

VALIDATION OF
NON-FORMAL
AND INFORMAL
LEARNING
IN SLOVENIA

One-off Report

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1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING AND ACQUISITION OF FORMAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS – THE NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM.....	6
2.1 Purpose, history and legal regulations of the NVQ system.....	6
2.2 Placement of the NVQ system in the Slovenian Qualifications framework and national bases for the implementation of the system	6
2.3 Organisational and legal arrangements of the NVQ system.....	7
2.4 NVQ verification and validation procedure and the roles of stakeholders in the procedure.....	8
2.4.1 NVQ verification and validation procedure	8
2.4.2 Methods and tools for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge in the NVQ system.....	9
2.4.3 Competences and professional qualifications of persons carrying out validation procedures	10
2.5 NVQ system funding.....	11
2.6 Effects of the NVQ system	11
2.7 Quality assurance in the NVQ system.....	15
2.7.1 Institutions competent for the monitoring and supervision of NVQ verification and validation procedures.....	17
3. VALIDATION OF NON- FORMAL LEARNING IN FORMAL EDUCATION ...	18
3.1 The purpose of recognition in formal education	18
3.2 Legal grounds	18
4. VALIDATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF PERSONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION WITH THE AIM OF FURTHER INTEGRATION INTO EDUCATION	23
4.1 Purpose	23
4.2 Legal grounds	23
5. SKILLS AUDIT	25
5.1 Purpose	25
5.2 Projects and activities	25
6. CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES.....	28

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2012, the Council of the European Union adopted the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Based on this Recommendation, the Council calls upon member states to enable, no later than 2018, their citizens to have the knowledge, skills and competences they acquired outside of formal education systems validated and assessed by having in place arrangements/a system for the validation of non-formal and informal knowledge, which is to be linked with national qualifications frameworks. Citizens should have an opportunity to obtain full or part qualification based on validated skills and competences acquired outside of formal education systems.

The main purpose of the education system in Slovenia is to provide equal access to education to each citizen and enable everyone to achieve the highest possible level of education. We provide free of charge primary and secondary education to all our citizens and maintain a higher education system accessible to all.

According to the Statistical Office of Slovenia, on 1st January 2020 the average age in Slovenia was 43.5 years. In 2019, 88.8% of the population of Slovenia in the age group of 25 and 64 had completed at least secondary school, which testifies to a favorable educational structure. The wage system in Slovenia is based on the acquired level of education, namely the salary level in the economic sectors that are tied to collective agreements and in the public sector, is tied to the acquired level of education.

The system of validation of non-formally and in-formally acquired knowledge, which has been established in Slovenia, reflects current demographic and economic factors and builds upon the results of the educational system.

In Slovenia, two regulated routes or two fundamental purposes of recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning have been established, namely in order to enable individuals to engage further in formal education (to continue suspended education or pursue it at higher levels, etc.), and to recognise professional competences (national vocational qualifications system) in the labour market.

People learn in a number of ways, therefore the formal education system in Slovenia has adapted to this fact, enabling individuals to obtain the recognition of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired through other

forms of learning. At the systemic level, upon enrolling in vocational and technical upper secondary, tertiary short-cycle vocational schools, the possibility has been introduced of recognising non-formally and informally acquired knowledge gained in various manners, either through experience from everyday practice or from courses, workshops, seminars and the like.

From the point of view of systemic possibilities for the implementation of recognition, there are two types of applicable standards based on which recognition can be implemented. Occupational standards that abide by the logic of employment (what is it that a person must know to carry out, and how to do it) and educational (study) standards based on the logic of the education system (what is it that an individual must learn, how to learn it and how to assess the content and quality of the learning).

In the recognition of professional knowledge, occupational standards have a bridging role between the formal and non-formal system. The basis for the development of occupational standards are the initiatives prepared by interested legal entities (chambers, employers' associations, professional/trade associations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions and competent ministries). The drafting of the occupational standard involves the participation of employers' and employees' organisations, competent ministries and schools. In accordance with national legislation, social partnership plays major role in the process of development and adoption of occupational standards.

With this Report, we aim to present the current situation in Slovenia in the field of validating non-formally and informally acquired knowledge. In 2018, the new Adult Education Act was adopted, which regulates public interest in the field of adult education and the achievement of public interest in the field of adult education programmes and activities in the field of adult education. One of such activities is counselling in adult education, which is established as a public service. The Guidelines for the performance of counselling in adult education to be carried out as a public service (2020), which are currently being drafted, will – once adopted by the Council of Experts for Adult Education – provide for expert guidance for the implementation of counselling on adult education in practice. The Guidelines define

that counselling involves three fields, one of which is counselling in the identification and documenting of adults' knowledge and skills. The Guidelines also define that at the identification stage, the adults themselves, in cooperation with the counsellors, determine and become aware of which knowledge and skills they already possess that they acquired through non-formal and informal routes towards education and learning. At the documenting stage, they will proceed – again in cooperation with the counsellors – to compiling and organising the documentation (certificates and other relevant documents) on their learning results achieved through the various pathways towards education and learning.

An important part of recognising non-formal knowledge in the Republic of Slovenia is the system of national vocational qualifications, which gives adults the opportunity to obtain a recognised certificate attesting to national vocational qualifications (hereinafter: NVQs); therefore, we described the NVQ system in the first part of the Report (its history, purpose, legal grounds, financing, effects, etc.).

We then present the validation of non-formal knowledge in formal education. We have included all levels and forms of formal education from basic school to higher education levels. This presentation details how

the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge is regulated and the underlying legal grounds.

In addition to the possibilities for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge for the citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, our aim with this Report was also to present the options available to persons with international protection whose intention is to continue education.

European recommendations highlight certain key principles that member states are expected to take into consideration in establishing a system for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge. In Slovenia, we are doing our best to follow all of these principles and it is our opinion that the process for the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills should follow the same quality assurance principles and procedures for all candidates irrespective of the purpose of the recognition. It should be implemented in a transparent and solid manner by suitably qualified experts following predetermined steps (informing, counselling, documenting and recognition) in order to ensure the comparability of processes as well as trust in the system and the results of the process.



2. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING AND ACQUISITION OF FORMAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS – THE NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

2.1 Purpose, history and legal regulations of the NVQ system

The NVQ system is based on the recognition and certification of the results of non-formal and informal learning. Its fundamental purpose is to take into consideration all of the competences that an individual has acquired in various learning environments, and to recognise their economic and social value. The latter should enable such an individual to obtain formal vocational qualification, namely a publicly recognised document (NVQ certificate), which is transferrable to various working environments. This should enable greater mobility of workers between sectors and companies, on the national and international levels alike. At the same time, this should also allow for better functional adaptability of employees and advancement at the same level of education. That said, the NVQ system does not grant individuals a level of education or school leaving certificate, degree or title, which can only be acquired by completing publicly valid education or study programmes adopted in accordance with the acts and other rules governing vocational, professional and higher education.

NVQs can be obtained by adults who are at least 18 years of age and have acquired various vocational competences throughout their life but did not have them validated or recognised; or wish to be promoted in their professional career without obtaining a higher level of professional education or completing a formal education programme. Exceptionally, NVQs can also be obtained by individuals under 18 years of age who no longer have the status of an apprentice but have gained relevant work experience.

In 1994, the ministry responsible for labour promoted a project entitled Development and Implementation of the Certificate System; a study was also carried out and a proposal of the model to identify and certify vocational qualifications was drawn up. The objective of the project was to develop a procedure to obtain certificates for vocational competences and put it into practice. The ministry responsible for labour first implemented the processes for the certification of vocational qualifications at the national level in 1999 (when no act that would govern this field was yet in force) by issuing the Rules

on the procedure for acquiring vocational qualifications. Based on the aforementioned Rules and the Employment and Insurance Against Unemployment Act of 1997, the ministry sought to enable industrial workers without formal qualifications who were becoming unemployed due to the restructuring of the economy to formally validate their non-formally acquired knowledge and skills as well the knowledge gathered through training for the labour market.

At the joint initiative of the ministry responsible for labour and of the ministry responsible for education, the Phare MOCCA project was carried out in 1999–2000. The project included, among other things, the elaboration of a certification system. The participation in the project provided the creators of the NVQ project with important expert support in the development of this system. The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training was the project operator and coordinator and carried out the following during this period of time: an evaluation study of pilot certification projects, studies of the technical infrastructure of the certificate system, the models for the verification and certification of vocational qualifications and comparative overviews of certification arrangements in the EU – all of which has laid down the foundations for the NVQ system.

2.2 Placement of the NVQ system in the Slovenian Qualifications framework and national bases for the implementation of the system

The Slovenian Qualifications Framework is a unified system of qualifications in Slovenia for the classification of qualifications into levels with regard to learning outcomes. The basis for the Slovenian qualifications framework is the Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act, which entered into force in 2016. The Slovenian Qualifications Framework includes three categories of qualifications, one of them being vocational qualification, demonstrated by an NVQ certificate. The NVQ acquisition system was introduced in 2000 with the National Vocational Qualifications Act, the basic objective of which was to facilitate the

formal recognition of vocational qualifications regardless of the ways or learning environments in which they were acquired.

In Slovenia, vocational qualifications can either be acquired through the formal education system (vocational, technical and higher vocational education), or they can be based on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (the NVQ system). The Vocational Education Act links the two systems by stipulating that occupational (professional) standards are the basis for both routes.

Occupational standards are documents drafted by experts, the representatives of different social partners, such as employers, trade unions, chambers, professional/trade associations and competent ministries. Based on an analysis of jobs and specific tasks, and by taking into consideration the trends of development in the sector, experts prepare occupational standards that determine the content of vocational qualification at a certain level of difficulty and set out the required knowledge, skills and occupational competences that one needs to successfully perform tasks in various work environments.

When a need arises in the labour market for the validation of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills, experts will then draft the NVQ catalogue based on the occupational standard. The NVQ catalogue is a document that serves as the basis for organising and implementing the verification and validation process. The catalogue also lays down the requirements that candidates must meet before they can take part in the NVQ assessment and validation process.

2.3 Organisational and legal arrangements of the NVQ system

Due to the goals pursued by the NVQ system, its key stakeholders are the State, employers and employees' representatives, as well as professional organisations and associations. The fundamental responsibility for the development and promotion of the NVQ lies with the state authorities.

The formal grounds for the implementation of the NVQ system is the National Vocational Qualifications Act, which defines the key stakeholders in the NVQ system.

Below, we present the key stakeholders of the NVQ system and their tasks set out in the National Vocational Qualifications Act.

Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is the central stakeholder of the NVQ system. It is responsible for the National Vocational Qualifications Act, preparation and adoption of the implementing acts and monitoring of the implementation of the system. Other responsibilities of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in the field of the NVQ system include:

- The appointment of members of sectoral committees for occupational standards,
- The adoption and publication of occupational standards and NVQ catalogues,
- The appointment of the list of NVQ verification committee members,
- The appointment of members of the permanent appeal commission.

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI)

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training is the central institution responsible for the performance of research, development, expert and advisory tasks in the field of vocational education and training. The tasks of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training also involve research work and the drafting of background documents for the NVQ system:

- it conducts the processes for the development of occupational standards and NVQ catalogues;
- it manages workgroups appointed by sectoral committees for occupational standards, and provides technical assistance to experts in the development of occupational standards and it monitors the NVQ system and the work of counsellors in the NVQ verification and validation process;
- it promotes the acquisition of vocational qualifications for new vocational and technical fields at all levels of difficulty;
- it promotes the NVQ system in collaboration with partners;
- it maintains and develops the information system within the framework of the National Reference Point (NRP) for Occupational Qualifications (the NRP website);
- it implements the compulsory programme for the training of counsellors in the NVQ verification and validation process.

National Examinations Centre (RIC)

The government of the Republic of Slovenia established the National Examinations Centre (RIC) as the national centre for the external assessment of the knowledge of

pupils, apprentices, students and adults. Its fundamental mission is to develop valid, reliable, fair, efficient and transparent knowledge assessments and examination systems in basic, secondary schools and in adult education. The principal tasks of the National Examination Centre in the fields of the NVQ system are to:

- develop the methodologies and procedures for verification and validation of NVQs;
- organise the training of candidates for NVQ verification committee members;
- monitor and evaluate the quality/efficiency of the training programme for NVQ verification committee candidates and to give the initiatives for its improvements,
- prepare/compile a data base of questions and tasks for verification and validation of NVQs;
- develop the network of verification committees and providers of procedures for verification and validation of NVQs;
- keep a register of providers of procedures for verification and validation of NVQs;
- issue licences to NVQ verification committee members;
- keep records for which it is legally authorised;
- monitor the work of NVQ verification committee members.

Providers of procedures for verification and validation of NVQs

Verification and validation of NVQs and counselling to candidates participating in the process of acquiring NVQs is carried out by providers of procedures for verification and validation of NVQs who are entered in the National Examinations Centre's register of providers.

The procedure may be carried out by inter-company training centres, schools, organisations for adult education and chambers carrying out publicly valid training programmes. To be entered in the register of providers without a public invitation for tenders, they need to fulfil material criteria (as determined in the NVQ catalogue as well as in other acts) and employ an NVQ counsellor.

For fields where there are no registered providers, the providers are selected by the National Examination Centre through a public invitation for tenders, and entered into the register upon the completion of the selection procedure.

The providers carry out administrative-technical work for the NVQ verification committee members, set the NVQ verification and

validation dates (at least once every 12 months) and provide the candidates with an NVQ counsellor, who informs them of the possibilities and conditions for the acquisition of NVQ and provides assistance in the preparation of their personal portfolio.

NVQ committee members for verification and validation

NVQs are assessed and validated by NVQ committee members for verification and validation. The members hold a licence of the National Examination Centre, which they obtain by fulfilling certain professional conditions, e.g. work experience from the field of the qualification they will be assessing, adequate field and level of education, special licences, etc.

Verification and validation is carried out by a three-member panel, which is formed and appointed by the National Examinations Centre for each NVQ verification and validation date.

2.4 NVQ verification and validation procedure and the roles of stakeholders in the procedure

2.4.1 NVQ verification and validation procedure

As part of the NVQ acquisition system, a **procedure involving four stages of assessing and certifying non-formally and informally acquired knowledge** was developed and laid down in the Rules on the method and procedure to the verification and validation of NVQs, ensuring uniformity, transparency and quality of NVQ certificates.

IDENTIFICATION

Identification is the stage at which the candidates by themselves or in cooperation with counsellors identify whether they meet the entry requirements for the acquisition of NVQs, and which skills and knowledge, determined by occupational standards and NVQ catalogues, they have already acquired in various learning environments. Candidates are requested to perform self-analysis or self-assessment, or they may be interviewed. Counsellors can also assist with self-assessment. This facilitates initial identification of previous knowledge that the candidate will demonstrate (or document).

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation is the compilation of evidence of candidates' previous learning and is one of the key stages in the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Evidence can be compiled in various ways. Whether specific knowledge, skills and competences of a candidate are recognised depends on the appropriateness of the evidence. Evidence must be varied and should express candidates' abilities as complexly as possible. Attention is also placed on the diversity and specificity of the activities in which a candidate has gained the required knowledge. Evidence must be authentic, which means that it should express a candidate's actual knowledge and competences, and must unambiguously refer to the candidate.

Candidates compile evidence on their abilities or achievements that they gained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. In addition to obligatory documents attesting to the fulfilment of entry requirements for NVQs, the portfolio also contains various supporting materials proving that a candidate possesses the required knowledge and a solid command of the competences and skills required to achieve occupational standards, and meets the requirements listed in the NVQ catalogue. Based on various evidence in the portfolio which is to be organised systematically in accordance with the content of the occupational standard and the NVQ catalogue, the NVQ verification committee will deliberate on whether to award the certificate or on the method and scope of any additional direct assessment.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment of candidates' non-formal and informal learning is performed by NVQ verification committee, appointed by the National Examinations Centre for each NVQ verification and validation.

The assessment of a candidate's non-formal and informal learning is usually a combination of validation of the portfolio and direct assessment, as a panel will generally establish that candidates' evidence partially conforms with occupational standards, and based on this defines the knowledge, skills and competences to be assessed directly.

Direct assessment of candidates is a process that involves the use of knowledge assessment methods defined in NVQ catalogues to identify the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by candidates in various learning environments. An NVQ catalogue usually determines various combinations of assessment

methods: written test, practical assignments in real work situations or simulated situations, roleplay, product and project presentations. NVQ verification committee must have a good understanding of knowledge assessment methods and be capable of adapting the assessment methods to the type of knowledge to be assessed, and also to adjust them to each candidate's individual requirements, seeing that they bear the responsibility for the quality performance of the procedure.

CERTIFICATION

Certification is the last stage in the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Certification is a procedure enabling a formal recognition of a candidate's knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal or informal knowledge.

An NVQ verification committee may confirm qualification and issue an NVQ certificate based on the validation of evidence attached to a candidate's portfolio, or based on direct assessment successfully completed by a candidate. An NVQ certificate is a public document and can only be issued by a provider of procedures for NVQ verification and validation.

A verification and validation process can only award a full and complete qualification. If an NVQ verification committee finds, based on the assessment of knowledge, that a candidate failed to meet qualification standards, it issues a decree stating that the candidate does not fulfil the conditions for the award of an NVQ certificate. The provider is legally required to send the decree to the candidate within 8 days after completion of the validation procedure. The deadline for appeal is 8 days after the decision is received.

2.4.2 Methods and tools for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge in the NVQ system

The approaches and methods used in the implementation of the procedure for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge can generally be categorised either as descriptive or demonstrative. In the first case, these are methods where an individual describes the experience (specialised or general) he or she has gained thus far, while the second type of methods consists of a practical demonstration of such experience.

These two forms of validation are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine a demonstration relying exclusively on activity without the aid of oral explanation or clarifications. Due to the complexity of previously acquired learning outcomes, a combination of descriptive and demonstrative approaches is encouraged, i.e. the use of the various methods featured in this procedure (portfolio, self-evaluation, interviews, demonstrations, simulations, etc.).

The portfolio is a tool that is being used from the documenting stage to the assessment stage. A portfolio can either be summative or procedural. If intended for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge, it is generally compiled in summative form, given that it summarises all of the competences that a candidate has already acquired to then compare them with the required standard.

Candidates may submit evidence of training and upskilling, proof of attendance of seminars and courses, certificates issued in accordance with the rules regulating the recognition of NVQs, employers' attestations of on-the-job training, attestations of the knowledge acquired and obligations completed in accordance with parts of training programmes, certificates of work experience, reference letters, candidates' own results or goods created, accolades, awards, commendations, specialist articles and other similar evidence. The structure of a portfolio is prescribed and published at the National Reference Point's (NRP) website.

The appropriateness of evidence is judged by the NVQ verification committee in the light of how it meets the criteria: authenticity, topicality, sufficiency and adequacy. In the case where the evidence provided does not warrant full validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, this **requires the implementation of the procedure to directly assess** knowledge. The committee determines the scope, manner and form of assessment that is best suited to the standards applying to the knowledge and skills in question and their intended objectives. The committee then selects the appropriate method or tool for the assessment that will allow it to identify as comprehensively as possible the candidate's knowledge (learning outcomes). The options available for the assessment include, for instance: written test, oral exam, conducted interview, presentation of results or goods (products) created, report, presentation of a paper, essay or project written or prepared for this purpose, provision of service and subsequent defence thereof, demonstration,

roleplay, and similar. An assessor must opt for an appropriate assessment methodology, one that will allow him or her to identify as many of a candidate's learning outcomes as possible, thus being able to gain a comprehensive insight into the candidate's prior learning. The selection of methodology must also take into account each individual's personal traits to enable him or her to perform to the best of his or her abilities.

Documents used in the NVQ verification and validation procedure:

Candidates, providers of verification and validation procedures, and NVQ verification committee members are able to download all documents required in the verification and validation procedure from the website at the URL: nrpslo.org. Assisted by their counsellors, candidates fill out the **application form** to be submitted to the verification and validation provider, clearly indicating that the candidate meets the entry requirements for the acquisition of NVQ as stipulated in the NVQ catalogue. The counsellor prepares a **record of counselling** that must be included in the portfolio along with the **form for the validation of each item of evidence** in the portfolio, a **form for the validation of the entire portfolio, records of direct assessment** of knowledge and skills, depending on the manner of knowledge assessment as stipulated in the NVQ catalogue (written testing, practical assignments, oral presentation, paper/performance of service).

2.4.3 Competences and professional qualifications of persons carrying out validation procedures

Counsellors for the preparation of NVQ portfolios

Counselling is being provided at every stage of the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and is interlinked with informing. Counselling involves providing comprehensive guidance to candidates at every stage of validation. Counsellors must be able to identify the opportunities presented to their candidates to use and make the best of their work experience and non-formal learning in the process of achieving growth in their professional or personal lives. Besides good command of basic communication skills in order to conduct the counselling process to assist candidates with identifying and showcasing their knowledge, skills and competences acquired in various ways, a key

ability in this process is for counsellors to be able to motivate and encourage individuals to play an active role at every stage of the validation and to be aware of their responsibilities as well as to persevere from beginning to end. Counselling helps bring out an individual's hidden skills and knowledge and, also quite often, very personal situations in which they acquired their knowledge, so confidentiality and professionalism must be fundamental aspects of the counselling process to be maintained by counsellors.

In Slovenia, the tasks and the role of counsellor in NVQ verification and validation procedures do not constitute an independent profession; they are included in the tasks assigned to various profiles, such as school counsellors, adult education organisers, teachers of various subjects and many others who work in the field of education, training and adult counselling and who have successfully completed the two-day training programme for counselling work in NVQ system provided by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training. At present, the majority of counsellors in NVQ verification and validation procedures are employees of institutions that operate both as providers of NVQ verification and validation procedures and as providers of preparatory courses for NVQ assessments.

The Adult Education Act of 2018 made it possible to perform counselling activity in adult education as a public service, thus enabling candidates for the acquisition of NVQs to obtain information on possible NVQ and assistance with the compiling of their portfolio for the selected NVQ free of charge at counselling centres for adult education.

NVQ verification committee members

The procedure for obtaining a licence for NVQ verification committee member begins with the National Examinations Centre's public invitation to tender. Tender is published for each NVQ catalogue separately, on the website of the National reference Point (NRP) for Occupational Qualifications and, if needed, also in other media. If a candidate's application meets the formal and professional criteria, he or she is required to attend and complete a verified training programme, provided by the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education. Upon successful completion of the training the National Examination Centre (RIC), issues the licenses to the candidates.

The NVQ verification committee members must renew their licences every four years

by providing proof of their work experience during the preceding four years and continued professional training in the field of qualification they assess as panel members. They must also partake in further training, organised by the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education, RIC and CPI.

2.5 NVQ system funding

The conditions and procedure (including funding) for the acquisition of NVQs are set out in the Vocational Qualifications Act and other regulatory provisions systematically and uniformly governing NVQ acquisition conditions and procedures. The Rules on the method and procedure for the validation of national vocational qualifications lay down the methodology to establish the pricing for the acquisition of NVQs, ensuring that candidates pay for the expenses in accordance with the methodology. The price includes all expenses associated with the verification and validation procedure, including counselling, validation of the portfolio and direct assessment. The expenses of the procedure are paid by the candidate, except in the cases where they are, for instance, covered by the employer or earmarked within the framework of various projects or programmes financed from the European Social Fund or the budget of the Republic of Slovenia (e.g. as part of programmes of active employment policies for unemployed persons, etc.).

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Equal Opportunities funds the activities stipulated in the National Vocational Qualifications Act to ensure the development and implementation of the system which are carried out by the National Examinations Centre, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education, which during the past five years amounted on average to EUR 600,000 per annum. The ministry funds via the Employment Service of Slovenia the activities enabling the acquisition of NVQs for candidates with unemployed or employment seeker status (preparatory courses for assessment or for the NVQ verification and validation procedure), which amounted to a total of EUR 5,638,785 in the past five years.

2.6 Effects of the NVQ system

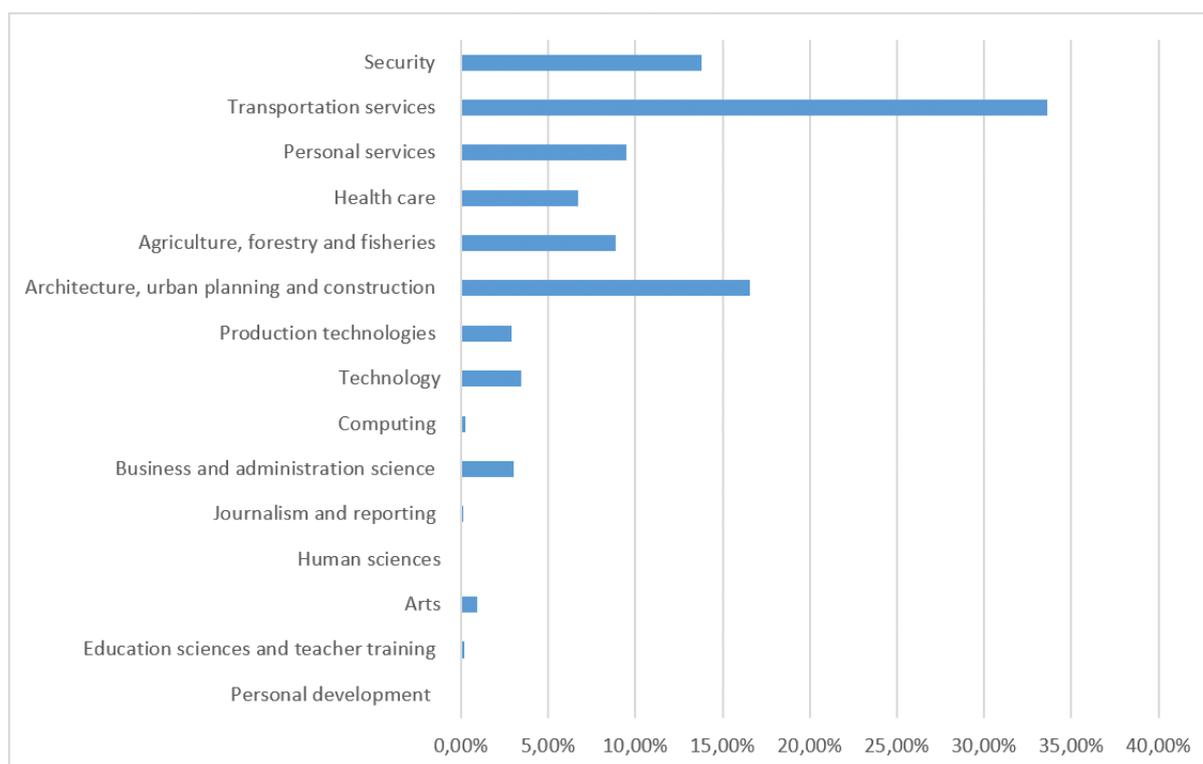
During its existence of almost 20 years, the NVQ system has evolved into a well-established system for the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, which is attested by statistical data presented here below. Since the year 2000 when the system became operational, a total of 98.864

certificates have been awarded. The below table details the numbers of certificates awarded categorised according to year and sector. The figures also point out to the development of new vocational qualifications in various sectors.

Table: The number of certificates awarded according to sector and year

Sector	Year																			
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Personal development																			11	31
Education sciences and teacher training														16	11	64	28	32	3	23
Arts					18	10	37	9	45	78	167	128	111	49	63	45	65	51	22	14
Human sciences					25	7	1	6	1	1	3	2	0	1	2	0	1	5	5	1
Journalism and reporting									39	23	16	15	5	3	3	0	19	16	3	0
Business and administration science								52	46	124	254	226	217	233	314	358	253	281	316	289
Computing						13	16	0	1	5	33	52	44	43	6	7	9	10	0	8
Technology				87	158	32	172	119	138	65	115	109	318	371	558	375	167	198	206	220
Production technologies				88	137	221	149	121	272	117	154	106	93	147	198	238	263	206	120	249
Architecture, urban planning and construction				41	35	26	204	3365	4385	857	722	949	1524	622	545	636	670	556	749	510
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries				72	90	402	148	10	16	180	299	242	208	748	1278	1396	1241	729	859	835
Health care				72	173	96	295	311	425	594	483	668	606	576	468	476	501	408	389	83
Personal services				72	174	774	876	649	777	802	867	669	549	503	486	493	370	322	307	688
Transportation services		38	35	30	1741	2665	3409	3606	6711	11239	90	118	126	178	186	275	510	572	873	852
Security					46	2512	1212	1489	775	979	1283	960	808	399	395	577	610	665	918	
total	0	38	35	462	2551	4292	7819	9460	14345	14860	4182	4567	4761	4298	4517	4758	4674	3996	4528	4721

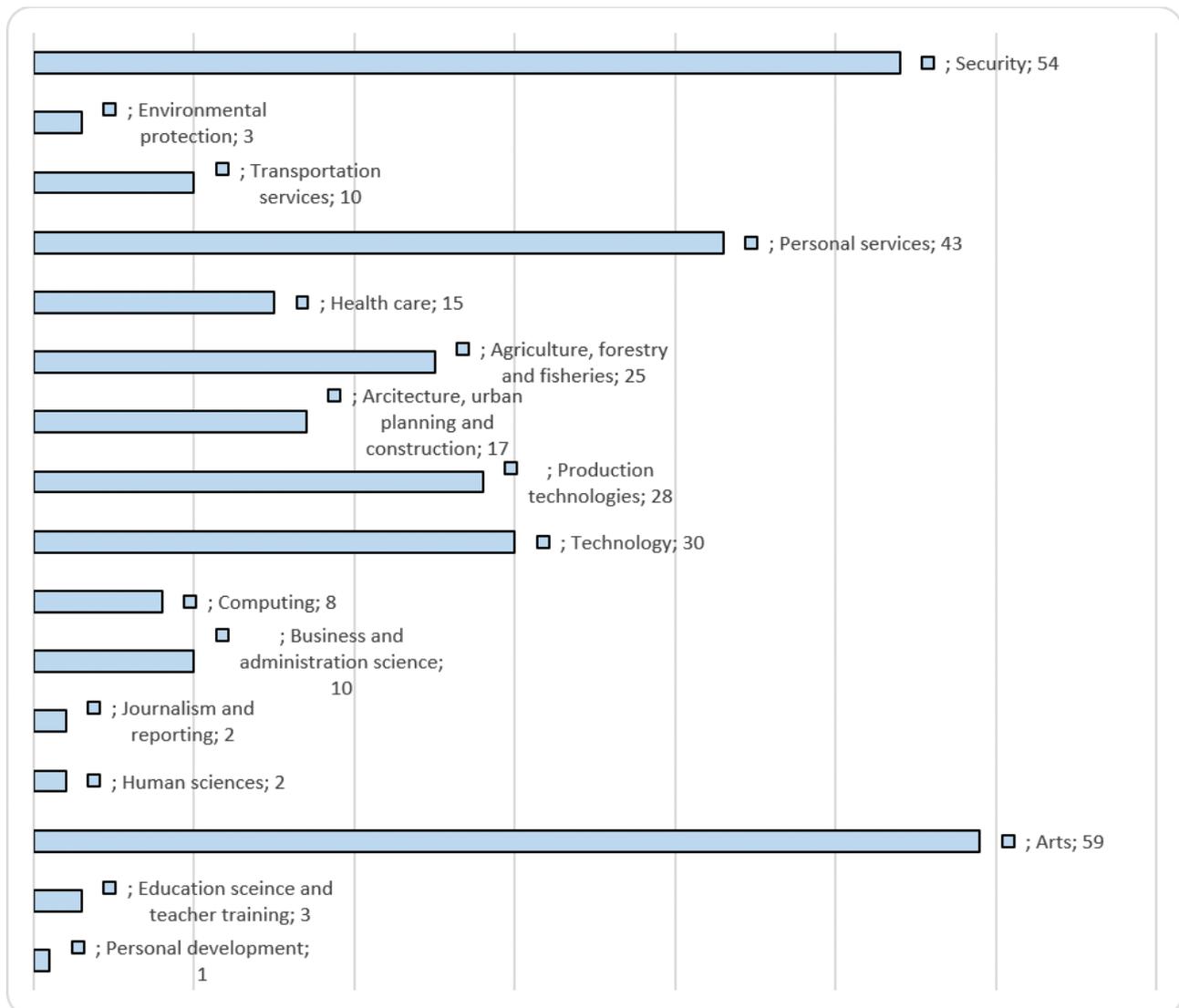
Chart: Certificates awarded expressed as percentages, per sector



According to the share distribution, the "Transportation services" sector stands out the most with over one third (34.42%) of all certificates awarded, followed by the sector of "Architecture, urban planning and construction" with 16.87% of the total certificates awarded, and the "Security" sector where the certificates awarded account for 13.50% of the all certificates.

The below chart demonstrates how qualifications are distributed according to sector. In terms of numbers, the sectors that stand out the most are "Arts", "Security" and "Personal services".

Chart: The number of qualifications per sector

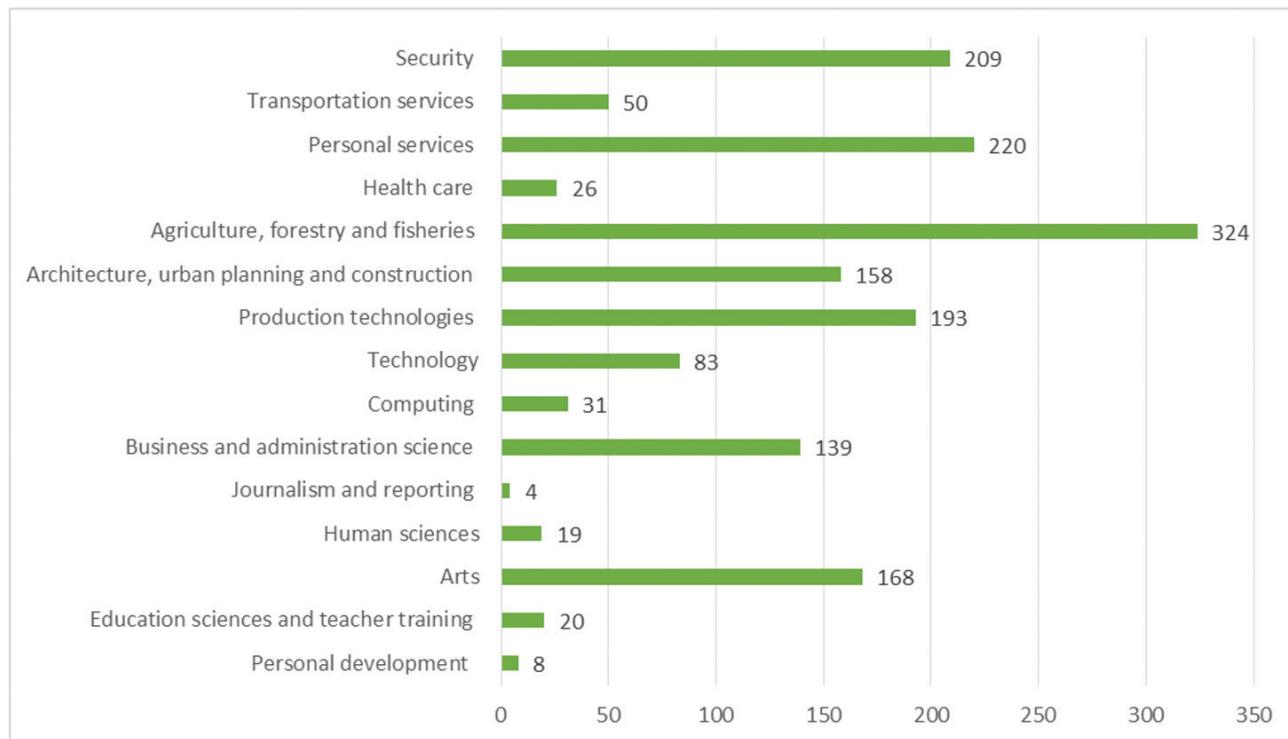


The number of NVQ verification committee members with a valid license changes in accordance with the revisions of NVQ catalogues and in accordance with periods of renovating licenses. In January 2020, the list featured 680 committee members for a total of

310 NVQs, and 534 NVQ counsellors.

Each NVQ verification committee members can hold several licences for different NVQs. The chart below demonstrate the number of licences held by NVQ verification committee members per sector.

Chart: Number of licences held by NVQ verification committee members holding valid licenses per sector



Follow-up information on the effects of the NVQ system on individuals can be drawn from the monitoring of the certificate system carried out by Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and the data published by the Employment Service of Slovenia.

In 2017, the Employment Service of Slovenia referred 904 unemployed persons to the NVQ acquisition procedure, of whom 689 become employed within one year. In 2018, 881 unemployed persons were referred to the NVQ acquisition procedure and by 1 February 2019, 489 found employment.

The monitoring of candidates (Kunčič Krapež et al., 2017), performed at two points in time; i.e. when the candidates entered the NVQ acquisition process and then six months after the award of the certificate, sought to determine why candidates opt for the acquisition of NVQs as well as to what extent their expectations have been fulfilled or whether their employment status has changed.

In the sample included in the survey, the largest share of respondents had upper secondary

vocational education (252 or 32.6%), followed by respondents with upper secondary technical education (222 or 28.7%), and respondents holding professional or academic bachelor's degrees in the third place (147 or 19.0%).

When asked about their employment status, almost half (349 or 45.5%) of the persons surveyed at the start of the NVQ acquisition process responded they were unemployed, 175 (22.8%) were employed in the business sector and 102 (13.3%) in public administration. A minor share of replies involved persons replying they were retired, had student status, sole trader status, farmer status, and some owned a small business.

After six months from having acquired NVQs, when asked whether they are employed, a good 60% of respondents gave an affirmative answer, while a little under 40% said they did not have a job. Almost half (46.5%) of those who replied they were now employed, stated they had a job in the business sector, a good fifth (21%) was employed in public administration, slightly less than a fifth (19.7%) had farmer status. Four are business owners, 13 are sole proprietors (translator's note: samostojni

podjetniki in Slovenci). Under the option 'other', the candidates stated: 'student', 'housewife at a farm' and 'non-governmental organisation'. When asked about the reason for the acquisition of NVQs, the largest number of respondents (307 or 41.7%) mentioned **job-seeking opportunities**. 108 (14.7%) responders said their reason behind the acquisition of NVQs was because they wanted to start **performing activities** as sole proprietors, and 93 (12.6%) singled out **promotion at their workplace**. 42 (or 5.7%) of respondents said they expected the acquisition of NVQs would enable those employed on a contractual basis to gain full-time regular employment. 17 (2.3%) were referred to the NVQ referral procedure by the Employment Service of Slovenia, while 14 (1.9%) of respondents said they needed a personal work visa.

The question about the kind of change they experienced because they acquired NVQs was only answered by employed respondents. We only sought the answer of employed respondents because the replies were linked to the type of change that the acquisition of NVQs brought in relation to their employment. 40% of employed respondents said that they were already employed, so the acquisition of NVQs did not change anything for them. For a little under 44% of the persons surveyed, the acquisition of NVQs resulted in a change in relation to their employment, namely: 20 (12.7%) of responders found employment in the field for which they acquired NVQs, 12 (7.6%) were promoted thanks to NVQs, two gained full-time employment, and NVQs enabled 35 (22.3%) responders to perform additional activities. A considerable share (11.5%) of answers was categorised as 'other', and over a half (10 out of 18) of these responders stated that employment-related NVQs enabled them to present their candidacy at the public tender for aid granted to young farmers.

2.7 Quality assurance in the NVQ system

"The NVQ system considers and acknowledges knowledge, skills and competences regardless of the ways and learning environments in which they were acquired. Due to this fact, it is crucial to have trust in the system enabling the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences thus acquired, as well as trust in the credibility of awarded NVQ certificates. The first quality assurance condition are **adequate bases** for NVQ verification and validation procedures. The following two important conditions are

standardised and solid implementation of NVQ verification and validation procedures and **the candidates' right to object** to the performed NVQ verification and validation processes. Quality is also assured by **competent institutions** in charge of the monitoring and control of NVQ verification and validation procedures. All of the abovementioned aspects of quality assurance contribute to the credibility of the system and thereby to the creation of trust of all key stakeholders who recognise their interests in the system." (Drofenik, 2017, p. 33)

Quality in the NVQ system is assured at the system level, at the level of the institutions involved, and at the level of the individual experts carrying out various roles in the knowledge assessment & certification and counselling processes. The key criteria pursued in quality assurance are as follows:

1. Ensuring the transparency of procedures with a clear distribution of responsibilities among the institutions and experts involved in the processes,
2. The procedures to document all stages of validation are prescribed, and documentation in the procedures is comprehensible and publicly available,
3. Ensuring up-to-date and publicly available information for candidates, counsellors and institutions,
4. Ensuring professional competences of the counsellors and the members of the panels validating and assessing NVQ candidates,
5. Monitoring and evaluation of procedures, institutions and persons involved in the NVQ system,
6. Ensuring continuous expert support to counsellors, panel members and providers of NVQ verification and validation procedures.

We will continue by demonstrating how the NVQ system assures quality at individual stages of the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge.

1. Informing and counselling:
 - The providers of verification and validation procedures are required to provide information on NVQs and on the conditions and procedures to candidates, as well as individual counselling,
 - A public network of counselling centres for adults, which offer free and independent counselling to adults involved in education and training has been established,
 - Counsellors in the NVQ system must complete training at the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training,

- Counselling is available at every stage of the validation of non-formally acquired knowledge; from the beginning when a candidate decides to validate knowledge, upon the preparation of the application, during the compilation of evidence and preparation of the portfolio, throughout the collaboration with the NVQ verification committee and in the preparation of a candidate's personal training plan,
 - Counsellors are bound to abide by ethical guidelines in force in the area of counselling activities,
 - The website of the National Reference Point for Occupational Qualifications in Slovenia – NRP, www.nrpslo.org, contains the most comprehensive information on the NVQ system and some information on the vocational and upper secondary technical education system. It provides candidates with information on the dates available for the assessment and validation of individual NVQs, but it also includes important information for the work of the providers, counsellors and members of panels in NVQ verification and validation procedures,
 - The www.npk.si website, dedicated exclusively to the NVQ system and intended for candidates and companies encountering the concept of NVQs for the first time. Information is provided in a comprehensible manner and supported by many cases of NVQ holders' experience. The website also offers the opportunity to view a portfolio in 3-D, a video presenting a counselling session between a candidate and a counsellor, a video on the work of panel members in direct assessment of an NVQ candidate, etc.
2. Identification:
- The procedures to document all validation stages are prescribed,
 - Documentation in the procedures is comprehensible and publicly available,
 - The structure and forms to be included in a portfolio are prescribed and publicly available,
 - The provider ensures the availability of information on entry conditions and the possibility to acquire NVQs,
 - The provider is bound to provide to each NVQ candidate involved in the procedure a counsellor who will help the candidate to identify non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and the options available in order to prove it.
3. Documenting:
- A counsellor's assistance in identifying the adequacy of a candidate's evidence by relying on competences, skills and knowledge detailed in occupational standards, and in compiling the portfolio,
 - A counsellor's assistance in the drafting of a candidate's personal education and training plan, which defines which obligations the candidate has yet to complete or which missing evidence or supporting materials still remain to be obtained in order to be able to proceed in the NVQ acquisition procedure,
 - A counsellor's collaboration with NVQ verification committee members, who as experts in a given qualification are well suited to identify appropriate documents to confirm vocational qualifications,
 - In the counselling process, a counsellor can also consult with other institutions, persons/experts if this is required in the certification procedure,
 - The identification and structuring of a candidate's evidence are done in accordance with the required structure of portfolios as prescribed by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and published at the website of the National Reference Point for Occupational Qualifications – NRP.
4. Assessment:
- In order to obtain a license for NVQ verification committee members, candidates must possess the qualifications laid down in the NVQ catalogue as well as work experience during the preceding five years in the field of the vocational qualification in question, and then successfully complete the training programme for assessment panel members organised by the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education,
 - NVQ verification committee members must renew their license for NVQ verification and validation by providing evidence of work experience during the preceding four years and by participating in continued expert training in the profession of the vocational qualification they are assessing,
 - The National Examinations Centre will for each individual verification and validation date (irrespective of the provider) appoint a three-member

committee in accordance with the staffing criteria laid down in the NVQ catalogue,

- The committees are autonomous and independent in their decision-making,
- Any person who is a candidate's employer, co-worker, co-owner of the company, facility, shop, establishment etc. where the candidate is employed, related or married to him or her cannot act as NVQ verification committee member during the assessment phase,
- The validation of the portfolio and individual items of evidence is carried out in accordance with preliminarily defined criteria to be drafted and updated continuously by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training,
- To ensure procedure traceability, committee members are required to keep prescribed records of the validation of portfolios and minutes of direct assessment,
- Assessment methods and evaluation criteria are prescribed in catalogues for each individual NVQ,
- The National Examinations Centre organises workshops for committee members in order to establish uniform criteria for the assessment of individual NVQs,
- Candidates have the right to appeal within eight days from receiving the decree of the NVQ assessment and certification.

5. Recognition:

- An NVQ certificate is a public document placing qualification into the Slovenian Qualifications Framework at a certain level,
- An NVQ certificate details the NVQ title for which its holder is qualified, and the competences of the holder of the certificate attested by this instrument. The certificate also states its issuer (the provider of NVQ verification and validation procedures and that provider's responsible person).

2.7.1 Institutions competent for the monitoring and supervision of NVQ verification and validation procedures

The Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia supervises the legality of the work

performed by the providers of NVQ verification and validation procedures, and the legality and expert/professional adequacy of the work performed by NVQ verification and validation panels.

The inspector supervises:

- The fulfilment of the conditions laid down for the providers of NVQ assessment and certification,
- The legality of the processes for the verification and validation of vocational qualifications,
- The composition of the NVQ verification committee members,
- The qualifications of the NVQ verification committee members.
- If infringements are detected, the inspector issues a decree to:
 - Determine the measures and deadline for the elimination of the infringements,
 - Order the replacement of an entire committee or its individual member(s) or president,
 - Impose a temporary or permanent revocation of the permit to carry out NVQ verification and validation procedures,
 - Impose a temporary or permanent suspension of the licence of a committee's president or member.

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI)

monitors and supervises the implementation of NVQ verification and validation procedures. CPI monitors the work of counsellors in NVQ verification and validation procedures in order to ensure quality and reliable counselling to candidates for the acquisition of NVQs, monitors the NVQ system and reports on its findings once per year to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The National Examinations Centre monitors and supervises the activity of NVQ verification committee members and NVQ verification and validation procedure providers.

It collects and monitors annual reports on the implementation of NVQ verification and validation procedures that NVQ verification and validation procedure providers are required to compile, and monitors the work of the verification and validation panels.

The authorised representatives of the competent institutions may also partake directly in NVQ verification and validation procedures.

3. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN FORMAL EDUCATION

3.1 The purpose of recognition in formal education

In the education system, the recognition of previous non-formally and informally acquired knowledge is aimed at recognising individual elements of publicly valid education or study programmes and thereby at a quicker progression within the framework of the education system and at the reduction of learning obligations. Recognition can work in two ways: by recognising the results of non-formal learning before proceeding to a certain education or training/study programme and during the implementation of the education process.

3.2 Legal grounds

The recognition of previously acquired knowledge as stipulated in legislative and regulative provisions is presented below according to the levels of the education system.

Basic school

Basic school for adults is ruled by the Adult Education Act (2018), which regulates public interest in the field of adult education and the ways to achieve it. The Act stipulates that anyone who meets basic school obligation or who has completed adapted basic school education programme may enrol to basic school for adults. The Act regulates, inter alia, the assessment and grading of knowledge and the recognition of knowledge previously acquired under the programme, whereby the legal provision stipulates only that it is the minister who has the authority to designate assessment and grading as recognition of previously acquired knowledge.

The recognition of previously acquired knowledge is referred to in slightly greater detail in the conditions for the enrolment and for the progression in basic school programmes for adults, adopted in 2003 (source: http://programoteka.acs.si/PDF/program_osnovne_ole_za_odrasle.pdf), where it is stated that one should "apart from assessing which grade adults can enrol in, also take into consideration the knowledge that they acquired in another manner, i.e. outside of the regular school system. If they possess adequate evidence to support it, they will be credited with a subject or part of a subject, but only if the knowledge acquired

in such a way complies with the standards for individual subjects from the syllabus for basic schools for adults. If the adults do not possess any publicly valid proof of previous knowledge, their knowledge may be verified at a basic school for adults before the start of education." (2003, p. 8 and 9)

The programme for basic school for adults is currently being modernised, and to this end, a programme reform group was appointed composed of representatives of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, adult education providers, the National Education Institute of Slovenia and the Adult Education Centre of Slovenia. The fundamental task of the group is to prepare the starting points for the modernisation of the Basic school for adults programme, which will also include an expert definition of the recognition of previously acquired knowledge.

General upper secondary schools

The General Upper Secondary School Act does not refer directly to the recognition of non-formal knowledge in the way found in vocational and technical education. In spite of this, 'indirect' regulation of the validation of non-formally and formally acquired knowledge, skills and competences can also be found in the area of general upper secondary education. The Act does provide for quicker progression of students: "Teachers' assembly may enable students to complete their obligations under the education programme via exams in less time than what is provided for in the education programme." Students are thus, based on the provision of their school's teachers' assembly, able to demonstrate the adequacy of their knowledge, skills and competences preliminarily with an exam, irrespective of the manner and form of learning. Since the establishment of assessment criteria for accelerated progression of students rests with the autonomy of schools or, more precisely, their boards of teachers, there are no (regulation-based) detailed provisions for national norms.

Upper secondary vocational and technical education

In upper secondary vocational and technical education, the recognition of individuals' non-formal knowledge is based on comparing this knowledge with the standards of individual units of the programme. Previously acquired non-formal knowledge is validated by comparing and categorising it in respect of knowledge standards of the education programme and individual programme unit (technical

module, technical subject, general subject, set of contents, school- or employer-based practical training and interest activities). This is mostly done by having recourse to knowledge catalogues and school curricula.

The recognition of previous non-formally and informally acquired knowledge in formal education is mostly implemented in order to enable individuals to engage in further formal education (to continue suspended education, proceed at a higher level, change the orientation of the education, etc.).

In upper secondary vocational and technical education, the field of non-formal knowledge recognition is regulated by the **Vocational Education Act**, which stipulates the possibility of validating and recognition both for students as well as adult participants in vocational or technical education. The provisions regarding part-time education state that part-time education programmes adapt to their participants, while the starting point for adaptations are the credit points achieved or previously acquired knowledge attested by an authentic instrument, or non-formally acquired knowledge to be demonstrated by passing exam or in another manner.

The Act stipulates in greater detail the possibility of recognising informally acquired knowledge and the obligations of the minister responsible for education, stating that non-formally acquired knowledge to be attested by authentic instruments, through examination or in other manners should also be taken into consideration in the assessments. The Act further stipulates that the records of all obligations completed in a current year should also include non-formally acquired knowledge. The minister is bound to further elaborate and define the procedures for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge in rules (in an executive act).

The Rules on the Assessing in the Vocational and Secondary Technical Education of 2007 that followed the adoption of the Act further regulated the area of validating and recognising of previously acquired knowledge by defining in greater detail the recognition procedure and the tasks of the individual expert bodies (teachers' assembly, head teachers), the forms of knowledge recognition, criteria and objection to expert bodies' decisions, and required educational and training organisations to adopt school rules where they had to define in greater detail the criteria and procedures for the recognition of previously acquired knowledge.

The aforementioned Rules, a step ahead towards regulating the recognition procedure at provider level, was in force until July 2010 when they were replaced by the **Rules on assessing knowledge in secondary schools**, which in turn do not directly define the validation and recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge, but allow for it to be implemented. Indirectly, the validation and recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge is mentioned in these Rules in the provisions for the personal education plan for participants in adult education, which should contain at least the information on previously acquired and recognised formal and non-formal knowledge, along with the obligation to establish a personal education plan for every participant in adult education (construct of obligation). The Rules provide for school rules on knowledge assessment and the compulsory elements they should contain. Under these Rules, the planning and implementation of the procedure to recognise previously acquired knowledge is largely in the hands of the providers of the procedure and their expertise. Given that the abovementioned Rules on assessing knowledge in secondary schools do not cover the process of recognising previous knowledge and that there are no other provisions (except those under the Adult Education Act, in practice – if and where there is the will to do so – the validation and recognition of previously acquired knowledge in secondary vocational and technical education is based on prior regulations or on grounds and documentation in place that were drafted in accordance with these prior regulations.

Instructions on the Adjustment of Part-Time Education (2008):

In 2008, the minister responsible for education adopted the Instructions on the Adjustment of Part-Time Education as an implementing document with instructions on how to adjust formal vocational and technical education and training of adults.

The starting point to determine the adjustments of part-time vocational and technical education of adults were introductory interviews with each participant and a potential recognition of previously acquired knowledge. Based on the findings of the introductory interview and upon taking into consideration of the recognition of previously acquired knowledge, the provider would prepare an analysis of the group and the implementation plan for that group's programme for the school year. In the following step, the provider would then

prepare a personal education plan for each individual participant from the group. Even in the case of individual organisational models, a provider could, following the introductory interview and potential recognition of previously acquired knowledge, establish a proposal of adjustments for the individuals to be educated under one of the individual organisational models of part-time education, and entered them as a proposal in that individual's personal education plan.

The Instructions lay down the content of the personal education plan, which should contain at least the information on:

- Formal and non-formal work experience related to the work or occupation that the participant will be training for,
- The completed previous formal education, including any particularities,
- The knowledge acquired through non-formal learning,
- The foreseen manner of and timeline for education and training, including the manners and deadlines for the assessment of knowledge,
- The manner and schedules for the monitoring of achievement of the personal education plan.

Short-cycle Higher Vocational Education

In short-cycle higher vocational education, the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge is governed by the **Higher Vocational Education Act** and the **Rules on the Recognition of the Previous Education in Higher Vocational Education**. The Rules on the Recognition of the Previous Education in Higher Vocational Education defines the grounds, criteria, procedure, and assessment of previous non-formally acquired knowledge. The procedure and criteria of identifying, assessing, validation and recognition of previously acquired knowledge that students of higher vocational colleges gained through formal or non-formal education or training are laid down very precisely in the **Common Guidelines and Procedures in the Procedures for the Recognition of the Previous Knowledge in Short-Cycle Vocational Education** (July 2010).

In short-cycle vocational education, students' previously acquired knowledge will be recognised if they are able to prove that the content, level and complexity of their knowledge fully meets the fundamental objectives or module-specific competences laid down in the study programme that is being carried out by the higher vocational college, regardless where and how the students acquired them.

The recognition procedure begins when a student submits the application for the recognition of informally acquired knowledge. The application must contain a request for the recognition of the previously acquired knowledge as well as evidence in accordance with the Rules:

- Authentic instruments, certificates and other official documents,
- The products, services, publications and other output created or authored by the student,
- Adequate reference of knowledge acquired through work.

The procedure to recognise previously acquired knowledge involves:

- Informing and counselling,
- Submission of the student's application,
- Compilation of the portfolio presenting the student's learning achievements,
- The drafting of a written expert opinion of lecturers or expert working groups,
- Potential verification of the previously acquired knowledge,
- The processing of the application,
- The issuing of the decision on the recognition,
- The potential student's complaint.

The procedure – from the receipt of a complete application until a decision on the recognition is issued – must generally be completed within 30 days, and at the latest within two months from the date on which a student submits his or her complete application.

The decision is issued by the study commission. (Žnidarič, H., Kunčič, B., Makovec D., Bauman, B., 2010, p. 9)

Pursuant to the Act, the study commission, which consists of at least three lecturers of the vocational college and chaired by a president, shall also handle issues related to the verification and assessment of knowledge acquired through work or other types of non-formally acquired knowledge to be recognised in the fulfilment of a student's study obligations.

Higher education

The recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge is also possible in higher education. The criteria for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired prior to the enrolment in a programme are the obligatory component of every study programme leading to a formal degree or training. Since there are no uniformly detailed criteria and procedures for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge in higher education on the national level, such criteria and procedures can be

defined differently under each study programme if the higher education institution does not have in place its own institutional rules for this purpose.

The procedure for the recognition can be requested by candidate who wish to have their non-formally acquired knowledge and skills taken into consideration as part of the obligations of the study programme they are admitted to. Candidates file their application for recognition on a special form at the student affairs office. If an application is not complete, the candidate is required to supplement it within a certain deadline.

The basis for the recognition are certificates or other documents that allow candidates to prove their knowledge acquired under non-formal education programmes:

- Authentic instruments,
- Certificate issued by education and training providers attesting to a successful completion of the education,
- Non-formal education certificate,
- Adequate reference of practical training and work experience,
- Products, services, projects, publications and other output created or authored by candidates.

Non-formally acquired knowledge and skills of the candidates are identified, verified, confirmed and recognised by a university's competent body. In the case of the recognition of knowledge and skills that candidates acquired through work, self-education and informal learning, the procedure to identify, verify, validate and recognise such knowledge is different. During the procedure, the competent body decides whether to proceed by assessing non-formally acquired knowledge or evaluating the products and services submitted by candidates as proof of their proficient knowledge or skill.

The application for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills (hereinafter: the application) must contain:

- Certificates,
- Other instruments (various documents issued by employers and providing proof of experience, certificates of participation in seminars and training workshops, etc.),
- A portfolio (personal consolidated folder) where candidates include their CV with information on education, employments and other experience and knowledge acquired in the past,
- Other evidence (products, services, publications and other output created or authored by candidates; projects inventions, patents, etc.).

The procedure for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills involves:

- The submission of the application,
- Supplementation of the application,
- The processing of the application by the commission,
- The issuing of the decision,
- The candidate's complaint.

The procedure – from the receipt of a complete application until a decision on the recognition is issued – must generally be at latest within two months from the date on which a candidate submits his or her complete application.

The Higher Education Act stipulates that based on reasonable use of the criteria for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired prior to the admission to a programme, or of criteria for transitions between study programmes, the competent body of the higher education institution shall recognise to the candidates from the preceding paragraph the completion of study obligations according to adequacy, scope and complexity of the knowledge acquired under the former study programme, and will admit them to a higher year of the new study programme if they meet the conditions.

The Higher Education Act also stipulates that study programmes leading to a formal degree which educate for regulated professions where a mutual recognition of vocational qualifications applies should also be developed in accordance with the rules regulating the recognition of vocational qualifications. Compulsory components of the study programme also include the criteria for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired prior to enrolment in the programme.

Adult education

In January 2018, the new Adult Education Act was adopted. It regulates public service and establishes a public network of institutions carrying out adult education.

Pursuant to the new Act, adult education may be carried out in three ways:

- Under programmes of basic schools for adults where a certificate of degree of education is awarded,
- Under publicly valid education programmes for adults that do not lead to a formal degree,
- Under non-formal education programmes for adults.

The Act also defines in greater detail individual activities, such as the field of counselling are one of the key activities in the public

service of adult education. The Act stipulates the counselling activity in adult education encompasses counselling activity in:

- The involvement in the basic school for adults programme and in the continuation of the pathway towards education,
- The involvement in publicly valid education programmes for adults that do not lead to a degree,
- The involvement in non-formal programmes for adults,
- The identification and documenting of knowledge and skills acquired through formal and non-formal education and informal learning based on documentation, namely for personal development, further education and entry into the labour market, and
- Independent learning.

As it has been said in the introduction, the Guidelines for the performance of counselling activity in adult education to be carried out as a public service (2020) are currently being drafted, which will – once adopted by the Council of Experts for Adult Education – provide for expert guidance for the implementation of counselling activity on adult education in practice. The Guidelines define that counselling

activity involves three fields, one of which is counselling activity in the identification and documenting of adults' knowledge and skills.

The subject matter of the counselling matter defined in the Guidelines is issued from experience in the development and implementation of counselling in adult education during the past 20 years when it was already made available free of charge from regional adult education counselling centres to all adults as counselling in the adult education system is free of charge for all elements of education.

The basis for the achievement of objective in adult education is the strategic document Resolution on the Master Plan for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for 2013 – 2020 (a new document for the 2021 – 2030 period is currently being drafted). The key objectives set out in RePNPIO13-20 (Resolution) include raising the level of education of the population and the degree of basic skills, increase employability of the active population, improve the possibilities for learning and involvement into education and the broad education level. The objectives are implemented by adopting annual adult education programmes.



4. VALIDATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF PERSONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION WITH THE AIM OF FURTHER INTEGRATION INTO EDUCATION

4.1 Purpose

A workgroup was appointed within the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport charged with developing the procedures to integrate refugees not holding any certificates on education into the Slovenian education system. The members of the workgroup are representatives of education from the entire vertical axis (basis school, upper secondary, short-cycle higher vocational and higher education, adult education, ENIC-NARIC Centre, Education Development and Quality Office).

The workgroup's core tasks are to develop proposals and solutions for the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Recognition of Education regarding the recognition of qualifications held by refugees or for their integration in the Slovenian education system and labour market, even in the cases where they cannot prove formal education with school certificates or diplomas. At the same time, the group's task was also to draft solutions for the implementation of the provisions of the International Protection Act in regard to ensuring the right to education to applicants for international protection and to persons granted international protection, and develop a draft for the supplementation of the Decree on the methods and conditions for ensuring the rights of people with international protection.

4.2 Legal grounds

Decree on the methods and conditions for ensuring the rights of people with international protection:

The Decree on the methods and conditions for ensuring the rights of people with international protection issued by the Government on 13 December 2017 was adopted on the grounds of the International Protection Act, which stipulates that the Government shall issue a decree with provisions for methods and condition for ensuring the right to persons granted international protection. The Decree stipulates in greater detail the methods and conditions for ensuring the rights of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection, namely the right to residing in the Republic of Slovenia,

extending subsidiary protection, obtaining information on the status, rights and obligations of persons with international protection, housing in housing facilities of the government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, allowance for private accommodation, education and assistance with integration into the environment. The Decree also lays down in greater detail the education of persons with international protection who are unable to prove formal education with documents.

For the purpose of integrating persons with international protection not in possession of formal documents in education, a workgroup led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport was established, which developed a draft text to supplement the Decree, in which they included the following solutions for the integration of persons with international protection in the Slovenian education system, also in the cases where they are unable to prove the education acquired in their country of origin with school certificates.

A person wishing to be admitted to upper secondary education in the Republic of Slovenia can do so by passing examination developed for this purpose by the National Education Institute of Slovenia. The certificate of passed examination to be issued by the National Education Institute of Slovenia constitutes a condition for admission to programmes of the initial years of short upper secondary and upper secondary vocational education, upper secondary technical education and general upper secondary education. Such persons are eligible to enrol in the first year, and the certificate does not grant admission to VET programmes, to vocational or general matura courses, as these programmes require prior completion of statutory obligations in previous upper secondary education. This type of certificate does not replace proof/certificate of passed/completed basic school education but merely serves as an admission condition for enrolment to the aforementioned education programmes. The aforementioned certificate of the National Education Institute of Slovenia does however also serve as adequate proof for inclusion in NVQ verification and validation procedures in the case where the entry condition for the acquisition of an NVQ is fulfilled basic school obligation or completed basic school.

Persons wishing to be admitted to higher education in the Republic of Slovenia will also have their knowledge assessed with examination developed and implemented by the National Examinations Centre (RIC). The certificate issued by RIC constitutes an entry condition for enrolment in the first year of short-cycle vocational education programmes, and the same also applies to first-cycle higher education study programmes. A pass of this examination does not result in a matura certificate being awarded; it only serves as

proof to meet entry conditions for enrolment in higher education study programmes. The certificate is issued by RIC. The aforementioned certificate also counts as adequate evidence for admission to NVQ verification and validation procedures in the cases where the prerequisite stipulated for the acquisition of an NVQ is for a candidate to have completed at least upper secondary general education.



5. SKILLS AUDIT

5.1 Purpose

Structured identification of the results of previous learning can benefit the unemployed in their search for a new employment, as well as the employed, presenting them with a possibility to switch employment or develop their careers. Success of the system for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge could lead to modernisation in the acquisition of education, facilitate further education, and, crucially, recognition by employers would facilitate and increase hiring. The establishment of systemic opportunities for such validation and recognition would present a good response to the needs of target groups with poorly developed fundamental abilities (key competences) and vocational at ISCED 1 level. Individuals do not have the impression that certain certificates would benefit them in several areas (better employment options, the use of existing knowledge and competences at work, insight into staffing potentials, mobility and flexibility at the workplace; quicker acquisition of education: better options to adjust education to individuals, acquisition of NVQs). Many individuals only realise the true extent of knowledge, skills and competences that they possess based on self-reflection. That said, it must be made sure that the system will prioritise the initiatives to commence documenting and/or validation coming from individuals seeking to formalise the results of their prior learning, as well as to make standards and procedures publicly available.

5.2 Projects and activities

Youth

Youthpass (Youth in Action – Movit Institute)

Youthpass is part of the European Commission's strategy to support non-formal learning. It is a European tool for the documenting and recognition of learning results achieved by participants in projects financed within the framework of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action (2014–2020) projects. It is an instrument for the planning, monitoring, validation and recognition of achievements in non-formal learning processes for all participants. It helps young people to analyse their learning process and the knowledge they have gained. Newly acquired knowledge is valued according to the system of key competences of lifelong learning, but it is also possible to describe

other knowledge gathered in the project. The acquired knowledge is valued and described by the young people themselves with the assistance of a mentor, instructor, conversation partner or youth leader, while the certificate they are awarded is recognised internationally. While creating the Youthpass certificate together with a supporting person, the participants in projects are given the opportunity to describe their activities and actions in their project and which competences they have acquired. Thus, Youthpass supports the reflection upon the personal non-formal learning process and outcomes; as a Europe-wide recognition instrument for non-formal learning in the youth field, it strengthens the recognition of youth work; it supports active European citizenship of young people and youth workers by describing the added value of their projects; and it also aims at supporting the employability of young people and of youth workers by raising their awareness of and helping to describe their competences by documenting their key competences on a certificate. (Youthpass, 2016; Youth Council of Slovenia, 2013)

Nefiks (Nefiks Institute)

Nefiks is a systemic tool to document knowledge, experience and skills of youth aged 14 and more. It covers six different areas: active citizenship and responsible project work, work experience, organised forms of education, voluntary work and camps, youth exchange programmes and the experience/knowledge gained abroad, and other forms of acquiring knowledge, skills and experience. Individuals are able to gather systematically and in a single location everything they have been involved in besides the regular education. They document all of their informally acquired knowledge in their log. The tool enables young people to recognise their own competences more easily and to transfer them to various formal tools. It exists in physical and electronic format. Nefiks can also be used for career planning, the monitoring of the development of young people's own competences and their self-awareness. (Nefiks, 2016; Youth Council of Slovenia, 2013)

Moje izkušnje

The Moje izkušnje ('My experience') system (Nefiks Institute in e-student job centre) ('Moje izkušnje' digital portfolio) is a tool to document one's own work experience gathered through student work. Upper-secondary and higher education students are able to keep regular,

up-to-date logs of the experience they have acquired while working via a student job centre. The system offers a good informative overview of work activities performed as part of student work. Employers can obtain a simple, uniform and credible overview of all work experience. Valuation is left up to the employers. (Moje izkušnje 2016; Youth Council of Slovenia, 2013)

TaPas (Scout Association of Slovenia)

TaPas ('scout passport'; translator's note: 'Ta' is the first syllable of 'tabornik', Slovene expression for scout) is a tool used to recognise and validate experience acquired during voluntary scout work, and to identify the competences achieved through this experience and recognised with diplomas, certificates and titles awarded. (Zveza tabornikov/Scout Association of Slovenia, 2016; Youth Council of Slovenia, 2013)

Unique learning badges

Unique learning badges (an international partnership of six organisations) is a tool for the recognition of non-formal learning in European youth work. It is an online accreditation platform that will include an online tool and solutions for the development of individual systems for the recognition of non-formal learning programmes. The tool supports young people in self-evaluation, the validation of their learning and the development of learning competence. Unique learning badges are transferrable to other environments (company, adult education, etc.). Young people and youth workers will be able to easily document their knowledge and describe learning results, saved in electronic form. The visual presentation of learning results will take the form of an online badge that will be displayed and highlighted with ease via social networks, add to personal websites, Facebook applications, blogs, into Europass and CVs. (Unique learning badges, 2016; Youth Council of Slovenia, 2013)

Student Organisation of Slovenia (ŠOS)

ŠOS with the financial support of the European Social Fund and Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities established a system of documenting competences acquired by upper secondary and higher education students through the performance and temporary and occasional work. Based on the work performed, its placement in the Standard Classification of Occupations and Competences – ESCO related to individual occupations, upper secondary and higher education students are able to monitor the development of competences through temporary and occasional work, regardless of the intermediary or employer through or for

whom they carry out their work. The system is compatible with ESCO classification and system of the Employment Service of Slovenia, and as a lifelong career guidance tool, it will be intended to increase the employability of young people and the promotion of the gathering of experience during education.

Unemployed persons

Project developer Employment Service of Slovenia

The identification and assessment of competences are important for the setting of employment objectives and identifying the shortcomings of unemployed persons. Non-formally acquired competences are especially important for those seeking their first employment and unemployed people who cannot or do not wish to pursue their occupation anymore.

Competences are identified by a counsellor together with the unemployed person during a counselling interview as part of basic career counselling, but also part of in-depth career counselling to persons faced with major obstacles in finding employment. The basis for the identification of competences is knowledge acquired during the school education process as well work experience, formal and non-formal alike. The assessment of the level of competence is based on work experience gathered through work in the occupation (also in the form of student or voluntary work, etc.), but also through hobbies, etc.

Unemployed persons can also benefit from e-Counselling (<https://esvetovanje.ess.gov.si/KajZnam/>).

Counsellor record identified important competences of unemployed persons in the ZPNet application, to serve as criteria for the selection of appropriate candidates to be referred for job vacancies. The assessment of competences is based on a competence interview and unemployed persons' self-evaluation.

Employed persons

Competence Centres for the Development of Human Resources – KOC

The purpose of the Competence Centres project, which is financed by the European Social Fund and Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, is to improve competences, productivity, creativeness and innovation of employees and to strengthen the competitiveness of the Slovenian economy.

The development of competence profiles and the competence model was a collaboration between human resources managers from partner companies, staffing partners of project offices and external providers. The identification of an individual's competences is the responsibility of the human resources manager, his or her direct superior and the employed person him- or herself. The documentation of competences is a task of the human resources service. Competences are documented by using online questionnaires, which are anonymous (only at partner company and KOC level), interviews, etc. Some KOCs also use computer software (Microsoft Excel) to document competence. During the implementation of the project, certain KOCs plan on training human resources managers for the preparation of individual career plans which in turn will document competences and the degree of their development. The assessment of competences is performed by using online questionnaires (1ka online survey), assessment questionnaires, interviews, 180- or 360-degree assessment.

ADULTS (ALL TARGET GROUPS)

The projects and activities carried out by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education develop and support mainly the third purpose of the validation and recognition of knowledge acquired in non-formal and informal manners by adults, which was defined in expert bases for systemic regulation of validation and recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge in adult education. (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2011), i.e. for the documenting and description of individuals' knowledge, skills and competences, with the aim of ensuring greater flexibility in the labour market (for easier re-employment, to change work, for the development or change of career), for personal growth (increase of confidence, increase of motivation for education and work, better life quality, etc.) and the development of key competences. (idem, p. 36)

The process being developed at the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education can end with outcome in the form of a compiled (hard copy or digital) portfolio of achievements, with feedback or opinion on individuals' achievements, with counselling and guidance as to what individuals are able to upgrade, develop further, integration in continued education (both formal and non-formal), involvement in formal certification (NVQ, foreign languages, computing, etc), improvement of employment options, career or personal development (depending on individual goals).

The process is developed and implemented on the basis of good capacity of adult education professionals to manage the process at various stages, and on an active role of individuals throughout the process as well as on their voluntary decision as to the stage at which they wish to become involved in/leave the process. The interconnection of the stages and the possibility for individuals to become involved or leave the process at any stage is also highlighted in the new Cedefop recommendations (cf. 2015, p. 14–15).

Experience in adult education regarding the inclusion of low educated and vulnerable groups in these processes suggest that the outcomes of these procedures are more efficient if the involved adults also receive feedback from the professional on the learning outcomes and competences achieved, which highlights above all the formative aspect of the valuation of adults' knowledge, skills and competences.

Throughout the process of development, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education has also been paying special attention to ensuring the quality of the validation of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, both from the perspective of ensuring the quality of the process itself as well as from the perspective of ensuring the quality and the proper training of professionals involved in adult education, for whom a programme of basic training was developed and implemented several times, as well as regular advanced training sessions for adult education professionals.

6. CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES

The validation of non-formal learning of adults, fundamentally aimed at ensuring greater flexibility in the labour market, fostering individuals' personal growth and encourage the development of key competences, is an adequate response to the challenges faced by our society as suggested in various surveys of the achievement of key competences of adults in Slovenia.

The recognition of the results of non-formal learning in Slovenia is present at all levels of the education system. At every level of formal education, the fundamental objective of the recognition of the results of non-formal learning is mostly the continuation of education and exemption from/shortening of education. Formal legal grounds for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge are best established for validation procedures responding to the needs of the labour market (NVQs) and in higher vocational education, allowing for the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge, while the decision on the implementation of the procedures is left to the schools themselves.

In the future development of the validation system, we should consider establishing more efficient links between the system of National Vocational Qualifications and formal education system, namely by having any NVQ certificate which is an integral part of a formal education programme in terms of its content automatically recognised in the process leading to formal vocational education. The validation procedure should be defined by being based on an individual's active role throughout the process, allowing him or her to become involved in it or leave it at any stage, and it should, above all, prioritise the initiative to start it being based on the decisions of the individuals seeking to have their competences become apparent. The quality of the validation procedure is also dependent on the methods and tools used in the process, which should be reliable, objective and valid. The tools and methods should be based on a combination of reflection and self-evaluation of the individual, and the evaluation of his or her competences by the professional implementing the procedures.

A comprehensive system of auditing and developing quality must also ensure adequate professional competence of the providers of the procedures, i.e.: counsellors and assessors, whereby the basis should be the complexity of a given procedure and the diversity of the candidates' needs.

In Slovenia, recognition is applied much more to programmes that do not lead to a formal degree, while in the system for the acquisition of formal education – even though there are no legal constraints (but no initiatives either) – the development of the tools and the establishment of the processes that would enable recognition is still very slow. The question of the transparency of qualifications acquired outside of traditional educational environments also still remains open.

In the development work within the framework of various activities and projects in the field of the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge in vocational and technical education, various stakeholders have raised issues and dilemmas that would need to be addressed and focused on in the further development of the system, also by taking into consideration European recommendations.

The objective of the recognition of non-formal knowledge in the field of upper secondary vocational and technical education (both for teenage students and adults) should be the development of a system that would provide individuals with the opportunity to bring forward their knowledge and skills acquired through their work processes and their life by having a provider institution recognise them in a systematic and transparent manner and thus facilitate these individuals' access to the education system.

The recognition procedures in the formal education system, particularly at the upper secondary vocational and upper secondary technical education level, should be defined in greater detail, also with a legal basis that would eliminate the obstacles that currently prevent successful implementation of these procedures.

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