

## Recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences

### Definitions

#### **Non-formal learning:**

“Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.” (Commission of the European Communities 2001, p. 33)

“Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations). (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p. 8)

#### **Informal learning:**

“Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or “incidental”/random).” (Commission of the European Communities 2001, p. 32)

“Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.” (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p. 8)

“In any case, a decisive criterion of informal learning remains that it is neither guided, organised, supervised, nor monitored in specific classes by educational institutions, but instead directly practiced by learners in actual situations (consciously or unconsciously) in order to cope better with their environment.” (Dohmen 2001, p.26: complete original text in German)

## **Status of recognition of non-formal and informal learning in partner countries**

### ***Belgium***

The concept of validating non-formal and informal education in Belgium can be found under the heading “Erkenning van Verworven Competenties” or the Recognition of Acquired Competences.

Recognition proceeds differently in the fields of higher and adult education. In the field of higher education, the process of recognition has been laid down by law with the objective of making higher education more flexible. This allows universities to recognise learning processes that were acquired through personal and occupational experience.

In the field of adult education, a Flemish decree determines the assessment and certification of competences that were acquired in educational institutions.

As of April 2004, the Flemish Government recognises non-formal and informal learning with a "Certificate of Vocational Experience". Employees or job seekers can obtain such a certificate after successfully demonstrating that they master specific skills needed to practice an occupation.

### ***Germany***

The recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences is different in Germany than in many other European countries. While the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is often associated with an entitlement and recognition in other European countries, it has remained predominantly **at a sub-legislative level** in Germany. Developments in Germany aim in most cases toward a general recognition of non-formal and informal learning in social contexts, but rarely toward recognition and accreditation in the educational system.

The publication from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) “Status of Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Germany” (2008) can be viewed as a summary of and as a basis for discussions about this subject matter.

### ***Latvia***

Latvia is currently developing a legislative framework for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences and is occupied with the development of the appropriate processes.

### ***Portugal***

The validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences is closely linked to measures which aim to elevate the qualification level of the adult population. In Portuguese higher education, a particular decree establishes flexible access to university education by giving applicants the right of recognition of their acquired competences.

### ***Ireland***



The concept of validating non-formal and informal education in Ireland can be found under the heading "Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning". Similar to the situation in Belgium, Ireland has a differentiated system for the validation of informally acquired competences, especially in the areas of higher and continued education. The main focus is on the recognition of prior learning and on portfolios of evidence.

### **Learning Mentor: Recommendations for the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences of future training participants**

Due to the diverse manner in which the European partner countries in this project assess and validate informally acquired competences, a uniform procedure for the recognition of existing competences is not currently possible.

For the training of "Learning Mentors" in Germany, we recommend preliminary questionnaires and preparatory discussions to assess competences.

We consider more extensive procedures such as competence assessment systems, e.g. ProfilPASS-System, online tests, or assessment procedures inappropriate in relation to the duration of the training.

Ralf Kulesa, ver.di-Forum Nord e.V. (trade union ver.di northern forum, registered association)