

PIN

Poland

WP3: Guidelines and questionnaire for the focus groups

The expected **outcome** of workpackage 3 is an overview of the impact of the EQF and its accompanying measures on the VET system and the consequences for employees. Special attention is asked for identifying good practices and approaches.

The core partners organise **focus groups** for analysing the impact of the EQF on **three specific levels**:

- trade union point of view
- in-company point of view
- educational providers point of view

Issues addressed by the focus groups:

1. collective bargaining
2. Impact of the learning outcome-approach for initial and further training
3. assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning
4. data protection vs. transparency
5. Increase flexibility in training programmes (e.g. EC VET)
6. Permeability between general, vocational and tertiary education and training
7. Quality assurance within vocational education and training (EQARF)
8. Guidance and individual career development
9. Standards for developing new skill profiles due to future skill needs
10. Mismatching (low and over qualification)

Introduction

The objective of PIN is to organize a transnational learning of organizations and people who share key questions regarding the consequences of the implementation of the EQF for the interests and rights of employees.

Although only two of the issues are not related to the educational system in general and to lifelong learning issues specifically, the chairman of the focus group should be aware that the impact on individual rights as represented by trade unions are the central issue of all issues to be addressed.

In the partner-countries the position, the role and the impact of trade unions when implementing the EQF in national learning systems are quite different, especially considering the diversity in the sectors in which the trade unions have a say when it comes to set sectoral standards for learning.

The primary focus in the focus groups is:

1. Identification of good practices in the partner-countries of implementation of the EQF,
2. Creating an overview of the knowledge needs of the stakeholders when 'working' with the EQF.

The **questionnaire** aims at the bird-eye view of the focus group-members for the sake of retrieving good practices. In this questionnaire general questions are asked about the nature of learning and the types of standards used at the moment. If possible, this questionnaire will open up information on actual use of EQF or EQF-related aspects. The questionnaire will also focus on the responsibilities of the stakeholders. In this questionnaire the diversity of roles in applying EQF and EQF-related aspects will be highlighted.

The guidelines are:

1. **Variety of stakeholders**
Make sure there is a variety of stakeholders represented in the focus group: trade-unions staff and members, VET-policymakers and teachers, negotiators of sectoral standards, etc
2. **Diversity**
Keep in mind that the EQF has been designed to give the huge variety of European systems a place. So there is no need for unifying the different systems but more finding out how to manage the diversity of national/sectoral learning systems or approaches.
3. **Information of the EQF**
You might want to introduce the EQF to your focus group. For this you can either use national information, or the brochure the European Commission has available in almost any language: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm
4. **Chairman**
Make sure that the **chairman** acts as an independent mediator of the debate in the focus group.
5. **Documentation**
Make careful notes of the outcomes of the debate; these notes will provide the information needed for WP3 and will also be used to do further research into good practices.
6. **National solutions**
In explaining the EQF, make clear that there might be different views of the impact of the EQF in the different partner-countries and amongst the different stakeholders. Articulate these differences in the debate with the focus group.
7. **National and sectoral standards**

Prepare for explaining to the focus group the diversity of national and sectoral standards used in your country. This entails making a short analysis of the information delivered by the focus group-members in the preparing questionnaire on good practices and their respective responsibilities.

What we expect from the work of the focus groups:

1. A written and detailed report answering questions 1 to 8 of the questionnaire.
2. Please use the structure of the questionnaire for your report. This makes it easier for us to compare the national reports.
3. The report of the first focus group meeting (National impact analysis) should be submitted to IGM and Cofora until September 15th. The report of the second meeting until November 30th.
4. Prepare on the basis of the existing information from the questionnaires a kind of format for the debate(s) in the focus group. It is recommended to use the order of the questions in the questionnaires as an agenda for the focus groups.
5. Make sure that you ask feedback after the focus group to the individual members. This is to make sure that the information you got out of the focus group will be transparent and concrete in naming good practices and stakeholders' responsibilities in your country.

Questionnaire on national policy and good practices

This questionnaire will be issued to the focus group-members before the focus group is organized. It will be used as a guide for debate.

1. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

1a. What are the main characteristics of the national qualifications system?

(Describe levels, types of official qualifications, system, organization, structure of the qualifications)

In Poland, a coherent national qualification framework that would include all possible to obtain formal qualifications, has not yet been created. Qualifications that are currently available, might be of various types, from very general to the specialist ones, and they are awarded by different education and training institutions and different awarding bodies.

These qualifications are mainly part of formal education and are completed at various levels and at various educational institutions.

Only some of the recognised, formal qualifications in Poland are being designed at a central level (this mainly concerns qualifications at a secondary education level). Many new types of vocational qualifications are created for instance at the higher education level at particular institutions, and various vocational training centres providing services for different sectors of the labour market. This causes the uncontrolled proliferation of types of qualifications, which - though often very similar - are not comparable with one another, and as such, difficult to identify for the employers.

Since 2006, Poland has been working on the development and implementation of the national qualifications framework (NQF), which is in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), including the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF). The first stage of the work is to create the PQF constituting a direct reference point for all qualifications obtained in Poland through formal, informal and non-formal education. The next step is to create a reference report that would allow comparisons to be made between Polish and European qualifications. Reference Report will be a description of the qualifications system (PQF) and a description of the methods of its implementation, approved by national authorities, assessed on the international scene, addressed to foreign recipients, for whom the report should be a functional tool for assessing the qualification level. Work on this report is already in progress. Poland plans to launch it in 2012. National Qualifications Register will be formed as part of the system that is currently being designed, and will become central record of evidence. According to the presented concepts, a specialised institution with nationwide coverage will be established to determine about entries into the register and about the level of the reported qualifications. Development of a system for validation of qualifications attained in various ways is going to be one of future challenges.

Institutional framework for national qualifications system is planned in the form of a separate bill. The proper functioning of the national qualifications system will be monitored by an institution established particularly for this purpose, for which tasks such as keeping a track record of qualifications, monitoring the qualifications system, updating the reference report, overseeing Polish procedures assuring high quality of qualifications, coordination of different interests in the field of description and awarding of the qualifications and promoting life-long learning, will be designed.

1b. Do you have a National Qualifications Framework, in which the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is integrated?

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If yes, describe the NQF and the reasons for establishing an NQF. If not, what actions are undertaken towards establishing a national qualifications framework?

Focus on actions like:

- *reasons for shifting to national standard*
- *reasons accepting a focus on learning outcomes*
- *Coordination and governance issues*
- *Quality assurance issues*
- *Transferability, progression, access and permeability*

Poland has not yet established the national qualifications framework, but work on its creation is very advanced.

Following guidelines of the European Qualifications Framework adopted in April 2008 by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, Poland is working on the development and implementation of the national qualifications system, including the Polish Qualifications Framework. Similarly to the EQF, the Polish model has 8 qualification levels, which consist of three key categories of learning outcomes (these are called competences according to the POF). The POF structure will consist of three levels - the universal descriptors of the 1st degree, 2nd degree descriptors for general education, vocational education and higher education, descriptors of the 3rd degree for higher education and for the various industries. In contrast to the EQF, in national qualifications framework model each level of qualification is characterised by additional categories, generic descriptors or indicators which enable description of the way a certain level of competence has been achieved. These descriptors relate to the existing education sectors in Poland.

The idea behind the creation of the POF is to provide, in one document, such a description of qualifications, which will allow to include into the system all qualifications obtained through non-formal and informal education.

1c. Does the qualification system in your country include assessing learning outcomes from the education sector, the labour market and the voluntary sector (non-profit organizations, sports associations, associations for voluntary social work etc., ICT courses, creative courses, liberal adult education for personal development etc.)?

If possible, can you describe examples?

In Poland, a single qualifications system which would assess the learning outcomes in the field of education, labour market and the voluntary sector, does not exist. Various institutions are responsible for organising the examinations to evaluate people's competences and to a different extent, they also have the power to award various types of qualifications.

Learning outcomes in formal education after primary school, middle school and secondary school, are confirmed through national external exams, organised by the Central Examination Board which reports to the Minister of Education. These exams demonstrate the effectiveness of general education and vocational training in so called "school professions" (*according the classification of occupations for VET (MENiS, 2007)*).¹ They are recognized by all public schools and higher education institutions, but not fully considered in the recruitment process by the employees and the employers.

Professional organisations examine and award a narrow range of specialised vocational and professional qualifications as well (e.g.: financial certificates/diplomas awarded by the Polish

¹ No official definition of initial vocational education and training (IVET) is used in Poland and the term is rarely used, restricted to European publications seeking comparison of the systems. In such cases IVET is understood as vocational education carried out in schools, usually before entering working life.
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Banks Association), professional bodies and crafts chambers (titles of an apprentice and a professional are awarded by the chamber of craftsmen), and the associations (e.g.: qualifications in Accounting are granted by the Polish Accountants Association). The recognition of those qualifications is not even and as far as their functionality is concerned, it depends entirely on the needs of the labour market.

1d. What impact does the implementation and use of EQF have on your field of work:

- Does it influence (and in what respect) your policy of collective bargaining?
- Does it influence the legal position of the employee?
- How do you value the problem of data protection vs. transparency?

It is difficult to say how big is the impact of the European Qualifications Framework on the Polish labour market. National qualifications system, based on the EQF model, has not been created yet. Therefore, it is impossible to determine at this stage the impact of its implementation. Creation of the national qualifications system, consistent with the principles of the EQF, using the approach based on learning outcomes, is a challenge for us and it presents both potential opportunities and threats.

The basis of the system is the approach which focuses on learning outcomes. Levels do not indicate the circumstances of learning, including for example time, place and effort put into learning. They are only determined by learning results, which is what the learner actually knows, understands and is able to do, especially in new circumstances that the learner is familiar with. Focusing on this particular approach, the national qualifications system will allow greater use of potential and competences in the labour market; competences gained outside of the institutionalised education system which have remained unrecognized in verification processes so far. Qualifications included in the EQF and the NQF should be described in accordance with the basic postulate for this idea, meaning that each qualification level can be reached in various ways (not only through formal education) and that the possibility of collecting and transferring qualifications between different places of learning has to be guaranteed. In order to maintain the link with the EQF, one must proceed in a similar manner when determining the national qualifications framework. NQF model can provide, through above-mentioned Reference Report, a reference to the EQF and thus allow comparison of qualifications gained in different countries and covered by the EQF.

Implementation of the system requires the completion of the Polish Qualifications Framework in the first place. Like EQF, PQF consists of 8 qualification levels, which, in contrast with the EQF, consist of further three key categories of learning outcomes.

However, national framework model, at each qualification level, has been characterised by additional categories, so called generic descriptors or indicators which describe ways in which a certain level of competence has been achieved. Different levels of qualifications in the PQF, in addition to the description using universal indicators (only those indicators are included in the EQF), have also been described in areas of general education, vocational education and higher education. It seems that subcategories presented in PQF, do not necessarily provide more detailed information about competences than the description used in the EQF, but they are an attempt to identify different approaches to obtaining qualifications in Poland (presented descriptors relate to the existing education areas in Poland). While it can be assumed that different levels of qualifications consist of competences distinctive for education and training, higher education can not be considered the third type of competence (it is a rather specific combination of two types of competences already mentioned), unless it is assumed that higher education does not fall into a category of neither general nor vocational education. Confirmation of this in the form of PQF may contribute to inadequate interpretations of the system in which universities will still be reluctant to abandon the academic way of teaching, and adapt training inadequately to the needs of the labour market. Based on the analysis of the effects of the existing work on PQF descriptors for the three areas mentioned

above, one should express concerns about the consistency of the description of the outlined qualifications.

One of the biggest future challenges for the team is going to be a creation of such a description, that will allow to include into the PQR also qualifications gained through non-formal and informal education.

In the PQR, 3rd degree generic descriptors are allowed (already present in higher education, possible to develop for specific industries; different sectors are to decide about their necessity). There are plans to develop qualifications frameworks for selected sectors. PQR descriptors will then become the basis for curricula and educational programmes in all fields. Lack of synchronization between work conducted on the PQR and the results of the work conducted by the Minister of Education on new school curricula for general education and VET, is a big concern. The PQR project team plans to review existing curricula and to make recommendations regarding amendments that will help adapt them to the PQR. This however, might disrupt already established processes and pose a threat to further destabilization of the formal education system.

Another challenge for the proper functioning of the Polish qualifications system, is to agree during a broad social debate, on how to determine qualification levels as per PQR and how determine the responsibilities of the institution which will be established for the purpose of monitoring national qualifications system, including rules for the participation of the system's stakeholders, guidelines regarding validation of qualifications, standards of quality assurance of qualifications.

The subject of the European and national qualifications frameworks, although extremely important, and probably influences the future of the whole education system, is still rather unknown among potential stakeholders. It seems that this might create a risk of making key decisions concerning the qualification system without sufficient input from outside of the realm of experts involved in the project.

1e. What kind of offers are in your country with regard to guidance and individual career development and the assessment of competences? Please name organisations and conditions (fees, costs...)?

In Poland, offers in the field of professional counselling, individual career development and support are rather scattered. Governmental institutions are often responsible for vocational guidance (most of all the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Ministry of Education) along with local councils, municipal information centres, lifelong learning centres or distance learning centres in the countryside. Ministries supervise operations of institutions which specialize in the field of vocational guidance, such as the National Centre for Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning (supervised by the Ministry of Education), psychological and pedagogical support centres (supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), job centres, information and career planning agencies and Voluntary Labour Corps. In various sectors, different non-public sector institutions, such as employment agencies, associations and foundations (e.g.: the Association of Polish Educational and Professional Advisors) also offer similar services. The activities of these institutions are not coordinated by any entity to ensure system integrity and greater cooperation. Institutions providing vocational guidance are not linked to each other in a way that more coordinated support to individuals of any age, at any stage of life could be provided to enable them to make wise choices about their education, training and profession, and also to manage effectively their own career.

Actions in the field of vocational guidance do not include all potentially interested in this kind of support. Despite the efforts of institutions and associations, Polish pupils are still not provided with effective support in selecting the right career path, as evidenced by the

widespread phenomenon of making hasty educational and professional decisions by children and young people at the stage of formal school education. This contributes to an increase in unemployment rates among school graduates and to the misuse of human capital in the labour market.

Officially, one of the subsystems of the educational and professional counselling are the inner-school career centres. They are created in accordance with the educational law, which indicates that the education system in Poland shall assist students with their career choices and will help direct their education. Under such regulations, career advice is one of the forms of psychological and pedagogical support provided to students, and aims to help them use active methods in choosing the direction of their further education, profession and career planning, and in providing information in this area, as well as supporting teachers in organising the internal advice system and activities related to the choice of educational and professional futures. Professional vocational guidance is usually provided in schools externally by specialists. Some schools have their own career centres.

Educational laws create the possibility but do not impose obligation on schools, to employ a career advisor. This includes a systematic diagnosis of student needs for educational and employment information and assistance in career planning, collecting, updating and sharing of educational and professional information about the labour market, development trends in the world of occupations and employment, use of own abilities and talents in future performance of professional tasks, as well as providing individual counselling to students and parents, conducting group activity classes, preparing students for wise career planning and entering the job market, collaboration with the institutions which support internal vocational guidance system, in particular with the psychological and pedagogical consultancies, including specialist ones, providing guidance and expertise to help pupils and parents. In practice, actions taken by schools, as far as vocational guidance is concerned, are limited and consist of occasional classes providing rather basic information about the labour market. Some schools do not implement any guidance or counselling and they do not employ any specialist help. In those schools where employment guidance is limited, the obligation to provide it, is transferred onto teachers who are not adequately trained and qualified. The quality and quantity of advice in schools is affected by the fact that vocational guidance is not included in the curriculum. The result is that advisory services are not thought-through and provided ad hoc.

Career guidance for students is also a statutory duty of the psychological and pedagogical centres. Schools and centres are required to cooperate when providing assistance in choosing the right type of education. Available data indicates that vocational guidance is a rather neglected area and that psychological and pedagogical agencies lack sufficient funding. Authorities supervising such agencies are reluctant to employ full time specialists and the importance of their role is often underestimated. Human resources assigned to provide personal counselling in psychological and pedagogical centres are not proportionally sufficient for the actual needs.

School career centres, formed through various social initiatives and designed in order to strengthen the system of vocational guidance in education, offer individual and group, information and action meetings. Unfortunately, research shows, that the number of schools which have their own career centres has been steadily decreasing.

In 2010, the Minister of Education introduced changes to the law in the field of education and employment advice, which should result in improved quality of these services in schools. Amendments suggested by the Ministry of Education, associated with increasing of educational opportunities for children and youth, require all middle and secondary schools to implement measures to provide educational and vocational guidance to support students in planning their own learning paths and careers. Schools are responsible for planning activities

in educational and vocational counselling, and for teaching young people how to realise their plans successfully.

Comprehensive support includes diagnosing individual needs of a particular student by a career advisor, planning and implementing daily schedules by a team of teachers, specialists and educators to use mandatory active methods and run additional activities. If the school does not have a career advisor, a head-teacher should designate one of the teachers to perform this function. Schools can also benefit from the support of external advisors. An advisor or a teacher designated for this role should collaborate on any given task with other teachers and parents.

2. LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

2a. What is the nature of lifelong learning policy in your country? What are the goals? Which problems is it expected to solve?

Focus on responsible actors/stakeholders, who takes initiatives, what are the reasons for these actors to act?

- Till now Poland is implementing elements LLL policy on the basis of various policy documents covering the whole state area (for example the “National Development Strategy 2007-2015”, “National Reform Programme”) and different sectors of education and training (general education, VET, higher education, adult learning). The most important sectorial document is the “Education Development Strategy for 2007-2013” adopted by the Government in August 2005.
- For many years, even after announcement by the Commission in 2000 “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” the LLL policy was limited to continuous education of adults, including especially VET for adults. European debate on the full scope of LLL policy in the second part of last decade (for example EQF with strong stress on validation systems and lifewide learning, ECVET, ET2020, Adult learning, ECEC) was very helpful to enlarge the scope of LLL policy in Poland too.
- On February 2010 an Interdepartmental Team for lifelong learning, including the National Qualifications Framework, was created by Order of the Prime Minister. This Team consists of representatives of the Prime Minister’s Chancellery and the ministries responsible for education, science and higher education, the economy, labour and social policy, regional development and foreign affairs.
- On March 2011 the strategy document named “Lifelong Learning Perspective” prepared by the Interdepartmental Team was preliminarily adopted by the Committee of the Council of the Ministers. This document is covering the whole spectrum of LLL policy from ECEC to senior learning in the formal, non-formal, informal context and from lowest to highest levels of competences and qualifications.
- Now the targets and actions proposed in this document are set against the targets and actions proposed in 9 new development strategies covering the whole state area in the framework of the “*Plan for putting an order to the national development strategies*” adopted by the Government. The intension of Government is such that LLL and the development of competences and qualifications must be present in all strategies covering the whole state area.
- The diagnosis of the above mentioned “Perspective” is in line with monitoring of Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020 strategy in Poland (and additionally with important OECD, World Bank and national surveys).

- The LLL policy pursued in Poland and encompassing the whole area of learning has been effective so far mainly in the area of formal learning. In the development of this learning, especially in the development of education from age 6/7 years to 18/24 years, Poland has many outstanding results which are even among the best in the EU and the OECD. For example Poland has the most ambitious target in Europe 2020 strategy in the scope of Early School Leaving (4,5%) and very ambitious target in tertiary education attainment of adult young people (45%).
- But despite this Poland has rather low achievements in the larger LLL area, especially in ECEC, adult learning, links between education and labour market (EU is stressing this in monitoring of Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020 strategy in Poland). PISA survey in Poland is showing that despite the visible development of competences of low-achievers there is still a challenge in preparing students as lifelong learners. This challenge is important for whole formal education in Poland including higher education. Polish national qualification system is divided across sectorial borders and not enough supporting growing mobility of people.
- In the face of such challenges, the Interdepartmental Team for LLL policy selected the following main objectives of the Polish LLL policy: (1) increase in creativity and innovation; (2) transparent and coherent national qualifications system; (3) diverse and accessible range of forms of ECEC; (4) education and training tailored to the needs of sustainable economy, changes on the labour market and social needs; (5) working environment and community involvement supporting development of adult learning.
- Our participation in the European cooperation in education and training has made it easier for us to work out a new approach to the challenges referred to above:
 - in adult learning, we emphasize the role of learning at work and of non-formal learning, whilst also stressing the need for the development of a validation system and the introduction of changes in its favour in the national qualification systems, thus providing a basis for a new policy in this area,
 - to ensure better adjustment of education to the needs of the labour market, we highlight the role of practical learning in initial education and module-based training designed to improve professional skills of adults,
 - in the area of ECEC, we see the need for an integrated approach involving parents.

2b. Is there a policy on recognition of non-formal and informal learning practiced as an element in the lifelong learning policy?

For instance as a means for motivating adults for lifelong learning?

- Till now Poland has rather low achievements in building large and coherent system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning (it is stated too in the last inventory report on validation of non-formal and informal learning by GHK, 2010).
- But it must be repeated that the great achievements of Poland in the area of dissemination formal education among young people (the greatest in UE percentage of young people in Poland aged 15-24 years is participating in education on the levels ISCED 1-6) is lowering the interest in recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This problem concerns mainly older peoples, older and low-qualified workers and migrant workers.
- In the above mentioned new strategy document on LLL policy in Poland (“Lifelong Learning Perspective”) recognition of non-formal and informal learning is treated as the basic part of modernization of Polish national qualification system, modernization of adult learning and basis for better tailoring education and training to the needs of labour market.

2c. Are all education sectors cooperating in creating lifelong learning programmes?

- In Poland there is a long tradition of barriers between education sectors. One of them was entrance examinations on the upper secondary level and on higher education level. Elements of LLL policy introduced in last decade reduced these barriers.
- But there are still “cultural” (with strong socio-economic background) differences between vocational initial education and general initial education (for example PISA data in Poland is showing great differences of student achievements in VET and GE streams). There are still great differences between formal education of young people on the level of upper secondary and higher education (which has many successes in Poland) and adult learning. The cooperation in the scope of such differences is limited.
- Despite these differences between education sectors they are more ready to accept main LLL policy rules. One of the most important of such “rules” is orientation on learning outcomes. Since September 2009 we are introducing curriculum reform in general education based on learning outcomes. The same is starting since October 2011 in higher education sector (based on National Qualification Framework for Higher Education). And in September 2012 similar reform will start in VET sector based on schools. In VET sector as a whole we are still developing national vocational qualification standards based on labour market requirements.

2d. Is there national legislation for lifelong learning? Or is lifelong learning regulated on a sectoral level?

- Till now there is no legislation on national level for LLL as a whole.
- But we may say about national legislation for important elements of LLL policy. One of the most important examples of such legislation may be development (since September 2009) of legislation based on learning outcomes in general education, higher education and VET (see point 2c).

2e. On the national level: What are your experiences with regard to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning?

- Elements of recognition of non-formal and informal learning are defined in national legislation. Such elements include:
 - a system of extramural exams for adults who may obtain graduation certificates from schools on ISCED 1-3 without the necessity of attending them,
 - exemption from external national exams on the basis of achievements in national and international students’ Olympiads and school subject contents,
 - the system of exams for apprentices and masters organized by vocational associations.
- Furthermore it is important that:
 - some elements of recognition of non-formal and informal learning are used in higher education institutions on the base of its autonomy,
 - in the planned reform of VET (see point 2c) the system of external exams acknowledging vocational qualifications will be open for individuals who are not graduates of vocational schools.

2f. On the companies/trade unions/training organisations level: Are there any examples for good practice? Please describe!

4. NON-FORMAL AND FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4a. In how far are people supported in non-formal learning? What are the instruments and kinds of support?

Non-formal education, which does not lead directly to qualifications, is implemented in the form of courses and training sessions and does not finish in Poland with a certificate of attainment confirming specific skills. Further education and training has therefore only practical dimension - as a form of expansion of competences - and its meaning and value is subjectively assessed by a trainee and an employer benefiting from these competences.

Legal means of support for learners in Poland - especially for workers - are associated with the acquisition of skills mainly through formal education. In accordance with the employment law, an employee who decides to improve his/her professional/vocational qualifications, is entitled to paid training leave and to paid time off work, required for arrival to lecture/training and the duration of classes. The employer may also (though it is not an obligation) grant the employee additional benefits e.g.: cover fees for education or training and expenses for travel, accommodation or course-books.

Employees who gain further knowledge and skills through non-formal education, are entitled by law to optional unpaid leave as well. Granting of these benefits is decided by the employer.

The support for working learners is defined by more specific regulations, such as pragmatics of teachers, whose statutory duty is consistent improvement of their competences. In school budgets, there is always a certain amount of money designed to fund teachers' training as per the above-mentioned reason. The initiative comes either from bodies supervising schools or headmasters. Funding may cover both the formal education of teachers ready to obtain additional qualifications, and various forms of participation in non-formal education, which is in line with the needs of teachers to improve their professional skills. Grants are particularly required for the organisation of training, participation in courses and the enrolment of teachers for postgraduate studies etc. (financing costs of participation in training, as well as travel and accommodation expenses of participants).

4b. Is there a praxis in your country to assign EC VET credit points?

Until now, the ECVET system has not been implemented in Poland yet. Through various pilot projects and the collection of experiences and good practices, measures are being taken to facilitate the implementation of this system in the future.

The conditions for the introduction of the ECVET system are being improved by the fact that the vocational education programme reform is being implemented at present. The reform describes vocational training from the learning outcomes standpoint and the process of gaining competences in different professions has been divided into component stages leading to the attainment of professional qualifications.

4c. In how far does EC VET increase flexibility of training programs?

ECVET has not been implemented and does not affect the increased flexibility of the training programmes yet, but the fact that the reform of vocational education recommends a wider use of modular curricula, could be considered one of the factors that will facilitate the implementation of the system in the future.

4d. How do you identify (what methods do you use?) skill profiles due to future skill needs?

Unfortunately, there is no system in Poland that would stimulate greater coherence between VET and the labour market needs, taking into account the demand for particular types of professional skills in the future. According to the education act, head-teachers in collaboration with local authorities, are the ones to decide on the selection of professions which vocational schools will teach, after consulting on that matter with the district and provincial employment councils.

4e. In how far does this influence the formulation of curricula?

School curricula, including VET curricula are designed and developed in relation to the educational standards of a certain school. It is the decision of a head-teacher who, by allowing the use of a certain programme, has to verify its compatibility with the core vocational education curriculum required in all schools, and to assess the level of the adaptation to the needs of specific student groups for whom the programme is intended.

In practice, the adaptation of the curricula to the future needs of the labour market occurs indirectly through changes in the description of recognized professional standards in the core VET curriculum. The study of the demand for specific vocational skills has little impact on the shape and content of the curriculum, although there are some good practices of shaping programme profiles and adjusting them to the needs of the employers who collaborate with schools.

4f. What are your quality assurance standards within education and training (EQARF)?

Poland is in the process of developing and implementing solutions that would help create a system of VET quality assurance standards which would cover comprehensively the entire process leading to the award of new qualifications. The existing regulations are fragmented and cover only narrow areas of education and training.

With regard to teacher training institutions, there are currently regulations regarding accreditation of these facilities. Institutions can obtain accreditation which ensures high quality of teacher training services. Accreditation is granted through an administrative decision, issued after the assessment of the work of the institution from the educational law compliance standpoint. Only those institutions which provide highly qualified staff, develop and implement teacher training programmes, carry out their evaluation, publish information about teacher training related issues and provide a modern didactic base, can obtain accreditation. Local education offices are currently responsible for granting accreditation. They can also withdraw the accreditation through an administrative decision if they find that institutions do not meet requirements necessary to become accredited. Training institutions which seek accreditation have to cover the costs of the process. Only institutions which provide training services free of charge, do not have to pay any fee.

5. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

5a. What are the tools/instruments/methods used for the identification (e.g. portfolio, interview, demonstration, self-assessment) of competences? What kinds of proof can be submitted?

5b. How is informal learning measured and validated? To what extent can validation use the same standards and references as formal education and training? If not, what other standards are used - job, or sectoral (branch)?

5c. What kind of advice/feedback may be made by assessors or mentors, counsellors, peers examiners?

- In Poland, there is no general system in place to verify competencies which would cover all areas of education - formal, non-formal and informal.
- Validation is now conducted in case of practically any form of organised training, but it is not part of any wider system and it can be slightly imperfect.
- There is also the possibility of validating learning outcomes outside of formalised VET programmes, but the scale of such possibilities is rather small and it does not fulfill the current needs. Informal learning (individual) could lead to a qualification in general and vocational education through a system of external examinations. On their basis, it is possible today to obtain a certificate of completion of primary and secondary education. Currently, new regulations are being implemented which extend the range of external examinations and include VET examinations that certify the attainment of vocational qualifications.
- Further validation of competences will require legislative amendments and the preparation of appropriate institutional infrastructure. Development of the validation system of the learning outcomes, obtained outside of formal education, is an important trend in the educational policy of lifelong learning. Creation of the national qualifications framework in Poland is part of the state policy aiming to confirm the validity of learning outcomes that not only labour market could benefit from, but also the society as a whole and individual learners. Basing the qualifications framework on learning outcomes will allow official recognition of learners' real competences gained outside of the formal education system.

6. SWOT

6a. Which strengths are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects.

6b. Which weaknesses are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects.

6c. Which opportunities are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects.

6d. Which threats are facing your country's learning system when it comes to implementing the EQF?

Focus on sustainability issues, cost-benefit issues, ethical issues, transferability between sectors and EQF-related aspects

Strengths and weaknesses according outcomes of Project involving construction workers organizations from some European (from Poland APL-Bud)

The initiative showed its potential to make a contribution to the national VET reform, the development of the NQF and new VET curricula in Poland by offering new insights from the pilot initiatives and providing a general framework for piloting further initiatives as part of these developments. The trans-European dimension of this initiative also provided new insights that could help other similar initiatives across Europe, but most importantly to Europe as a whole to achieve its goals already set out in the Education and Training 2010 work programme, the Lifelong Learning strategy (2001) and ultimately the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The initiative showed that validation of non-formal learning outcomes is relevant for workers in the construction sector and especially for the low-qualified. Anecdotal evidence indicate that validation can generate more opportunities in the labour market, reduce the sense of insecurity and risk of unemployment, but also boost the participants' self-esteem. Moreover, the pilots suggest that formally named as low-skilled, or low-qualified (because they do not possess formal vocational qualifications) workers are actually able to develop and demonstrate high levels of competence and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning (i.e. work experience).

As the project findings suggest, there are substantial hidden obstacles to migrant workers to acquire qualifications and / or to get them recognised in a foreign country, especially those acquired through non-formal or informal learning. Even when a system for validation exists, it is difficult to find information about it, the process is unnecessarily complex and variable over time and place, not to mention about being sympathetic to migrant workers. The project showed that there is a lot to learn from the systems already implemented elsewhere (such as Romania, Belgium, Italy and the UK), but also delivered new insights to these already established systems to make them more accessible for migrant workers.

The project showed that a lot of joint efforts are required for the development of an internationally recognised certificate, but the requirement for these efforts is not lower at the national level.

Another important aspect to make such initiatives successful is to address the lack of concrete motivation for APL both for workers and for their employers. Workers and employers both need to be targeted with better information about the opportunities available and the benefits and incentives: improved conditions of employment (not only financial gains, but also level, status, formalization, responsibility) for workers, improved competitiveness for employers.

In an interview conducted for this case study, a number of key points were identified that need to be considered in order to design a validation procedure and set up an awarding body to make the process worthwhile and corresponding to contemporary labour market needs etc., such as

- a) a strong link with the EQF;
- b) a strong link with the European guidelines for validation;
- c) a strong link with ECVET (which basically means an independence of the certifying body, an independence of the evaluation and free access to assessment);
- d) emphasis on real benefits and added value for the members of a potential target group.

In this context it is necessary to underpin and understand the challenges, opportunities and links that the project faces. It is important to learn from the experience and be able to build and sustain strong commitment from all actors involved (such as social partners, policy and decision-makers and VET providers and employers), which is a key for every project or initiative to succeed.

7. Thematic outline

7a. On page 1 there are 10 issues (themes) formulated: Are these addressed issues relevant or not relevant for you?

Adressed issues	Relevant 3	Less relevant 2	Not relevant 1
Collective bargaining		X	
Impact of the learning outcome-approach for initial and further training	X		
Assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning	X		
Data protection vs. Transparency		X	
Increase flexibility in training programmes (e.g. EC VET)	X		
Permeability between general, vocational and tertiary education and training		X	
Quality assurance within vocational education and training (EQARF)	X		
Guidance and individual career development	X		
Standards for developing new skill profiles due to future skill needs	X		
Mismatching (low and over qualification)			

Please explain the reasons for your rating!

7b. On page 1 there are 10 issues (themes) formulated: From your national point of view what else issues are relevant for you in the process of implementation and use of EQF? Please give us a detailed description. Do you have any approaches (strategies or experiences) to solve these challenges?

8. Information and support by PIN

8a. What information do you expect from PIN, from a trade union, in company and educational providers point of view?

8b. What support do you need?

The Project involving construction workers organizations from some European (from Poland APL-Bud) countries encountered a lot of challenges therefore was rich in terms of opportunities for learning:

- It was hoped that by documenting the differences between the APL-Bud system in Poland and the foreign systems, it would be possible to demonstrate that they were similar (in scope, standard and reliability) and in this way the full Polish accreditation may also be awarded to the APL-Bud Project participants in project partner countries by making slight changes. In practice it was only possible to award an APL-Bud project qualification, not the full accreditation, which was acquired by APL-Bud Project participants in Poland;
- The recruitment of candidates proved particularly difficult in Belgium and the UK and did not succeed at all in Germany (largely because transition arrangements excluded Polish workers from the German labour market and illegal workers were afraid to come forward). In general migrant workers are not easy to contact, for instance, even after 5 years as staying the project partner countries they were not networked with each other (and still less with migrants from other countries) and they were not necessarily motivated to improve their qualifications. For these reasons Project partners needed to be very creative and try several strategies to find eligible candidates;
- The major incentive for candidates working outside Poland was to acquire a foreign qualification, in order to improve their competitiveness on the local labour market (to obtain more work, better pay, better status, or become more 'legal') but this was often not enough. The APL-Bud Polish qualification was not a significant incentive (NB it is not yet a certainty that the Polish qualification can be awarded to candidates outside the country). Migrants may not expect to stay long enough to make local qualifications worthwhile. Employers perceive a loss not gain from qualifications for their migrant workers (loss of production during assessment, cost of assessment, subsequent demands for higher wages or loss of employees etc.);
- Language skills of migrant workers are often poor. Recruitment benefited hugely when the Polish language was used (for advertisements, or discussions with candidates). Candidates were concerned their language skills were insufficient for assessment. There was a separate vocabulary (and often concepts) which was not part of migrant workers' everyday speech even in their own language: associated with qualifications, government grants, portfolios, evidence, assessment. UK assessors remarked that they had to explain what test questions mean even to native English candidates. In general, standard processes rarely make allowances for people with other mother-tongues (the UK CSCS Health & Safety test is an exception, being offered in a wide variety of languages), and the assessors do not usually speak the migrant workers' language. Where special programmes have been designed for migrant workers, they include language tuition and this is doubtless extremely valuable for the candidates but was not included in the pilots of the Project. The Stage 1 (briefing on the assessment process) was often carried out in a group of candidates, so that they were able to help each other by translating;

- **Both candidates and employers in the construction industry tend to have a deep-rooted antipathy to ‘officialdom’, including government grants, assessors, etc. This was even worse in relation to illegal working and illegal pay/conditions in some countries, which hindered both the project partners (e.g. recruiting) and migrant workers who were unwilling to come forward as candidates;**
- **The theory test was a general disincentive (it was often the reason why a candidate did not have a qualification until now). Candidates had difficulties in understanding the written questions – UK assessors reported that this is the case even for candidates taking the test in their own language. It reflected the divide between the classroom and the workplace. The UK approach of asking the candidate orally, so that the candidate’s real understanding is assessed, overcomes some of this problem, especially when the test is in a foreign language.**