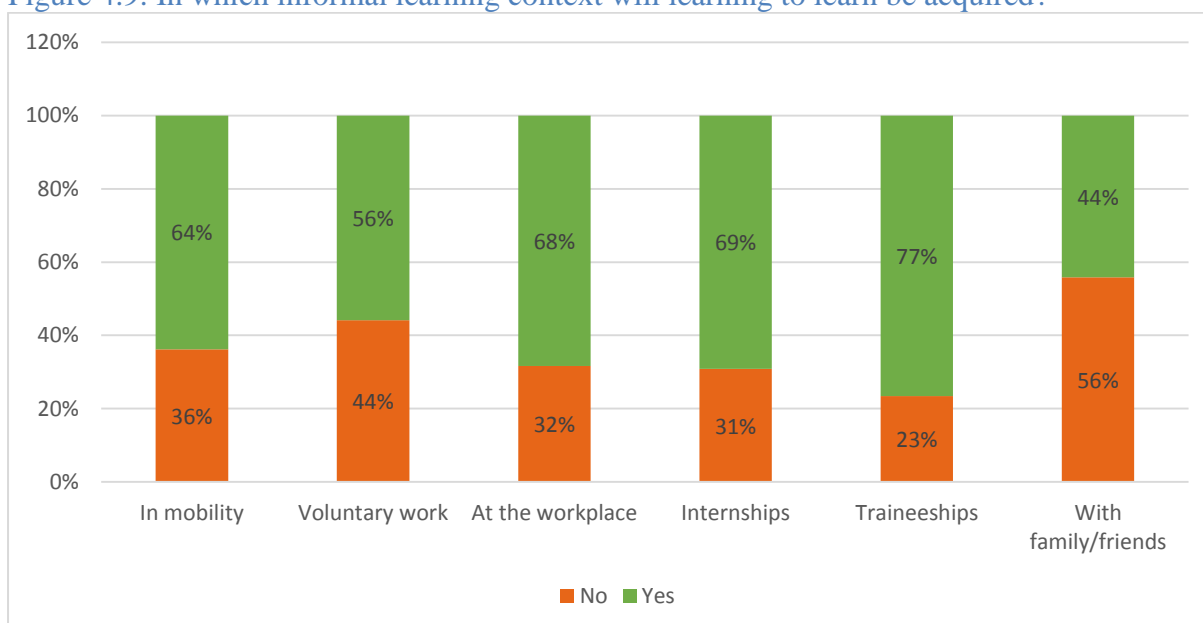


Figure 4.9: In which informal learning context will learning to learn be acquired?





### 4.5 Tools for validation and learning

The perceived need for the validation of competences is almost universal, with only 4% not considering the validation of competences as important and 71% answering that they do think it is important. However, only 62% are familiar with any tools for validating competences. A first conclusion is that although validation of competences is regarded as quite important among the respondents, tools to validate them are less known. 38% answering they do not know of any tools to validate competences. This shows the significance of the PROMOTE project since validation is still unknown territory for more than a third of the experts.

Figure 4.10: Do you know approaches for validation?

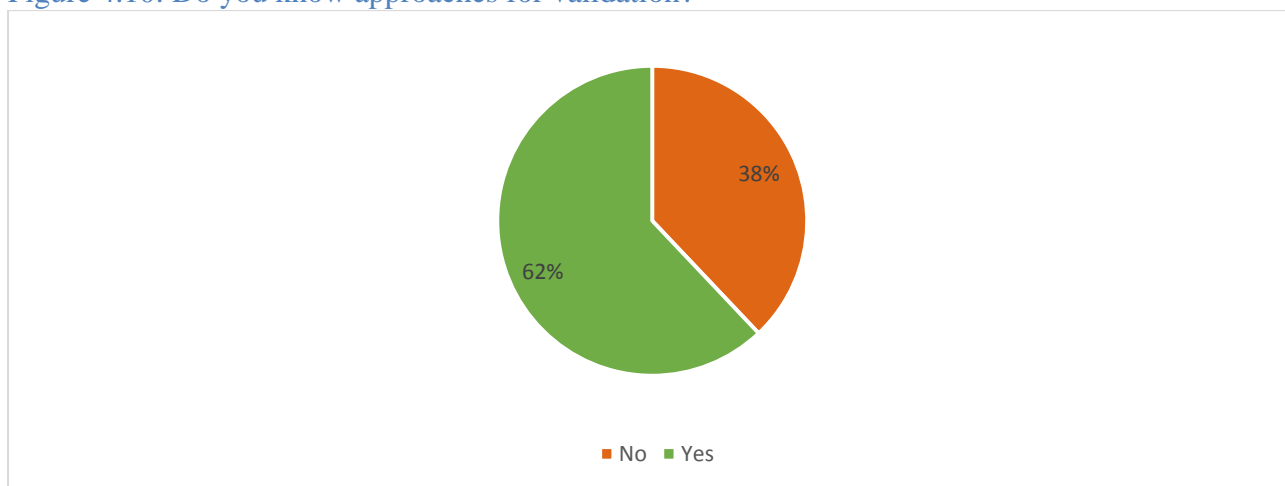
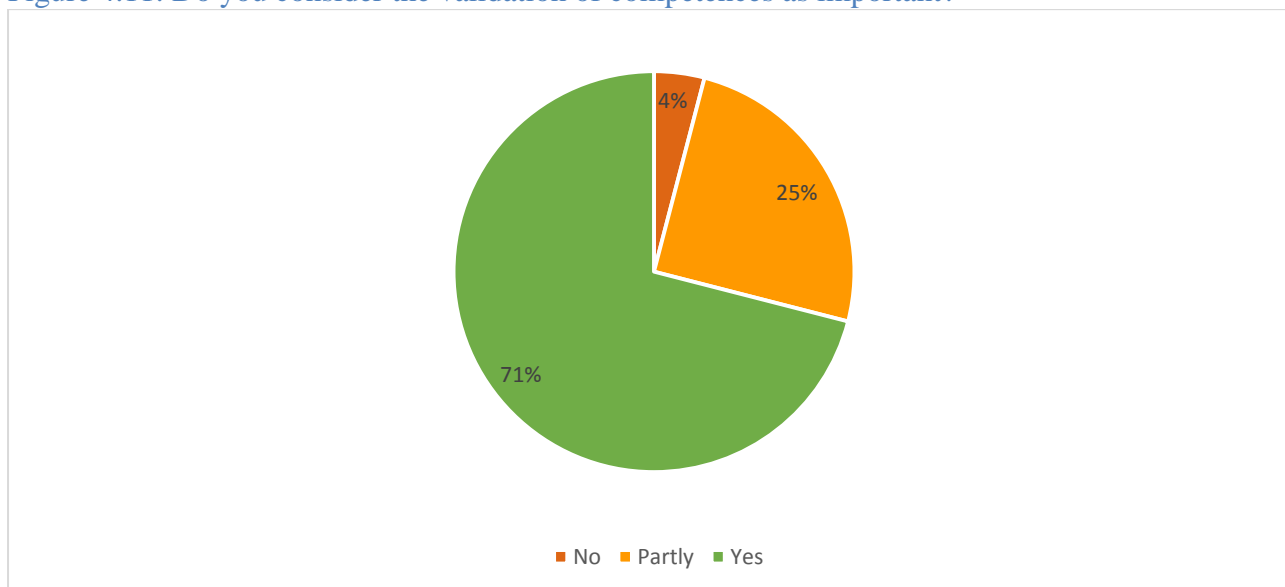


Figure 4.11: Do you consider the validation of competences as important?





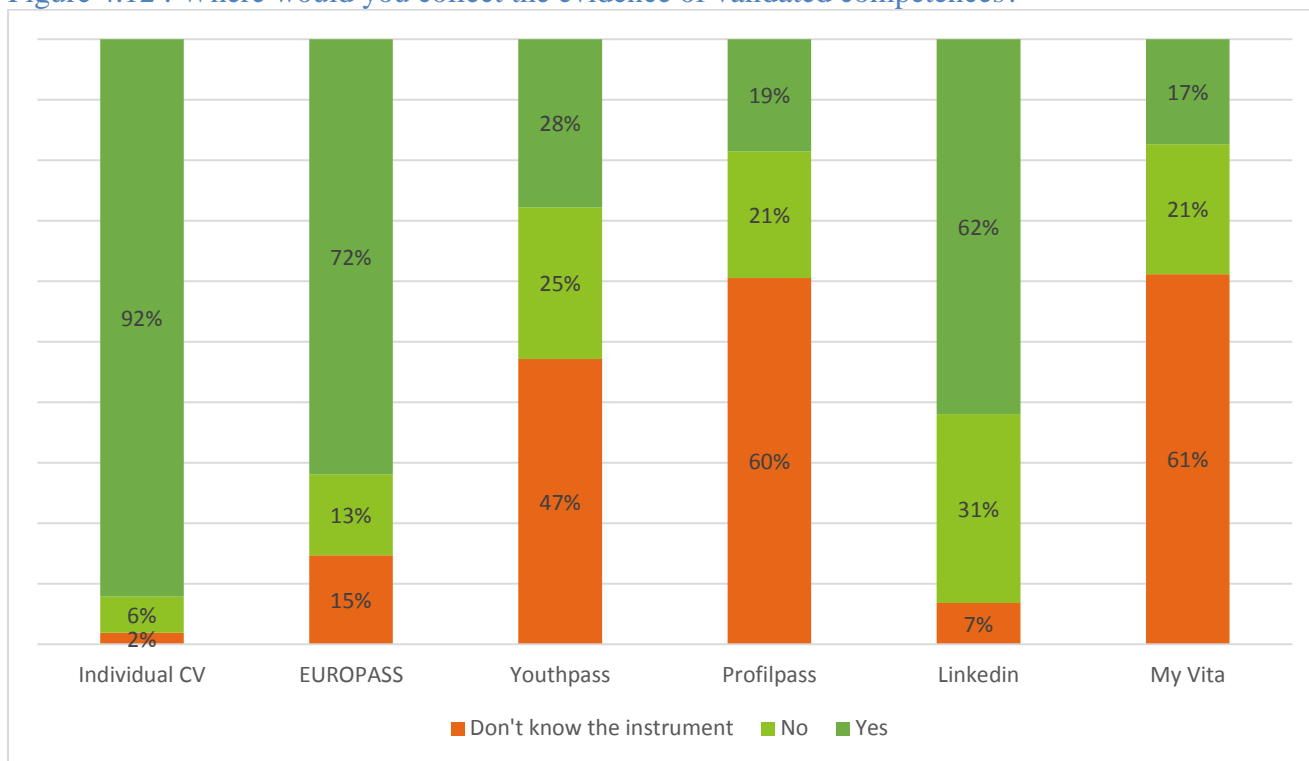


4.5.1 Tools for validating

When it comes to containers in which validation evidences can be put it does not come as surprise that the most well-known are: EUROPASS, CVs and LinkedIn. 15% not knowing EUROPASS, 2% not knowing CVs and 7% not knowing LinkedIn. Unsurprising seeing that CV is used almost universally, EUROPASS is promoted by the EU and LinkedIn is a very popular international career platform.

In this regard 38% know my-VITA even though it has been established in a relatively small network. This coincides with 40% of ProfilPASS; which is surprising since this tool was also largely pushed by German authorities and the EU. Youthpass, as a European instrument is slightly better known with 53% of the respondents signalling familiarity.

Figure 4.12 : Where would you collect the evidence of validated competences?



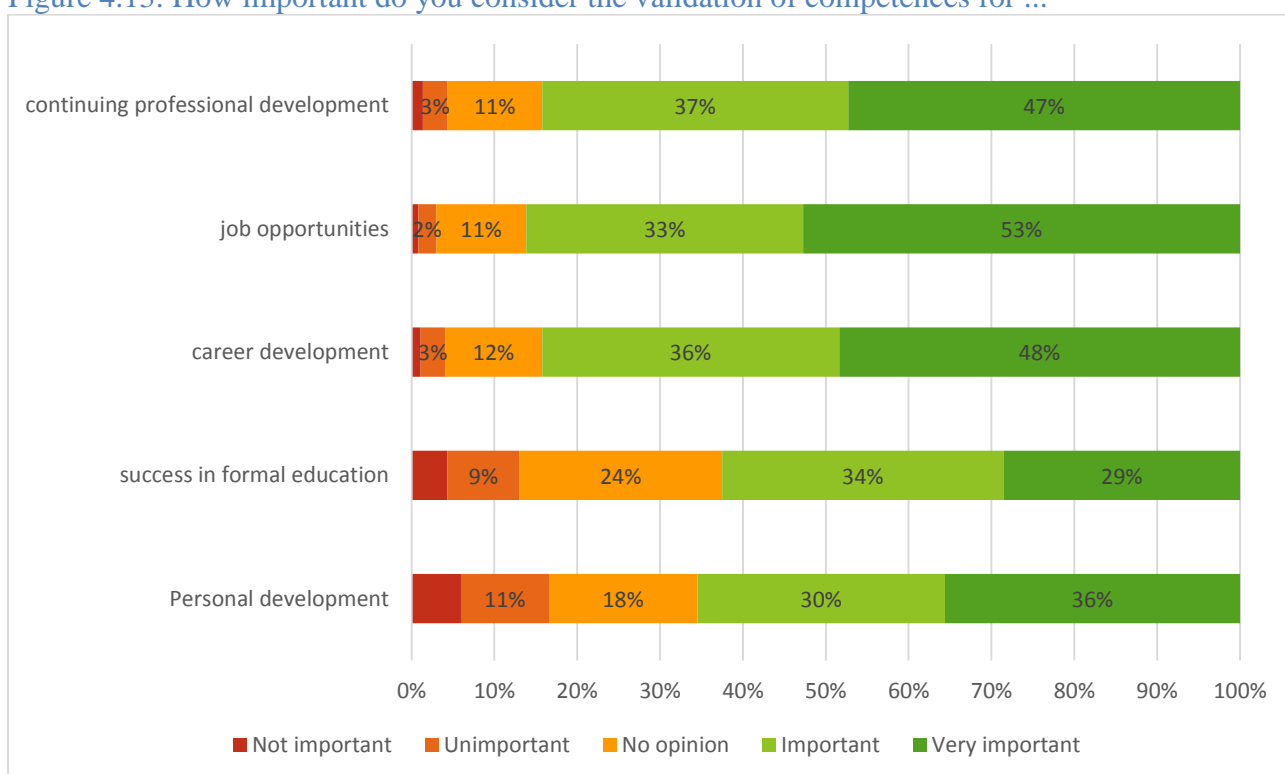
To conclude: tools to validate competences are considered to be important, but knowledge about these tools is quite low.



#### 4.5.2 Importance of validation for different subjects

Validation of competences is regarded as quite useful for job related areas of development. Validation of competences is regarded as less useful, however, in regards to personal development and success in formal education. This specifies the results we obtained from the question asking whether the respondents found the validation of competences to be important. Again we can see a consensus among respondents that it is, and particularly so when dealing with job related areas of life.

Figure 4.13: How important do you consider the validation of competences for ...



What immediately becomes clear when reviewing the familiarity among respondents for European standardized instruments is that this familiarity is quite low. In the case of ECTS a respectable 42% of respondents is very familiar with the instrument, but in the case ECVET only 17% regard themselves as very familiar with it and even 30% saying they are not familiar. EQF/NQF scoring slightly higher with 28% seeing themselves as very familiar and 26% as not familiar at all.

This reflects on the one hand the origin of the respondents and the history of the tools (ECTS is well known in the HE) while ECVET is only seldom introduced and EQF is the underlying meta-system.

However, against the background that ECVET shall be implemented in Europe in 2018 the level of awareness and knowledge on the systems is not convincing.



Figure 4.14: Are you familiar with the following European standardized instruments?

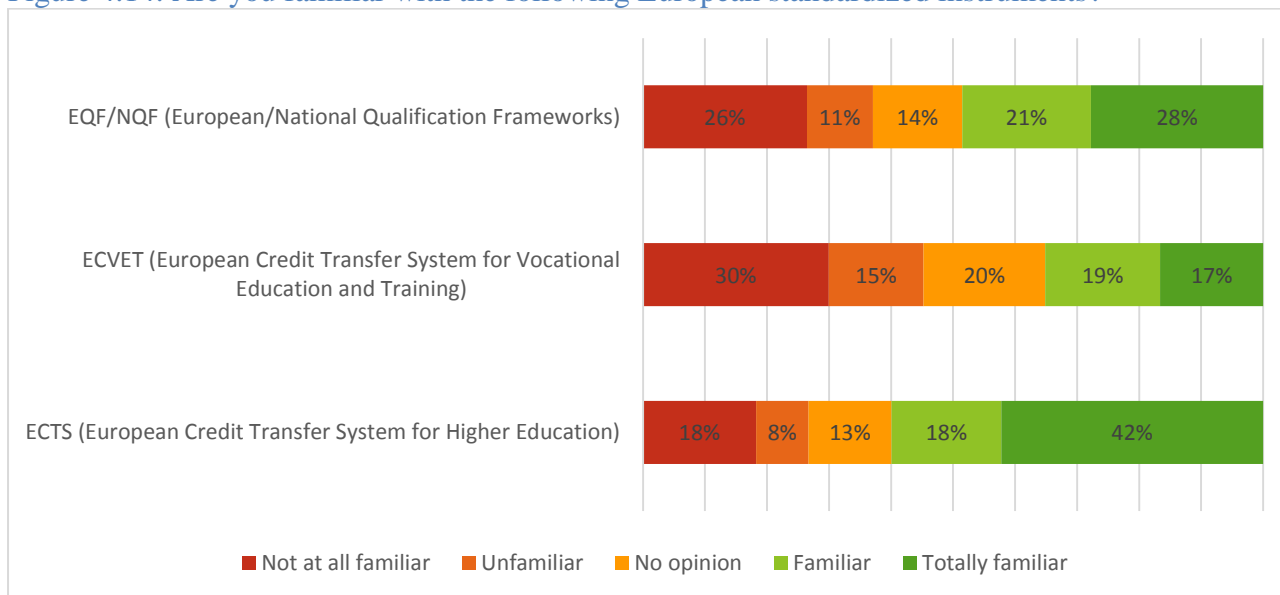
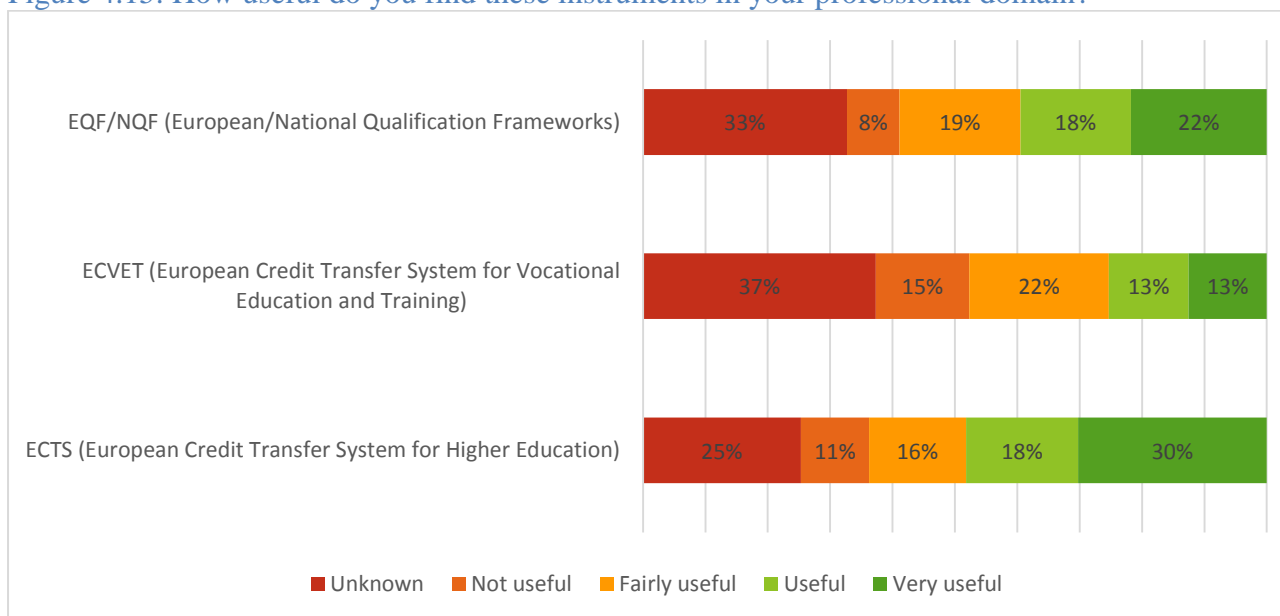


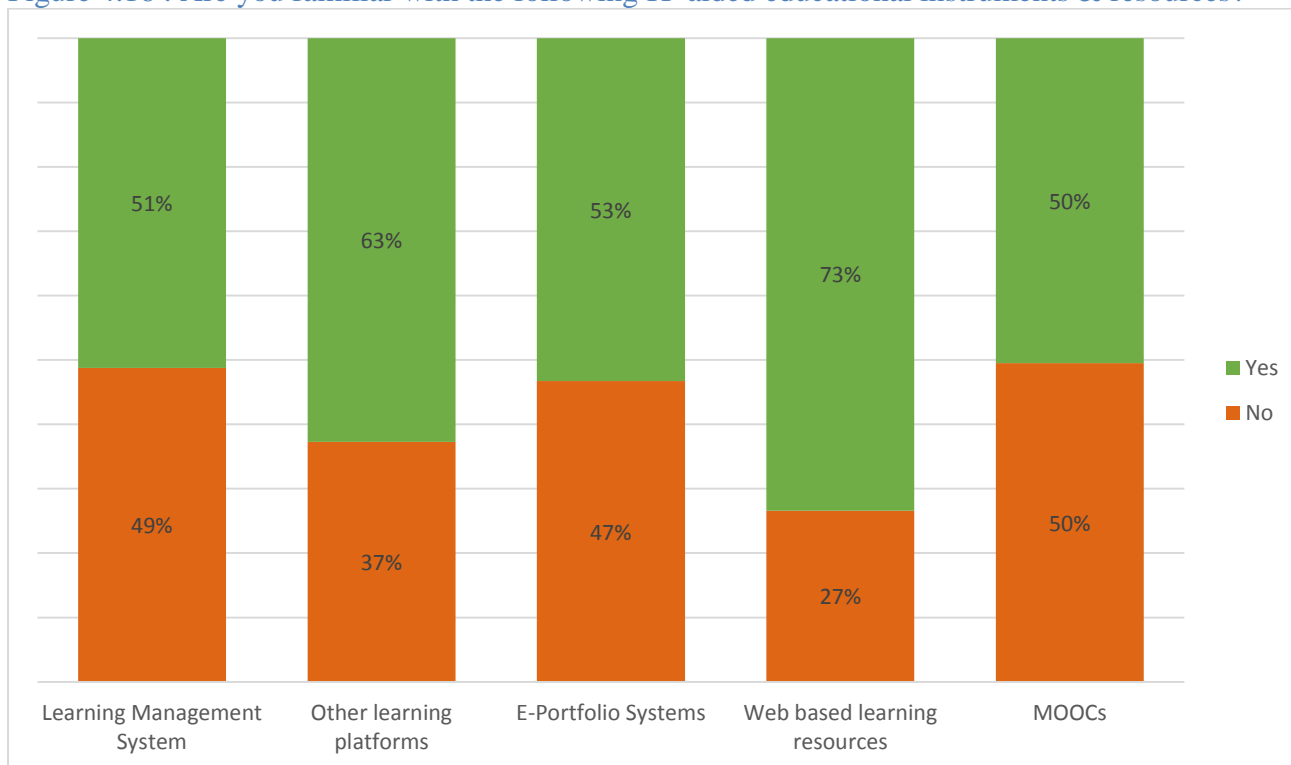
Figure 4.15: How useful do you find these instruments in your professional domain?



Familiarity with IT-based educational tools can be regarded as moderate to low. Most of them hovering around 50% of the respondents signalling that they are familiar with them. The exception is web-based learning sources which are known by 73% of the respondents.



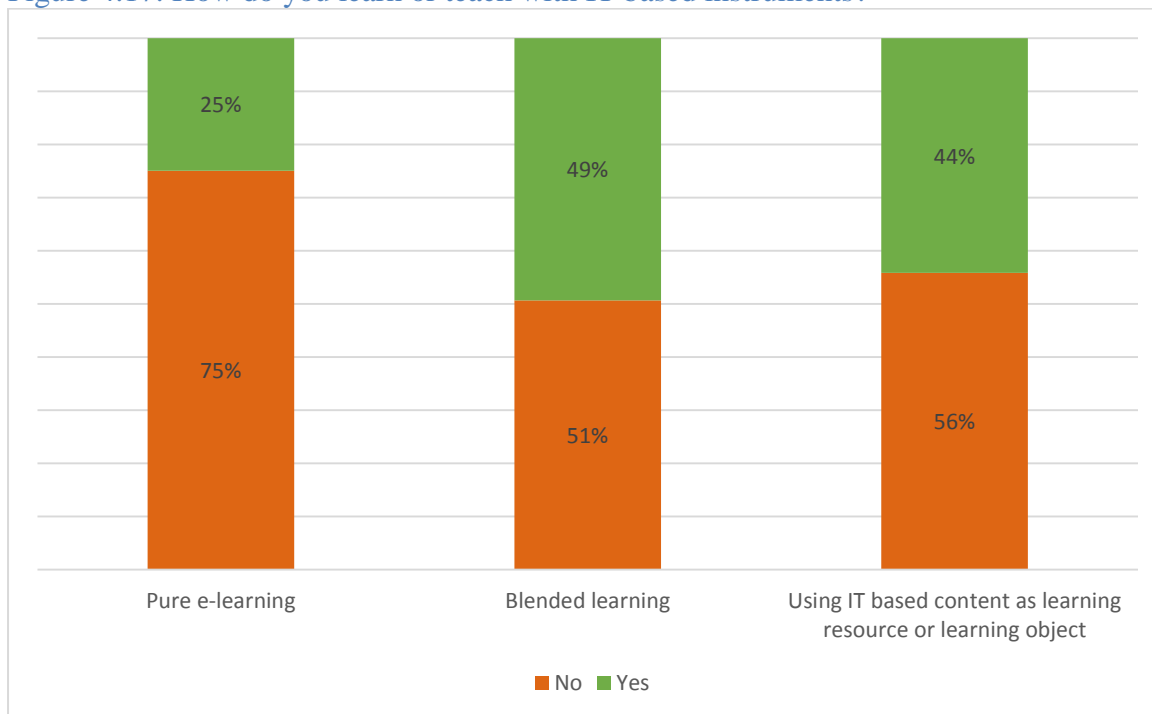
Figure 4.16 : Are you familiar with the following IT-aided educational instruments & resources?



Familiarity with types of IT-based learning also seems to be quite low. Blended learning and using IT based content as learning resource or learning object are the most familiar among respondents with respectively 49% and 44% signalling that they are familiar with them. Only 25% of the respondents say they are familiar with Pure E-learning.

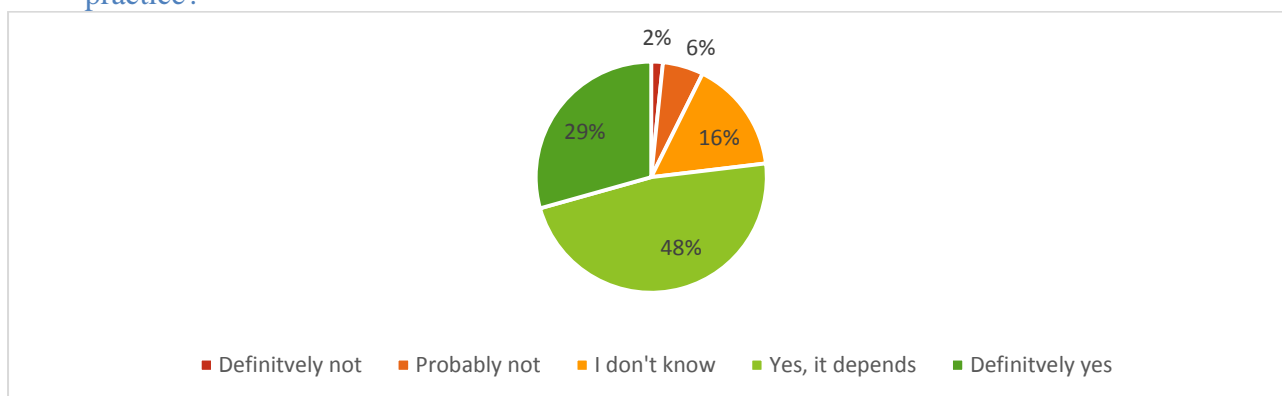


Figure 4.17: How do you learn or teach with IT based instruments?



In regards to IT-based learning and validation methods we can, similar to validation of competences, conclude that there is a great interest towards it. Yet previous charts make clear that familiarity with these tools is very limited, even among the educational specialists that predominated our sample.

Figure 4.18: Would you consider IT-aided learning and validation helpful in your professional practice?





### 4.6 Results according to occupational group

Decision makers, as could be expected, seem to be more predisposed towards entrepreneurship compared to the other competences, recalling that decision makers here also includes business leaders. The ‘Other profession’ category has an overall lower familiarity with the three competences in general, particularly the entrepreneurship competence. As could be expected, again, both the teacher/lecturer and the Trainer/coach/teamleader category are quite familiar with all three the competences.

Figure 4.19: Familiarity with civic competences by occupational group

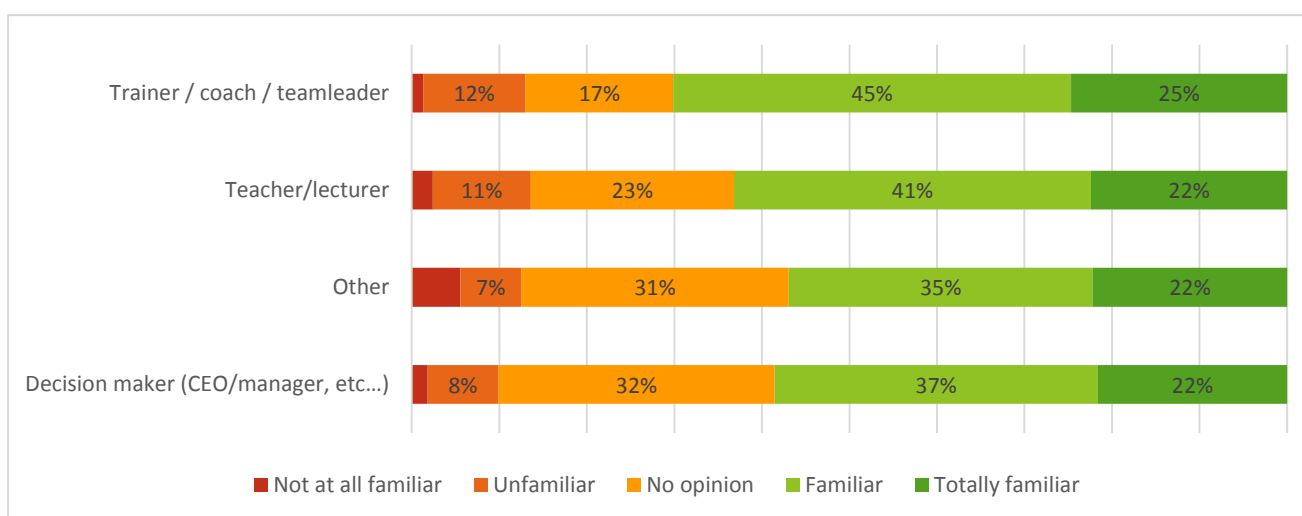


Figure 4.20: Familiarity with entrepreneurship by occupational group

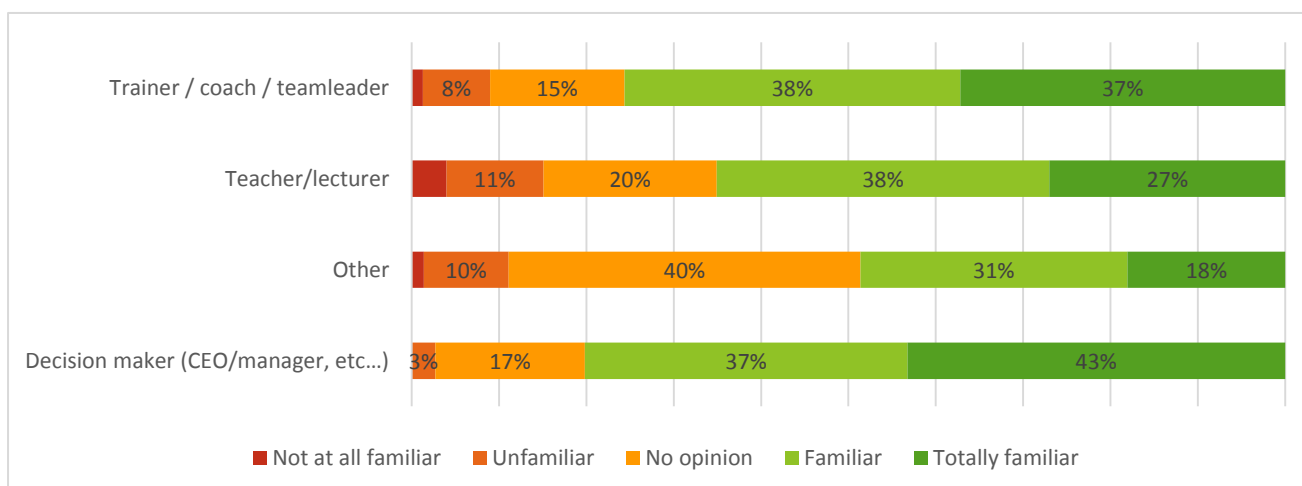
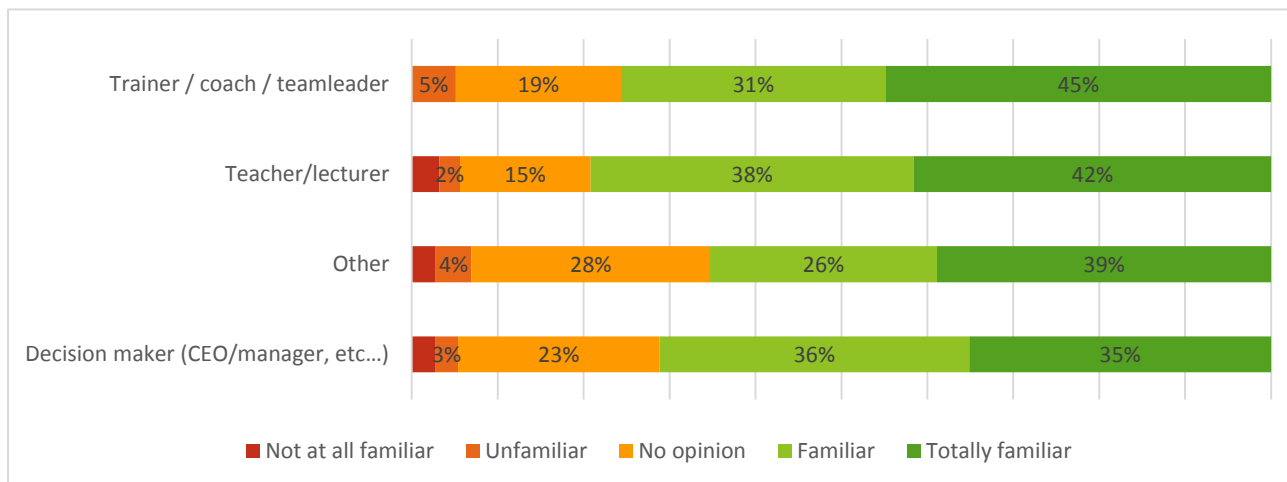


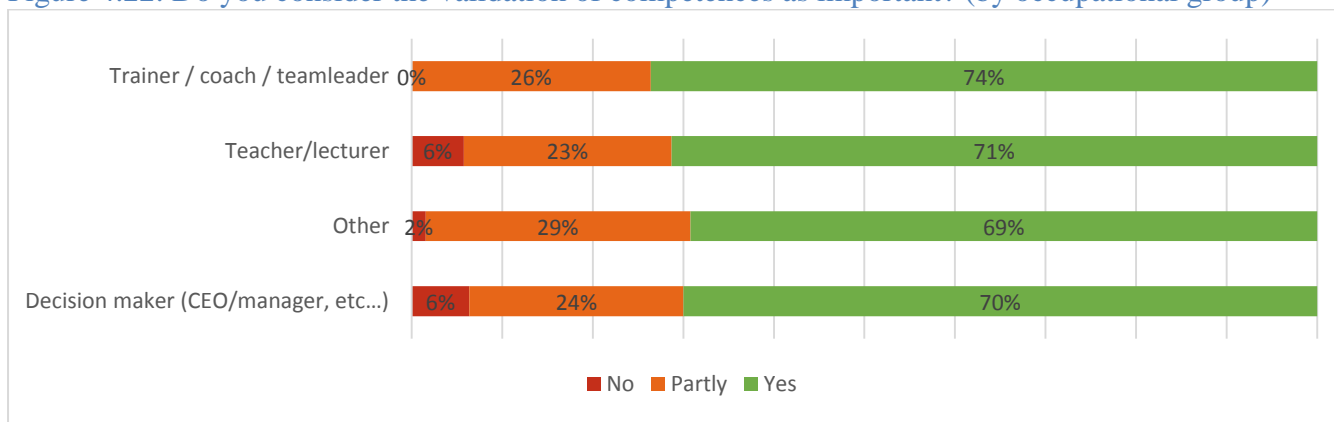


Figure 4.21 Familiarity with learning to learn by occupational group



The importance attached to the different key competences hardly diverges between the different occupational groups and are mainly positive for all competences and occupations.

Figure 4.22: Do you consider the validation of competences as important? (by occupational group)





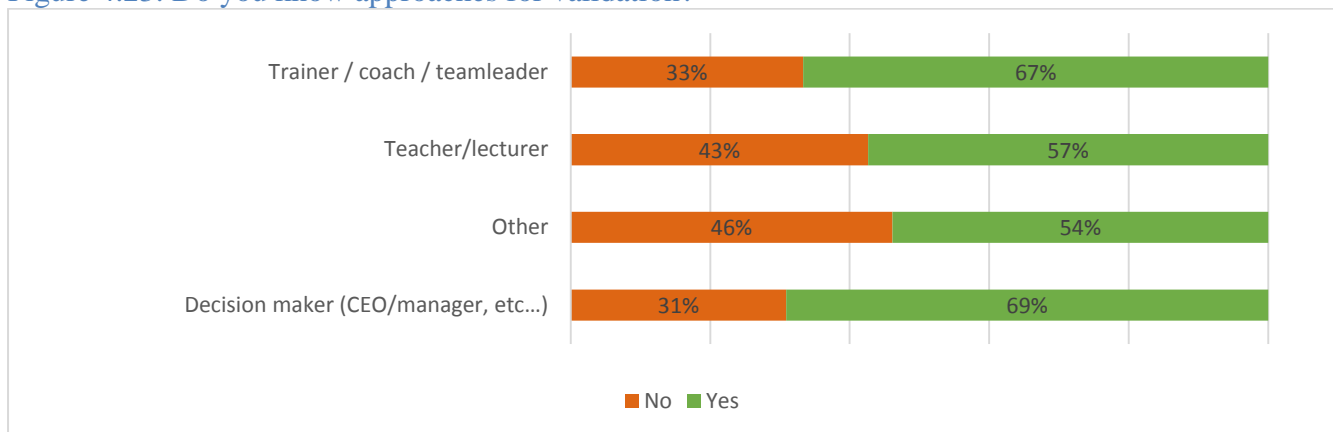
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Only in regards to knowledge on validation techniques there seems to be a difference according to professional categories. Teacher/lecturers and the 'Other category' being notably less familiar with validation techniques. Odd seeing the educational character of both groups.

Figure 4.23: Do you know approaches for validation?





#### 4.7 Conclusion questionnaire

Based on the desk research an online questionnaire was carried out in the framework of the PROMOTE project. This questionnaire reached 477 European stakeholders working the field of education and decision makers. Most respondents were educational professionals (<70%), which has an influence on the results of the questionnaire.

The three competences – entrepreneurship, civic competences and learning to learn – are well-known among the respondents. Furthermore, these key competences are considered to be important in most professional and life contexts. However tools for validating these key competences are not well known.

While more than 70% of the respondents considered the validation of key competences important, nearly 40% do not know any validation instruments for it. Less than 50% of the respondents are familiar with European validation instruments. However, 50% of the participants is familiar with ECVTS, probably due to the high amount of educational professionals in our sample.

The most important sub-competences are ranked as followed (ranked according to indicated importance):

Rank	<b>entrepreneurship competences</b>	<b>civic competences</b>	<b>learning to learn competences</b>
1	Communication	Communication	Critical Thinking
2	Leadership	Intercultural Communication	Self-reliance/ Autonomy
3	Creativity	Critical Thinking	Evaluation, Reflection
4	Teamworking	Teamworking	Knowledge and Skills management
5	Networking	Conflict management	Problem Solving

Generally, formal education is considered a good place to acquire these competences, however this could be because of the predominance of educational professional respondents in our questionnaire. Despite this high number of educational professionals in our survey, 30%-50% of the respondents answered that the PROMOTE key competences could not be learned in formal education. This clearly indicates the need for promoting validation methods for informal and non-formal learning.

The general conclusion of the questionnaire is that most of the respondents consider the validation of key competences important, but a large number of the respondents do not know any validation instruments for this purpose (even though the largest part of the respondents are educational professionals). This demonstrates a clear need for projects such as PROMOTE, and their role in

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making different stakeholder groups familiar with tools to validate informal learning.

### 5 Interviews

To get an wider and more in depth understanding of the needs and demands for validating informal and non-formal learning the questionnaire was substantiated by in-depth interviews with experts. Moreover, these interview give a view on the potential pitfalls signalled by the target groups in regards to the validation and acquisition of the three key competences

Every partner conducted three to ten in-depth interviews with national target group experts and in one case with experts from different European countries. All interviews were conducted following four main topics:

- Knowledge about the European Lifelong Learning competences ‘learning to learn’, ‘social and civic competences’ and ‘sense of initiative and entrepreneurship’
- Learning programmes and/or learning activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences
- Validation of competences and learning outcomes
- External expertise and potentially needed support related to validation of non- and informal learning

Using these topics as a guideline for every in-depth interview enabled us to get a clear view on the needs and demands for validating informal and non-formal learning throughout Europe. Moreover, it enabled us to make comparison between the European countries.

This section is structured per country, with a final section for other European cases. All the country reports are subsequently structured by the four different topics as described above. First, this section starts with a description of the used methodology.

#### Methodology

All the in-depth interviews were conducted according to the Delphi-method (more specifically mini-Delphi or Estimate-Talk-Estimate). In this way interviewees are encouraged to revise their earlier statements on the subject, and they are steered towards a consensus on the subject discussed. Anonymity of the participants is guaranteed in this process, names of interviewees will thus not be released. Reference will only be made to their occupations as to sketch the composition of the expert panels. The results of the in-depth interviews will be discussed in section 5 of this research.



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### 5.1 Austria

Three experts working in the educational system and media sector were interviewed.

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

There is a common misunderstanding of how the term competence is defined or to be understood, it is often misinterpreted as “knowledge” or “skill”. The respondents were, however, quite aware of the issue overall in Austria. Regarding non-formal and informal learning, there is also more discussion going on but one interview partner had the feeling that it will take another 10 years until the issue of VINFL will be of real importance in Austria.

Key competences are highly relevant, but the concept of key competences as defined by the EC is little acknowledged in the private sector (furthermore, the term “key competences” is often used in a different meaning without reference to the EC key competences) – although there might be differences in various industrial sectors. Even for career development, personal development, job coaching and job searching there is little evidence to a person’s competence level of certain key competences.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

The most researched area of acquisition of competences in informal areas at the moment is the voluntary sector (Freiwilligenpass).

Mobility actions and workplace experiences of students are often required in FHs (universities of applied sciences), but acquisition of competences often focuses on technical skills, key competences might become more relevant in the future. Overall, formal learning environments continue to focus on (factual) knowledge and the acquisition of skills, although the importance of “soft skills” or competences continues to gain ground in these areas, too.



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### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

Validation for formal purposes is highly formalized and technical, there is little to no room for the validation of key competences. In informal settings, the focus is on empowerment and activation (in particular for job-seekers).

One interviewee mentioned the KODE system (“Kompetenz-Diagnostik und –Entwicklung” / the diagnosis and development of competences) which detects strengths of a person and opportunities for improvement and concentrates on the development of competences (cf. [www.competenzia.de](http://www.competenzia.de) and [www.kode-project.eu](http://www.kode-project.eu)). This system is computer-aided and allows to track competence development through questionnaires (individual questionnaire for youth is available). The cost for a competence profile is approx. 35€ per person.

In the field of volunteering, the validation of competences and learning outcomes gains momentum.

In the field of job qualification / counselling, the focus is on finding individual strengths and to develop action plans based on existing competences, rather than tracking the development of a competence over a certain period (see the guideline for the Kompetenz+ Beratung).

Austrian universities – and this is probably true for all German-speaking countries – have little interest in validating learning that happen “outside” of the university.

### External expertise and support related to validation

There is little to no mention of “key competences” in job advertisements, currently no real issue in personnel search and selection (“social competences” are more important and given higher importance). There are a couple of psychological tests in place to measure competences (not “key competences”) of applicants – these are widespread and well known, so no further need for external expertise and support in this area. But in general certificates (also those proofing certain levels in a key competence) may always be an important factor for job seekers

One important issue that must be kept in mind is the existence of funds to implement validation offers (e.g. there is the consultation process for validation of non-formal and informal learning supported by the Ministry of Education and all relevant stakeholders are involved, but it is still open whether the results will then be implemented on a big scale if the necessary funds are not available)



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### Conclusion interviews Austria

Two important aspects of the interviews are the low importance that key competences play in universities and in business. That does not mean that competences are not considered important as such, but mainly that the concept of key competences and the measurement of competence levels play a rather minor role when it comes to applying for a job or having informal and non-formal learning outcomes validated.

The good news is that the issue is currently gaining momentum due to the public consultation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.



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### 5.2 Belgium

Six experts were interviewed in Belgium: two HR-managers; one managing director of a labour union; three managing directors of (semi-)public institutions responsible for social- and work related topics in Belgium and finally one keynote speaker on the topic of learning and learning environments.

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

All, except one, of the interviewees knew about the three PROMOTE-competences. One of the interviewees (the head of a labour union) had not heard of these key competences. Furthermore, some of the interviewees whom knew about the competences were lacking a more in-depth knowledge about them. For example, some interviewees, especially from the private sector, stated that they found the competences too general and thought that they should be more specific. This shows they are not fully aware of the fact that these key competences function as a more holistic competence, rather than a more specific sub-competence.

Nonetheless, they all saw the importance of these competences.

All interviewees agreed on the importance of the civic-competence which was seen as a key skill for the proper functioning of society. As one interviewee stated: *“Civic-competence is learning to live together”*. So the main relevance of this competence was found in both personal and social development.

The given definitions for entrepreneurship varied the most between the interviewed professionals. The interviewees working in the private-sector tend to define this competence mostly as a practical skill (i.e. starting or running a business), whereas the policy-related interviewees saw this competence as a broader and soft skill, necessary to function in a modern society. In this context one of the interviewees clarified this difference: *“you don’t need to be an entrepreneur to have entrepreneurship-competences”*. Furthermore, it was mentioned that entrepreneurship is *“the individual courage to take risks in both private and personal life”*. Despite the difference in definition all interviewees agreed on the importance of this competence, mainly in career development.

The learning-to-learn competences was predominantly explained as the most relevant for both personal development and job opportunities. Learning-to-learn is seen as a highly important competence in the modern knowledge-society. In connection with the learning-to-learn competence two interviewees mentioned the sub-competences “ability to adapt” and “flexibility” as highly important.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences





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Most interviewees are familiar with the Flanders public employment service tool ‘mijnloopbaan’ (VDAB). This online tool helps unemployed people discover their own competences and making them visible to future employers. Furthermore, it’s used to make a competence-based match between job opportunity and employee.

Apart from this tool, most of the interviewees were not familiar with any specific learning program or activity promoting these competences. Some of the interviewees noticed that to obtaining the key competence ‘learning-to-learn’ is one of the general objectives within the formal educational system, nevertheless they noticed that these goals mainly exist on paper and no validation of these competence is taking place.

### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

The interviewees disagreed most about the topic of validating competences and learning outcomes. Especially noticeable is the differences between policy-oriented interviewees and HR-managers. The former recognizing the importance of VINFL but at the same time pointed out the lack of comprehensive policy and useful tools in Flanders. The latter were clearly less familiar to the concept of validation, and none of the HR-managers were using any form of validation relating to informal or non-formal learning. This is especially noticeable since they do underline the importance of informal and non-formal learning.

### External expertise and support related to validation

In an interview, the representative of the public employment service (VDAB), emphasized their belief in making competences visible. Validating is seen as highly important but not necessary, because it might increase the threshold to further trainings. The VDAB focuses on competence-based matching between job-seekers and employers. Both the VDAB and other interviewees underlined the rise of competences e-matching.

Most interviewees focused on the importance of validation for a better matching between unemployed people and available jobs. Furthermore, validation of competences should lead to the increase of competence-based recruiting.

Most of the people interviewed are themselves professionals on the topic of Lifelong Learning and/or the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and stated to not be interested in support related to validation.

Despite this, they mostly all agreed on the fact that a more comprehensive way of validating these forms of learning and competences is crucial. Some cooperation between different social actors already exists. For example Flanders social economic advisory board (SERV) and the public employment service (VDAB) both highlighted the importance of their corporation in separate



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interviews. Within this partnership the two organisations work together on defining different competences and e-matching between jobs and unemployed people.

One area where validation support is welcome would be in small and medium enterprises (SME). In an interview with UNIZO (employers federation of SME), it became clear that these companies do not have much knowledge about informal and non-formal learning. UNIZO was stating that support for both, the learning and the validating, is much needed.

### Conclusion interviews Belgium

The three PROMOTE-competences are quite well known in Flanders. The civic-competence being seen as most useful for society as a whole, entrepreneurship being seen by employers as only related to starting businesses while policy-minded experts produced a broader interpretation of the concept associating it with innovative behaviour, learning to learn being considered a the most useful competence for career development.

In terms of learning programmes only the “mijnloopbaan” tool and the general objectives are known. Lack of knowledge and enthusiasm for these general objectives, however, is worrying.

Disagreements between policy-oriented and business oriented interviewees arises when discussing validation. Business mainly argues for rather informal ways of validating, at the level of the company, policy-oriented respondents argued in favour of a centralised validation system.

Support is rejected by most interviewees, except in the case of small and middle-sized enterprises. The need for cooperation between different social and governmental actors is, however, considered to be crucial.



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### 5.3 Bulgaria

Within Bulgaria three interviews with experienced human resources experts in different sectors were conducted: a coach and career consultant, a senior training expert in a globally operating IT company and a university lecturer in human resources and organizational behaviour.

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

All the three experts are familiar with the European concept of the key competences in Lifelong Learning but there are some differences in their individual understanding of those competences. The main ideas behind entrepreneurship are being pro-active and searching for new ideas, innovative and creative, taking responsibility and reasonable risk, being flexible and adaptive. The main associations with civic competences are being socially responsible not only in words but also in actions – supporting causes (e.g. ecological, educational etc.) which are for the benefit of the community or the society as a whole. And finally the main perceptions about the ability: learning to learn is proactive searching of new information, applying it in different contexts, the general attitude to try out something new, to be curious and flexible. The three experts underlined that in their professional fields the desire and the ability to constantly learn are of the utmost importance for personal and career development, as well as for success in formal education, whereas the entrepreneurial competences and sense of initiative are crucial in the process of searching new job opportunities, or continuing professional development.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

The common finding among the interviewed experts here is that most of them could state many examples for learning programmes and initiatives fostering entrepreneurial skills, and a few examples about the other two competences.

In higher education there are at least 2 relevant programmes: a Bachelor in Entrepreneurship with Master in Family Entrepreneurship (University of National and World Economics) and a Master in Innovations, Entrepreneurship and Finances (in cooperation between a private university and Cisco Entrepreneur Institute in Bulgaria). In secondary education there is one successful example: the Bulgarian Training Firms Net which has been organized since 1995. The aim is to establish and manage “training firms” in schools which are simulations of real companies, with all the documentation, systems, and procedures used in real business.

In business, the examples which were shared were not directly connected to entrepreneurship in the



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sense of founding an own business but more about gathering and assessing various, innovative and creative ideas how to support the society development, e.g. social entrepreneurship initiatives for communities in less developed countries or societies by helping them implement their own ideas or run a project via coaching/mentoring/consultancy which is pro-bono ( so called skill-based initiatives). These initiatives also foster the development of civic competences and learning-to-learn skills of the employees, who are transferring their knowledge to different areas and becoming more sensitive to different social issues beyond their own personal and professional field. For all of them the skill learning to learn is fostered mainly by changing the working and / or social field of a person (interns/employees rotation i.e.), which requires him/her to look at the things from a new perspective, to broaden their horizon and then make transfer of the knowledge and skills to the own area of responsibilities.

### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

The topic validation of competences was the main cutting point between the interviewed experts.

The university lecturer from the higher education sector shared that a system for assessing and validating learning outcomes (regarding both hard and soft skills) might be useful for a formalized structure as the university as they are used to assessing the results with notes and credit points. It would be great if the Learning Management System of the University could be connected with this validation system – something similar is already available at the private college Adam Smith where she is teaching project management. The online system there integrates all the specific data and results of the students with all learning materials and other available resources (similar as moodle).

For the other two experts who are mainly working in the private/business sector, assessment tools are used as part of the performance or potential evaluation of a person and they prefer not to have it so formalized, but instead giving appropriate and regular feedback for further development. Thus, for the companies there might not be that much added value to formalize the process of assessment and validation, at least concerning the soft skills (for the hard skills it would be more reasonable and acceptable).

In the context of the career development of the employees, some formalized assessment and validation tools might only be used as one of the various means for gathering information and facts, others are 360 degree feedback, calibration meetings between the managers, etc.



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From the individual career development perspective however it might be useful for each individual to have some objective assessment at certain periods of his/her life in order to track records and may be re-consider some changes/ new or further qualifications etc.

### External expertise and support related to validation

The interviewed experts shared that one training/workshop explaining how to use the specific validation system would be enough for them, as all of them are working with different LMS systems and are well familiar with learning and assessment software. Additional support might not be necessary for them, may be only for the final users – other trainers/lectures/professors as well as students/adult learners.



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### Conclusion interviews Bulgaria

All of the interviewees are familiar with the key competences in PROMOTE – entrepreneurship, civic competences and learning to learn and as all of them are dealing with personnel development they consider these skills as very relevant for the personal and career development and also for the continuous professional development. They gave lots of examples for fostering the acquisition and the development of these skills in their organizations mainly focusing on entrepreneurship, but also some related to the other 2 competences.

The main cutting point between the experts was the validation system and its relevancy for their fields – while it was assessed as very practicable and useful in the university field, the business didn't consider it as great added value as it would formalize a process, which they try to make more flexible and adapted to the employees' needs.

Finally, from the individual development perspective, assessment and validation system might be seen again as an additional tool to visualize personal progress, to track some records and may be re-think some changes in qualification in the future.





## 5.4 Germany

A total of nine experts were interviewed in Germany: one entrepreneur (business person), three educational experts (from the scientific community and from two educational providers), one teacher, two members from NGOs (from the youth sector), and two persons from a city administration.

### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

Most interviewees feel familiar with the idea of key competences, however, some relate them rather to professional competences and were a bit surprised when we confronted them with the idea of the European catalogue of key competences. Thus it seems to be reasonable to use the term key competence, however, the respondents could not agree upon a fully consistent definition of it. But the general notion is correct and respondents without a fundamental understanding could still relate to the concept based on their life and professional experiences.

Groups who did not professionally deal with competences, mainly decision-makers, had to think about what the competences mean and had the closest relation to KC7 (entrepreneurship) and to civic competences (in case of the NGOs). Here they derived from their own practice what is needed in the field. They applied a simple deduction from the challenges to the activities and further to the aspired competences. Being asked what sub-competences they would put in the concept of KC7 (entrepreneurship) they came up with team management, creativity, autonomy, project planning and management to name the most important ones.

As far as civic competences are concerned the most important sub-competences were communication, intercultural skills and competences, cooperation, diversity management, tolerance but also project management skills and creativity.

Most unclear for the majority of interviewees was the concept of learning to learn competences though everybody considered it as extremely important since people have to learn and develop their competences in every situation. Only the educationalists (and not all of them) could answer in a comprehensive way what learning to learn competences would comprise, one person even came up with the concept of mathetics – the art of learning. The most important sub-competences are: managing the own learning (pathway), problem solving, creativity, autonomy and teamwork.

All groups consider all competences as being very important and relevant, it goes without saying that civic competences were associated more with personal development and “unprofessional life” while entrepreneurship was associated most strongly with professional development and job opportunities.



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Learning to learn competences are considered to be equally important in private and professional life.

### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

In regards to entrepreneurship there are a number of courses in the academic field, however, they are rather scattered. They are mostly organised by Universities. This University staff and the entrepreneur were familiar with courses offered, the entrepreneur also pointed to singular learning offers from different umbrella organisations such as the chamber of commerce or the association of industry designers who also promote exchange (mobility) offers. The EYE programme was mentioned as a very efficient way to gain practical knowledge and skills in business situations abroad.

Theoretical courses are generally not being well regarded by respondents since the competences have to be acquired and applied in practice according to them. Hence this is a strong hint for learning projects. Similarly KC6 (Active Citizenship; AC) is supposed to be learned, trained and applied in practice.

There is no information if and where learning to learn competences are explicitly trained and taught -it seems to be a competence that is acquired in parallel to other learning processes. In a situation when employers are complaining about employees missing basic and where a PIACCC study still shows a high rate of unskilled people in European member states it seems learning to learn should receive more attention and concrete learning approaches should be integrated better into existing educational sectors.

However some are considered more – others less appropriate to be learned in educational sectors. For example entrepreneurship is perceived to be less likely to be learned in educational sectors because pupils do not have a strong relation to business. The respondents also reported on successful projects and case studies on entrepreneurship in school and VET education.

Entrepreneurship education is also not really common in German adult education courses, however, if it comes to more informal learning (non-formal and informal) entrepreneurship, but also civic competences can be acquired in a very good way.

Respondents felt that key competences can be best learnt in practice, though a good preparation and embedding in a learning programme would increase the efficiency and would sometimes be a pre-condition for the practice phase.

### Validation of competences and learning outcomes



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The concept of competence validation has not yet reached actors in the field, employers for example are not familiar with it and are rather surprised to learn that it shall be implemented in 2018. Universities are familiar with ECTS, of course. Some educational providers have heard about it but do not relate the theme to their specific fields yet.

The educational experts (research institutes) are aware of EQF and ECVET. However, there are strong arguments against the implementation – especially since the VET sector in Germany has a very good reputation (the famous dual system which combines theory and practice in apprenticeships). The VET sector in Germany is at the moment rather unhappy about efforts to put more people into higher education since there is a lack of skilled workers in the practical professions. Students seem to strive more for theoretical qualifications than for practical. Hence there is some discussion going on in the practice.

However, there seem to be a tendency for stakeholders in the field of becoming more aware of validation. There is an increasing consciousness that validation will also affect the own field of work.

If validation relates to certification, the interviewees feel that there is a rather extensive (bureaucratic) system of acknowledgements in place (universities, chambers of commerce and crafts, public authorities) and that the procedures for new job descriptions, curricula etc. are rather slow. One respondent named the IT sector in which new requirements pop up so fast that the official bodies have no chance to react on that in a timely way.

Every respondent, however, mentioned the great demand for recognition of prior learning and the comparability of qualifications (even if some didn't directly connect this to validation). All interviewees reported a high demand of skilled workers in certain sectors in Germany, be it technical, health and socially related and IT-professions.

There is not much knowledge on the validation in rather informal learning settings even though the validation of soft skills (key competences) was very logical to all respondents. This relates, on the one hand, to migrants (who are a big issue in Germany at the moment), since we need a good concept for integrating refugees. This requires also a high level of intercultural competences, critical thinking and learning to learn competences. On the other hand, the NGOs and the volunteers working with the (partly traumatised) refugees need these competences, too.

Secondly these social, personal and organisational competences are reported to become ever more important also in the professional field – higher education people reported about big enterprises who would not select candidates on the basis of their formal marks but rather on the basis of their

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competences like teamwork. There was also the story of a hospital medical director who rejected the very young candidates who graduated from their medical studies with extremely good marks. He deducted that these students had a lack of social and personal competences since they did nothing else but study for all of their lives. This underlines the fact that informally acquired competences become more important. The educators also emphasised that a skill validation can also be used in formative settings – in order to give feed-back to the participants to empower them to go on with their learning.

From the point of view of the employers validation is a possible means to find adequate staff more easily and quickly. However, nobody has a real idea on how this could be operationalised and on how employers could find suitable future staff members. In this connection the PROMOTE idea, which relates learning in internships and in mobility to business (the enterprises) is highly appreciated. The employer also states that new competences are required from their HR departments because the matching of the needs of the enterprises and the competences of the new workers, especially if they come from different cultures, has to be facilitated by them.

### External expertise and support related to validation

In general, most decision makers lack support and assistance. In the educational field staff may have heard about EQF (and some are quite reluctant since they feel disadvantaged themselves by EQF – e.g. occupational therapists in Germany). In the overwhelming part of the cases the field-staff has no relation to it since it is not (yet) obligatory.

Once it will have been implemented all interviewees responded that they would need assistance to implement it. In other words: If validation is not be only an “appendix” of the learning (and as such sometimes harmful and painful) the educationalists in the field need good training or counselling on how to implement it in their practice.

For educational institutes there is (as always) a rather strong anxiety that the implementation of validation would lead to additional work. This means as a consequence that there is a need for rather general information on validation, combined with tailor-made concepts that could be convincing to overcome the reluctance to change (here to invent new system approach).

Secondly, teachers and trainers are sometimes not well equipped in terms of assessment and do not know how the assessment could be integrated in the learning (e.g. in combination of good instructional design, contents, competence levels, good assignments and suitable assessment methods). This second need clearly relates to the teaching personal.



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Thirdly, also the organisations are not equipped –neither with competent people nor with IT based competence management systems to reach a high performance and to reduce workload. Especially in public schools the directors are in a difficult situation to implement these measures. Eventually also the learners seem to have a lack of consciousness on the value of their validated competences.

All respondents signalled that schools, VET and HE institutes but also the stakeholders in practice should do more to make students aware of what they know and what they are able to do.

### 5.5 Greece

Six interviews were conducted with experts in Greece. Five with experts from the educational sector with expertise in a variety of academic fields and NGO's. One administrative assistant of a scientific research centre.

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

The interviewees were all familiar with the three key competences. The experts explained entrepreneurship and sense of initiative as understanding the structure of the economy and the law of supply-demand as decriminalization of profit, not being afraid of taking risks and trying new ideas that involve creativity and innovation, effectively managing ideas and transforming them to product/services which produce value for people and the entrepreneur. This means to know how to develop and craft ideas, how to enhance them, to plan and manage projects in order to achieve business ideas, to communicate and co-operate with the project team members and to promote them via idea pitching in order to identify resources to implement them. Last but not least, some participants underline a very important personal skill: soliciting government aid especially about youth entrepreneurship. Experts describe Civic competences as being a responsible, mindful and skilful active citizen (at both a national and European level) who wants to solve problems effectively through participation in society and having a clear knowledge of their rights and obligations. Furthermore, they mention the importance of being able to co-operate in job or in life with various people from different cultures and backgrounds in order to produce value for all. They explain Learning to Learn competences as skills in relation to learning but also taking advantage of learning about their quality of life, being open to gain new abilities and updating skills they already have, managing the projects of their own learning process, recognizing the value of skills and their continuous enrichment and extension through life, seeking and exploiting opportunities to organize their personal and professional lives. Participants link these three competences with social cohesion, community development, establishment of educational and cultural capital that facilitate equitable participation in the European scene, enhancement of lifelong learning concept, success in informal education, up-to-date knowledge and skills linked to the labour market, competitive in the



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international job market and practically useful to develop creative, critical and innovative spirit.



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### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

Most of the professionals mentioned EU funded programs (Youthpass certificates for Erasmus+ Youth in Action that validates that the participants have acquired these three main competences; Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) was designed to enable people to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing education and training across Europe; Erasmus; Erasmus plus; Creative Europe (the new European Union programme for the cultural and creative sectors); Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training; Comenius for school education, through mobility actions, partnership, language skills, quality in education, pedagogical innovations and school management; Grundtvig for adult education; Within the Erasmus+ Programme Jean Monnet for European integration. Experts stressed the important impact of some NGOs Making specific references to Ergani Centre on enhancing female participation in the workforce and eliminating factors that lead to women's exclusion from the labour market and other NGOs.

Professionals analyse that these competences can be promoted through certain initiatives undertaken by the EU, governments, private entities but following the same guidelines by funding projects which will reward innovative ideas or foster partnerships in the field of the social economy, local or interregional employment. Their main perception is that ICT based initiatives using well-structured and designed LMSs could play major role in promoting these competences. Additionally, they underline the importance of projects based on case studies (experiential education) which promote face to face co-operation using real life problems and materialized in real life conditions. They all regard the youth pass certification and Europass curriculum vitae as good practices.

All the experts are also familiar with such programs in HE and other educational agencies. They strongly believe that these competences should be promoted via well designed curricula at every level of school education—from kindergarten (new generation of people), in vocational education to higher education. Project-based learning is the core learning method for promoting these competences. Furthermore, experts believe that we need to fund actions that enhance the development and application of appropriate methodology for promoting creativity and innovation. In school education we need courses related to problem solving and creative thinking. In vocational education we need to promote critical thinking and innovative entrepreneurship. In HE we need projects promoting innovation and initiatives.

### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

All the professionals use various validation methods for formal and informal purposes. Many aspects are relevant to their professional domain. According to the experts' opinion validation in Greece takes place largely through European Union-funded programs. Validation installs a rather objective evaluation system and introduces quality characteristics in the field of adult education and



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qualifications certification; makes the matrix assembly transparent and the selection of the appropriate employee. Validation and learning are interrelated as through validation knowledge associated with its scope and learning is raised. All of the above underlines that validation concerns every aspect of the learning process (identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning). Furthermore, if someone wants to be an effective trainer then they have to use a validation system. Also the experts noticed that they use some e-learning platforms providing open source courses and giving the participants the opportunity to assess their competences and have their own e-portfolio such as: coursera, Schoox, Europass etc.

### External expertise and support related to validation

The experts agree that there are various approaches to support. Furthermore, they need a well-structured platform for external assessment of competence development and of course a training course on how to use it (it could be embedded into the platform). Secondly, they prefer an education and advisory services package. It is their firm belief that over the course of years there will be more and more know how about LMS. In such a case, they are interested in everything new about assessment of learners, certification, learning technologies, IT tools supporting assessments and/or learners competence management, integrating the assessment/validation in the learning processes and networking good practices.

### Conclusion interviews Greece

The experts derived information about Key competences in LLL from international conferences, adult education certification process, relevant EU documents and scientific literature as by their involvement in relevant programs. According to their opinion key competences refer to the basic skills/abilities necessary for personal fulfillment in the professional field but also in society and should be promoted in every learning environment through projects based on case studies which promote face to face co-operation using real life problems and materialized in real life conditions.

Greece is trying to “build” a validation system based on EU guidance but till now there isn’t any complete and integrated system based on advanced technology. In the future our country needs to establish a long term educational strategy referring to these competences and certain initiatives undertaken by EU, government, private entities by funding projects which will reward innovative ideas or will foster partnerships.

EU funded programs –despite bureaucracy, unequal contribution, expensive results - are important contribution parallel with civic society and private initiatives.

ICT based initiatives using well structured and designed LMSs could play major role in this effort.



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There is no question that experts have a major positive opinion about getting further assistance and support related to validation.





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### 5.6 Italy

Nine experts were interviewed in Italy. The interviewees being composed of academics, private sector representatives and representatives from NGOs. Different partners conducted interviews in Italy, therefore this section will exist of two ‘national’ reports.

#### 5.6.1 Italy I

##### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

The three key competences were relatively well-known among the respondents. Entrepreneurship was mostly defined in terms of business, for example the ability to set up one’s own business, recognize market needs and develop skills accordingly or the ability to turn an idea into a marketable product or service; this entails proactivity and transitioning from an employee mindset to a business-owner attitude. Entrepreneurship was also found to include broader skills, however, such as the capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and react to change.

Civic competences were most strongly associated with: job ethics and a keen sense of duty and responsibility towards society, active participation, construction and reconstruction of society and active citizenship.

Learning to learn is most strongly associated with a willingness to constantly update one’s own knowledge and ability to apply learning outcomes in work settings, an understanding of one’s own strengths and weaknesses and capacity to learn from one’s own mistakes and finally the acquisition of a critical method of study and analysis, and willingness to improve one’s own knowledge and skills.

There is a consensus among the interviewees that these competences are crosscutting and are relevant to the achievement of personal development, success in formal education, career development, job opportunity, and continuing professional development.

##### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

Both the Erasmus programme and NGO-run workshops in schools are mentioned as sites for the acquisition of key competences. The Erasmus programme is extremely useful, as it allows young people to acquire specific and highly professionalising competences, develop advanced linguistic skills and build a professional and personal network of contacts for future career. NGO-run workshops in schools help develop civic competences and active citizenship among youth.



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Respondents' suggestions to promote the acquisition of key competences in the field of formal environment are: enhanced awareness of European, national and regional programmes promoting the acquisition of competences, with particular reference to those supporting start-up creation. And to incentivise students to involve in extracurricular activities such as sports and fine arts to develop self-esteem, team working and cultural sensitiveness. As regard to non-formal settings, volunteering is considered as a useful instrument to develop key competences.

### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

Validation of competences is truly important in the work of a placement officer even if in Italy there is a lack of defined standards and benchmarks. Validation takes place in a very fragmented and random fashion. As a result, in many cases validation becomes just an additional bureaucratic burden. Validation is usually conceived as an ex-post instrument while, it would be more appropriate to consider validation as the starting point for re-designing training programmes to better meet professional development needs. Validation is a pressing issue also in the third sector, with special regard to voluntary work. It has become a key step in the transition from pure voluntary work to career volunteering.

So far, the only way to validate skills were CVs, questionnaires or letters of reference. The E+ project "DesTeVa" (destination e-validation), aims at developing a web platform to give volunteers the opportunity to receive an assessment of the skills acquired during their volunteering experiences. The platform will allow any volunteer to register and upload all relevant certification to create a portfolio describing knowledge, skills and qualification level according to EQF description.

### External expertise and support related to validation

External expertise and support are considered particularly useful. Mainly to support to the assessment of participants/learners, to provide support for certification, to provide external assessment of competence development and to integrate the assessment/validation in the learning processes.

### Conclusion interviews Italy part 1

All respondents are well acquainted with the concept of validation of competences and learning outcomes. In different ways and from different perspectives, all of them perceive this topic as extremely relevant in their respective fields.

The second topic was the most challenging to answer. Some interviewees argued that it would have been better to have the questions in advance so to have more time to think about the answers.



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### 5.6.2 Italy part II

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

The people selected for this step of the project were all expert of entrepreneurship education therefore for them it was not a problem to define the “sense of initiative”. They were also aware of the European concept of key competences and they all agreed on the needs for Europeans to follow learning paths improving all of them. The area were they recognized importance for these competences were: personal development, job opportunity and professional development for those already on the job market. Participants recognized the existence and relevance of non-formal learning as a key model to improve these skills.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

The interviewees were all aware of learning programmes focused on developing the “spirit of initiative” for target groups going from children to adults. However there is a common opinion that there is nothing like a plan on this at country level but several individual initiatives proposed by public or private learning providers.

A common opinion was also that specific professionals would have been needed to work on this area.

The link of these competences with formal learning environment was somehow difficult to develop while there was a common opinion that the most suitable learning environment would have been a non-formal.

Another common opinion is that sooner or later the Italian educational system should take care of this area of learning and so a link would be created between the formal and non formal.

In non-formal area the participants have been able to name different sector: in adult education, in mobility, in European project, voluntary work, in job environment.

#### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

Validation of competences and learning outcomes is for the majority of participant an area which needs more information and with scarce familiarity.

Participants knew some of the EU tools for validation but were not really familiar with their practical use and functionality. A general understanding was shared on the credits system in higher education. Participants declared the need for a connection between learning and validation of competences and outcomes. The majority of them showed interest in the idea of validation for competences developed in non formal learning environment.



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Interviewers were familiar with e-learning platform and MOOC and they all considered it very relevant for their career.

### External expertise and support related to validation

Participants declared their interest in getting more information on validation, in particular they shared the idea that online system would suit better for their area of interest.

The majority of them saw a clear interest in the connection of validation with continuous development in a working environment and in the learning by doing methodology.

### Conclusion interviews Italy part II

Generally speaking key competences are a known topic (with entrepreneurship related one more known for the area the interviewees are coming from) and it is a common idea that they are needed and relevant for the development both personal and professional.

In Italy there are some programs that focus on the development of some of these key competences but they are usually managed in the non formal learning sector. A lack of competencies is perceived among trainers and educators.

Non formal learning is the domain where the participants saw the easiest development of these skills. The validation as a concept is not so known and few knows system for validation of competences outside the common EU tools.

The participants declared interest in having more info and exploring validation tools particularly online.



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### 5.7 Lithuania

Eight interviews were conducted in Lithuania. Six are linked to higher education spread over a variety of academic fields and professions, including the heads of different academic divisions and professors specialised in adult education, informal and non-formal learning. Additionally, two decision makers were interviewed. Different partners conducted interviews in Lithuania, therefore this section will exist of two ‘national’ reports.

#### 5.7.1 Lithuania part I

##### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

Not every professional is familiar with European concept of key competences in lifelong learning (LLL). Interviewees gave definitions that are close to LLL but sometimes not exactly correct. The closest definitions were given on civic competences. Though for the competences of entrepreneurship and sense of initiative was the most difficult to define and definitions were mostly related to doing business, for example “to try business many times and never give up”, “competences to understand the changing business context (e.g. PESTEL), anticipate changes and ready to act to gain benefits”. One of the experienced professionals gave a more precise definition of the competence of entrepreneurship and sense of initiative, e.g. “abilities and skills necessary to adapt to challenges at the workforce market; closely related to sense of ownership”. All key competences were recognised to be of great importance for personal development, career development, job opportunity and continuing professional development because of the followings reasons “they help increase adaptation to societal challenges, also to improve subjective wellbeing”. According to interviewees point of view the least it is important to success in formal education because “in Lithuania ... formal educations asks for knowledge, but not for competences”. It could be summarised that interviewees admit the importance of LLL key competences for personal development and individual and social thriving, but that given definitions sometimes are less than correct.

##### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

There are learning programmes or learning activities that promote the acquisition of these competences in Lithuania. Some of them are developed by universities, some by the private sector and some are developed by professional psychologists. Nevertheless, there is a lack of local professionals to teach/ train all target groups on national level. Different learning programmes and learning activities have different advantages, for example “acquisition of most recent knowledge” in certain field, “people can learn at any suitable time”, “professionally developed learning program, professional teachers/lectures, highly adapted to target groups”, “help people learn resolve conflicts



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in non-violent way”, “wide access for different age groups”. Disadvantages mentioned by interviewees could be summarized in that learning programmes or learning activities cannot reach all interested parties and if this is a university initiative it is not recognised “as a mission to public society”. Disadvantages indicate that learning programmes and learning activities that promote the acquisition of these competences are not developed enough and there is a lack of professionals who could train or teach the competences.

The interviewees’ opinions on the promotion of these competences in formal learning environments vary from “no formalities would increase the level of involvement in LLL”, to “very important”, “These competences are also integrated into degree programs; they are assessed as students’ achievement”. There was no common opinion among interviewees about the issue of promotion in different educational levels. The school education was recognised by all. Though opinions about other levels were different. Some stressed vocational education, others – higher education.

It could be summarised that these competences could be best promoted in informal learning environments and are acquired mainly in the following domains: in adult education, in mobility, voluntary work, at the workplace and in youth organisations.

#### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

The decision makers are less familiar with concept of validation of competences and learning outcomes. It depends on the relevance in their professional field. The most relevant are aspects of professional domain, e.g. “very relevant, because people usually work during the work week, but changes in ... business are very rapid” and aspects of assessment, certification, for example, “– it gives possibility to work in international construction projects”, “mainly personnel certifications / qualifications”. The relevancy in Lithuania was high as stated “very relevant” even if one of interviewees stated “33 higher education institutions provide validation of competences that are acquired in informal learning settings”.

A connection between validation and learning was recognised by interviewees, some however raised the issue that: “concepts should be connected but they are not necessarily”. Most of interviewees connect validation as follows “the validation is made only at the end of trainings”, “use as many simulations or tests in real environments”.

Interviewees are most familiar with open (web-aided) learnings systems such as Moodle, portfolio system and EDX. Most of the interviewees consider this as helpful in their professional practice except for one who claimed that “our training is too specific/small scale”.

#### External expertise and support related to validation

Depending on the interviewee’s professional experience they could be interested in getting assistance



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and support. Some of them already have the system; some of them would not be interested and for others all service (external assessment, consultancy, training/workshop) would be relevant.

Most of professionals would be interested in following fields of expertise: learning technologies, IT-tools supporting assessments and/or learner's competence management.

### Conclusion interviews Lithuania part I

Interviewers admit the importance of LLL key competences for personal development and individual and social thriving.

It was indicated that learning programmes and learning activities that promote the acquisition of these competences are not developed enough and lack for professionals who could train or teach to gain the competences.

Because there was not common opinion of interviewers on promotion in different educational levels it could prove the need of promotion of LLL key competences. The promotion in informal learning environment were important for all domains, especially in in adult education, in mobility, voluntary work, at the workplace, in youth cations.

The lack of cooperation with formal educational institutions is one of the reasons of poor development of validation of key competences of LLL.

Depending on the field of interviewers they would be interested in getting assistance and support, especially in these fields of expertise: learning technologies, IT-tools supporting assessments and/or learner's competence management.





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### 5.7.2 Lithuania part II

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

The concept of key competences is quite well familiar in the circles of higher, vocational and adult education in Lithuania. The formal systems of school, higher and vocational require learning outcome descriptions of any course in terms of competences acquired. Adult and non-formal education is also increasingly referring to the competence-based learning. Competencies of learning to learn, civic competence and entrepreneurship are important to all spheres of human life.

Educators and education policy makers emphasize the importance of gaining learning to learn competences as early as in pre-school education establishments and later – in school, to equip individuals learning skills necessary for their lifelong learning.

Entrepreneurship is one of those key competencies that has received the most attention since 2000 when Memorandum on Lifelong Learning has outlined key skills for life and employment. This is partly due to the fact that it was especially needed after Lithuania's shift from occupational planned economy to market economy.

Civic competencies are also very important and are gaining increasing attention through different non-formal education programs for all age groups. The notions of social responsibility, volunteering and active community spirit are gaining more support, but are still rather fragile in the Lithuanian society.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

The gaining of civic, learning to learn and entrepreneurship skills is possible through different NGOs: civic organizations as well as non-formal clubs, e.g., senior clubs that may organize socially responsible activities and volunteering. This is especially to be said of a civic competence.

There is potential to use more after-school education to boost not only subject oriented learning but also supporting competencies for social and civic participation. This is not to say that there is no civic competence education at all, but to indicate that subject oriented education should not be overestimated in regards to social and civic competences. Lithuanian children, youth and adults need development of social, civic and entrepreneurial skills be free individuals for a free society. There is still some negative heritage from the occupational past that needs to be overcome by education of non-formal competencies.

Currently the development of these competencies mostly rely on non-formal sector, whereas the possibilities of formal education – school, vocational and higher education need to be further developed as well. However, certain secondary schools take systematic steps to develop learning to





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learn competences, there are non-formal adult education programs to boost learning to learn. Entrepreneurship is more and more often being integrated into subject teaching.

### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

University students gain non-formal competences in their studies through academic mobility, participation in different clubs (teams, groups, ensembles, etc.), but the level of their up-take depends on the students themselves.

Individual institutions (some universities, colleges) practice validation of non-formal competencies gained in non-formal environments or practical training. However, no mainstream practice is known. Usually if validation of non-formal competencies exists it is usually related to some formal competences, e.g., client orientation skills. Otherwise, these are random projects that relate to validation of non-formal competences. However, nothing formal or systematic is functioning in terms of validation of non-formal competences in Lithuania.

### External expertise and support related to validation

Learning process connection to the processes of validation would be very useful and functional, especially if it were in any way programmed through virtual learning environments or learning management systems.

### Conclusion interviews Lithuania

The development of civic, entrepreneurship and learning to learn competences is very important for Lithuania, but they are developed mostly in unregulated manner and through non-formal sector. Development of entrepreneurship is more coordinated in school education. Some secondary schools integrate development of these skills in subject programs. The potential of after school education may be more used to develop the civic, entrepreneurship and learning to learn competences and not just subject training (e.g., math skills, etc.). In higher and vocational education these skills are being developed but their validation is usually related to formal competences. There is no comprehensive and functioning validation of civic, entrepreneurship and learning to learn competences, just single project-based initiatives.



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### 5.8 Portugal

Four experts working in the educational sector in Portugal were interviewed.

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

The European concept of key competences in lifelong learning in Portugal is disseminated by Cedefop and ANQEP, in two of the interviews some references were made to the European key competences but not very extensively. New opportunities centres use national references for the competence validation.

Related to the PROMOTE competences, it was mentioned that entrepreneurship and sense of initiative as to do with the way with which someone deals with worries and goals. It is specially related with an attitude through life of taking risks and pursuing fulfilment, well-being and being motivated to grow.

Related to civic competences it was mentioned that it implies morality, responsibility, social awareness, and other abilities, attitudes or behaviours related to society, in general, and the respect for others in specific. Learning to learn implies two complementary aspects, an attitude that enables someone to be constantly in contact with the world and also being aware of what is needed to be integrated with the surrounding reality, being proactive and curious in the search for new answers and new knowledge with some flexibility to accept the learning needs and to think about new information or new methods.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

In the New Opportunities Centres many activities were planned and developed for the acquisition of the competences that the learners were missing. For example, research abilities, working with a computer when preparing their portfolio and presentation, communication skills and autonomy in learning.

Outside the mentioned program there are many short courses that promote competence acquisition, for example directed at entrepreneurship, in HE and also in adult learning. There are also some few actions and/or programmes related to learning to learn, namely in higher education institutions. There are also some actions for the unemployed, but it is hard to say if the learners are really interested in lifelong learning or are at these training sessions only because they have to. Besides those, every context has the potential to be a learning environment, especially in the case of transversal competences. Everything learned can be applied in different contexts, due to the human ability to reason and connect knew and different knowledge. Some forms of competence acquisition are informal, through voluntary civic activities, participation in non-profit associations, in the



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organisation of events, gamification, individual coaching, participating in sports and other activities involving team work, etc.

#### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

In all interviews some familiarity with the concept of validation was mentioned. The person with experience in the new opportunities centres mentioned that her work was to help the candidates to prepare the documentation for validation within the national reference system. Several people mentioned the potential difficulty of developing a European-wide validation method applied to transversal competences considering the cultural differences across the continent. Although it was considered extremely important to develop some kind of system, even a simple one, that could give value to all the different learned competences obtained in training, in curricular programs, but also in informal context. It was also mentioned that: “The industrial age brought us the industrial school – the same for everyone, and now we are at a new stage of human development, where everyone can search in the internet and easily accumulate some knowledge. The learning paradigm has to change and adapt to this new reality, setting the competences as the main training goal, and not the knowledge by itself. Thus, all of this is essential to the future of mankind, and the sooner we adapt to this new conditions, the faster we can grow and adapt”.

#### External expertise and support related to validation

Generally in interviews people seem interested to cooperate and willing to know more about the possibility to have a good validation of transversal competences, considering it, nevertheless, a difficult process. In one case the person is working directly with transversal competence development and showed also interest in the integration of the validation in the learning process, stating that:

“I’m interested in collaborating in: support to assessment of participants / learners; Human resources development, continuing professional development and/or career development; Integrating the assessment/validation in the learning processes; or any other aspect of competence development and assessment.”

#### Summary Portugal

As conclusion it may be stated that in Portugal the New Opportunities program already allowed some validation and certification of non-formal learning, nevertheless that validation used a national referential and not an European one, and was certified in formal learning levels.

It was also clear that the validation of transversal competences and their development is an important issue, for instance for job selection purposes, but there is not much practice in this kind of validation and not much tools for it.

Finally the interviewed people showed some interest in the development of validation tools and



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processes essentially for transversal competences.

### 5.9 The United Kingdom

As part of the interview process four in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from the United Kingdom. Two of the interviewees were the participants of the previous EDUCCKATE project and the other two were the professionals whose work involved mentoring and assessing the informal/non-formal learning processes.

#### European concept of key competences in lifelong learning

All interviewees informed us that they were aware of the idea of key competences in lifelong learning. All were able to explain the three key competences, although in varying degree of comprehensiveness. The entrepreneurship and sense of initiative was the easiest one for all to explain. Its connection with creativity and seeing opportunities was particularly highlighted. One of the respondents pointed out that entrepreneurial competences could be useful in social life too.

The civic competences were very clear to two of the respondents, while the other two had some hesitation in pinpointing its exact meaning. Nevertheless, all of them demonstrated understanding of the civic competences in general. The learning to learn competences were explained as willingness to learn new things and in ways and as the process of being able to learn effectively.

The relevance of the key competences in personal development was important because, as one interviewee pointed out, it helped to become more satisfied and accomplished as a person. It was also considered relevant to receive externally validated certification that will be formally recognised by third parties, and the competences were expected to be important for progression within the workplace. All agreed that these competences should be absolutely critical in the job recruitment process – employers and recruiters should be able to use them to assess the suitability of candidates for jobs. As one said, the professionals should hold responsibility for their own CPD (continuing professional development) – and the key competences are ideal tools for structuring CPD planning, activity and recording. It was also highlighted that these competences are important to show young people that there are multiple career paths out there and open their horizons to different opportunities to develop their own ideas; it promotes a different way of thinking since job descriptions are no longer clear-cut and employers are looking for independent, initiative-taking employees.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

Two of the interviewees were very familiar with previous EDUCCKATE programme and they discussed the importance of the mentored internships and the significance of UCL Enterprise



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Bootcamp for promoting acquisition of the key competences in their experience. Two other interviewees were well aware of different schemes under the Erasmus+ and other European projects and they were able to describe much more varied and lengthy learning curve.

First two respondents with EDUCCKATE experience give slightly different views. One said that the goals of EDUCCKATE were unclear to start with and that it sounds as promoting very ‘European’ competences that were unfamiliar to people raised in the UK. Its only advantage seemed to be for business and entrepreneurship and the approaches to learning was provided in later stages. The other responded said that EDUCCKATE’s selection of smaller businesses was an advantage as it provided significantly different places where learning took place. The main advantage was that students not only learn about the competences, but also put them in practice and gain work experience at the same time. Both said that the experience was very valuable for finding future employment and both regretted that these projects were of limited availability for the students.

Two other respondents with wider European knowledge saw clear advantages of large European-wide projects (such as PROMOTE) that bring together European participants/expertise. Disadvantage – quality of learning experiences, and certification of those experiences, can be variable. Both believed that the assessment of competences can be seamlessly integrated into learning programmes for vocational education, and should be done so throughout VET. One considered that it was difficult for these competences to be incorporated into HE, as many HE educators do not see this as their role – they are guardians of academic knowledge, passing on knowledge rather than competences.

All agreed that the competences can be blended into adult learning opportunities and could be explicitly set out in work contracts and implicit in all professional activity in the workplace. Internships should be about learning about the world of work and while trainees should be working towards VET certification of their technical skills, they should be developing their competences simultaneously.

All were in favour of turning the competences from abstract concepts to concrete examples in order to make it more understandable and of making internships more wide-spread.

#### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

All were familiar with the concept of validation, both in its formal and informal purpose forms. One respondent highlighted that the validation was overly relevant in her current position, and as being very relevant in the UK as a whole. The other respondent was supportive of formalising and certifying the competences more rigorously, although the competences were not formally recognised



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in his current job and he did not see the competence validation being a big development in the UK. The third responded with the opinion that the validation and learning can be seen as two completely separate concepts if you tie the former to informal learning and the later to formal learning. However, while engaged in informal learning, for example job training in an apprenticeship one can learn valuable information and while engaged in formal education such as a Master degree one can learn practical things such as lab work and writing skills. By going through a validation process one can identify what skills and formal knowledge you have acquired through your work placement or course. This respondent also was experienced in Level5 and said that, although it helps identifying and rating the competences acquired, it is quite complicated and can be weary. The respondent thought that the validation process through a workshop or other exercise could be much more personable and productive, although this is more labour intensive. It's important to note, however, that LEVEL5 is supposed to be integrated in a workshop and not just put at the end of a learning experience.

For two respondent learning and validation definitely were connected concepts and they suggested tying them together through competence testing. They both knew learning systems connected with validation, but one of them thought that they were under-used. One mentioned that these systems would help professional practice, but they would encounter significant amounts of resistance. One respondent very interestingly mentioned that even if people are not familiar with the concept, they already practice validation in everyday life or work. She regretted that the focus of many employers, when recruiting new staff, is on the formal qualifications more than the practical competences.

### External expertise and support related to validation

Two of the respondents said that, at the moment, they did not require any assistance due to the character of their work. But if they needed, they said they would be interested in trainings for continuing professional development that would encompass the informal learning and the subsequent validation. One respondent said that a training or workshop can be very informative or a mentor in the work place can help with developing the competences further. She was interested in support necessary for certification and in support for understanding the continuing professional development better. She also highlighted that these skills are often desired by the employer or the industry, but are for some reason difficult to obtain i.e. costly courses, unfunded internships etc. There is the expectation that one would learn through experience and that she would be interested in support programmes that would help giving people access to these competences. The fourth respondent said that he is interested to get support in order to improve his understanding of new ways of validation. He also said that from his experience he knew how important it is to gain the skills and competences one needs to further his/her career.



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What was clear from the interviews is that the need for learning the key competences is acknowledged, but the difficulties with implementing it were also highlighted quite clearly. All were in favour of integrating the assessment/validation in the learning processes. But the validation methods/tools need to be refined further and explained better in order to make them more acceptable. Two respondents with LEVEL5 experience both said they encountered difficulties in using it in previous projects. Three respondents explicitly supported European dimension to the process; they wanted to share experiences with mainland Europe and learn from them where necessary.

### Conclusion interviews UK

The opinions of the interviewees were very much dictated by their experiences in the areas of informal learning and validation. The notes were taken during all four interviews and more detailed feedback could be provided if necessary. All 4 respondents could be contacted for further discussions and all would be kept informed regarding the developments of PROMOTE.

What was clear from the interviews is that the need for the learning the key competences is acknowledged, but the difficulties with implementing it was also highlighted quite clearly. All were in favour of integrating the assessment/validation in the learning processes. But the validation methods/tools need to be refined further and explained better in order to make them more acceptable. Two respondents with LEVEL5 experience both said they experienced difficulties in using it in previous project.

Three respondents explicitly supported European dimension to the process; they wanted to share experiences with mainland Europe and learn from them where necessary.







### 5.10 Other European cases

Additionally, four experts working in higher education on questions of lifelong learning and the validation of key competences from different European countries (The Netherlands, Denmark, France and Portugal) were interviewed.

#### European concept of key competences in Lifelong learning

All the interviewees possess a certain familiarity with the three competences. All of them could provide a definition. Two of the interviewees have worked for many years in lifelong learning, where these competences are core concepts and subjects. One of the interviewees mentioned that these competences (especially entrepreneurship) are part of his company's values and are regularly used to inspire people to go for lifelong learning. One of the interviewees heard about these competences from the media, with regard to the present economic and social situation, especially the high unemployment rate of young people and adults, but also heard about them on the occasion of professional conferences or in relation with university access degree.

Entrepreneurship and sense of initiative are seen as the ability of developing new ideas and actions, they are linked to innovation, creativity, risk-taking, autonomy and self-confidence. Entrepreneurship is, among the three competences, the one which the respondents have more direct experience and familiarity with.

Civic competences are perceived as those competences needed to behave and take responsibility as a full member of society. They refer to the participation in society and to the possession of knowledge about society, policy and culture, as well as to the ethical and moral behaviour sphere. Learning to learn is seen as the ability to learn and organise one's own learning – individually, in groups and in all types of relations relevant for learning. It is also defined as the ability to take responsibility for learning in contexts. The Dutch interviewee declared that his company is presently working on the learning to learn competence, because they have a lot of people who are stuck in one position and cannot go further in education, so they are going to start a programme in January to engage them and make them aware of the importance of learning with the company, not to be left behind.

The three competences are considered relevant for several reasons. They are seen as important in a globalised world where lifelong learning is more and more a reality and a need for individuals, groups and society. They are seen as important in a societal perspective, including citizenship aspects and social integration issues. They are key to gather reactivity, high adaptation capacity and curiosity. In general, all the interviewees agree in considering the three competences important for all the aspects suggested: personal development, success in formal education, career development, job opportunities and continuing professional development.

All the respondents consider the three competences important in formal learning environments, in the



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different domain of school education, vocational education and higher education. Validation of prior learning was indicated as a way to promote the competences in formal learning environments.

The three competences are unanimously considered important in informal learning environments, in all the sub-domains suggested in the question. The interviewee from the Netherlands explained that every person who is in adult education and also youth education must realize the importance of learning to learn. If we look at voluntary work, two important components and skills to carry out effective voluntary work are civic and social competences and entrepreneurship. Looking at internships and traineeships, it is also very important that interns and trainees have social and civic competences, but also learning to learn and entrepreneurship.

#### Learning programmes and activities that promote the acquisition of the PROMOTE competences

The respondents agreed on the need of promoting these competences both in formal and informal learning environments. As for formal learning environments, the interviewee from Portugal said this could be done through flexibility and experimentation (school education), through training of tutors to provide the desired outcomes (vocational education), through problem-based and team work (higher education). As for how to promote these competences in rather informal learning environments, this could be done through social interaction (adult education), through cultural immersion and intellectual challenges (mobility), and through learning contracts and specific trainers (at the workplace, internships and traineeships).

#### Validation of competences and learning outcomes

All the four interviewees possess a certain familiarity with validation, two of them stating they mainly have familiarity with validation for formal purposes. For the respondent from Danish, validation is the core subject in her work as researcher and responsible for development activities in the area. The respondent from the Netherlands is also very familiar with validation since he also works as an assessor, assessing people's civic and entrepreneurship competences, and giving feedback on how to acquire more competences. The respondent from France stated that her University's lifelong learning service manage around 100 trainees/a year in recognition of prior learning process that end with a validation/diploma which has a real value on the job market.

Validation is very relevant in the professional field of the Danish respondent, and has been on the agenda at policy level in Denmark since 2000, both at national and regional level, in the educational field and in the third sector. In some institutions, validation is very developed and organised, while in others is still emerging or under development. In France, according to a recent law on vocational training, diplomas have to be declined in competences. There are already seventy diplomas declined in competences. The respondent from Portugal declared that in his professional domain (higher





education), validation is presently relevant for research purposes only.

Three of the interviewees highlighted the existence of a strong connection between validation and formal and informal learning. The respondent from the Netherlands still sees them as two different concepts, explaining that in the company he works for it is still too early to see them as closely connected, although in the future they might be. He does not see how validation and learning arrangements could be linked, at the moment. Right now, the company proceeds like this: they do learning arrangements and then afterwards do the validation of them for the learning outcomes. The respondent from Portugal declared that validation and learning arrangements can be connected if learning arrangements are clearly specified and accredited.

As for the existence or familiarity with open (web-aided) learning systems (e.g. LMS, e-portfolios etc.) that connect with validation (assessment and evidencing), the respondent from France mentioned a master degree (called SIFA, *Stratégie et Ingénierie en Formation des Adultes*), in which students or trainees have a e-portfolio, Mahara system, which is a link between trainees, the enterprise and the university, and which can be considered like a part of the assessment. The respondent from the Netherlands explained that his company has a learning management system (LMS), although they do not use e-portfolio, but only paper portfolios. They do a lot of e-learning, but with no link to validation. The introduction of learning tools that connect with validation are considered by the Dutch respondent as potentially helpful in his professional practice, although maybe in the next future. Finally, the respondent from Portugal mentioned the knowledge and use of Moodle with badges and considers the use of this type of learning system essential in his professional practice.

#### External expertise and support related to validation

The interviewee from France, expressed interest in service in the field of external assessment of competence development, consultancy, training and workshops. Support was welcome in the subjects of human resource development, integrating the validation in the learning processes, IT-tools supporting assessments and support to certification.

The respondent from the Netherlands stated that he would be interested in receiving external expertise, but that he thinks they already have some available in his company. He also said he thinks that, for the future, there could be some external help for the development of those competences and for translating them into education (by training or others). He expressed this priority order: human resources development, continuing professional development and/or career development, learning technologies,

IT-tools supporting assessments and learners' competence management.

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Finally, the interviewee from Portugal said he would be interested in getting assistance in terms of external assessment of competence development, consultancy, and training/workshops. As for the field of expertise/support he would be interested in support to assessment of participants, support to certification, human resources development, continuing professional development and/or career development and integrating the validation in the learning processes.



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### 5.11 Conclusion interviews

To substantiate the results from the questionnaire in-depth expert interviews were carried out within the framework of the PROMOTE project. Each partner country of the PROMOTE project interviewed a minimum of three (maximum of 10) stakeholders, which resulted in interviewed experts from 12 European member states.

Throughout Europe there seems to be a basic, generalized knowledge of the three key competences: entrepreneurship, learning-to-learn and civic competences. What, however, was found to be lacking was the ability to accurately expand upon and define these competences.

The interviews revealed that, within Europe, there are different understandings and connotations of central terms like “competence”, “entrepreneurship” or the concept of key competences. Here, also differences among professions became obvious. For example, there seems to be a divide between interviewees who define entrepreneurship in a more narrow way, mainly associating it with business practices, and those who take a broader view, interpreting it more strongly in terms of taking initiative and innovating.

All PROMOTE key competences are considered as crucial for the development of individuals, from personal to professional development. Learning to learn competences were valued most important in general, while entrepreneurship is considered essential for professional development and active Citizenship is most important for private life.

There seems to be no consensus on which areas of development are promoted by which key competences. This is an indicator that knowledge on competences needs to be systematized from the fragmented state it is in now.

The need for validation is almost universally recognized by interviewees. Support is welcomed by most interviewees. Ways, and particularly tools, to validate key competences are not well-known. There is a strong demand for the diffusion of knowledge on these issues across Europe. And thus a clear need for a project such as PROMOTE.





## 6 Conclusion survey

The PROMOTE project aims at promoting and validating social, personal and organisational key competences such as entrepreneurship, civic competences and learning to learn with the help of an innovative, self-directed learning approach at the interface of higher education and business.

In the framework of the PROMOTE project a comprehensive survey was carried out covering a large number of countries within Europe. The total survey consisted of three parts: (1) a desk research for every partner country involved, (2) an online survey with 477 respondents and (3) in depth expert interviews with European experts regarding the topic of validating informal and non-formal learning.

From the desk research we draw the conclusion that the validation of informal and non-formal learning is still in an initial stage in most European member states even though a development on awareness and knowledge on the approaches for VINFL can be identified.

The questionnaire reached 477 European stakeholders working in the field of education and decision makers. Most respondents were educational professionals (<70%), which has an influence on the results of the questionnaire. The three competences – entrepreneurship, civic competences and learning to learn – are well-known among the respondents. Furthermore, these key competences are considered to be important in most professional and life contexts. However tools for validating these key competences are not well known. The questionnaire allows us to expand on which sub-competences are regarded as most important for certain key-competences. For entrepreneurship the most important sub-competences are communication, leadership, creativity, teamwork and networking; for civic competences these are communication, intercultural communication, critical thinking, teamwork, conflict management; and for learning-to-learn the most important sub-competences are critical thinking, autonomy, reflection, knowledge management and problem solving.

From the questionnaire we can conclude that the validation of informal and non-formal learning is still in an initial stage in most European member states even though a development of awareness and knowledge on the approaches for VINFL can be identified.

To substantiate the results from the questionnaire, expert interviews were carried out. Each partner country of the PROMOTE project interviewed a minimum of three (maximum of 10) stakeholders, which resulted in interviewed experts from 12 European member states. The interviews revealed that (despite the results of the online questionnaire) there are different understandings and connotations of central terms like “competence”, “entrepreneurship” or the concept of key competences. All PROMOTE key competences are considered as crucial for the development of individuals, from

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personal to professional development. The need for validation is almost universally recognized by interviewees. Support is welcomed by most interviewees. Ways, and particularly tools, to validate key competences are not well-known.

Formal education is interestingly preferred as a site for learning key competences in the questionnaire, something which is contradicted in the interview section and which could be ascribed to the predominance of educational experts in the questionnaire sample.

From the whole survey we can conclude that there is a strong demand for the diffusion of knowledge on the validation of informal and non-formal learning across Europe. This is exactly where PROMOTE stands for: promoting and validating key competences in mobility and traineeships in Europe.





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