

Work Package 3

Focus Groups Report

ValidAid
validation of
competences

**Interviews with employers, stakeholders and
employees
performed in each project partners' countries.**

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1. Introduction

The project “Validation of skills and knowledge for strengthening the positions of low-qualified employees in the labour market – ValidAid” started in October 2010. It has duration of two years and is expected to end in September 2012.

This project aims at developing methods and tools for identifying and validating competences in the workplace and opening gateways to education and training to make it easier for low qualified individuals to develop their competences, and by that secure their position on the labour market.

The project consortium includes seven organisations from six countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Iceland, France, Lithuania and Portugal. The partnership includes international universities, research centres, training and counselling organisations.

This research aims to find out the situation from Focus Group researches with employers, employees and stakeholders, and leads to a better understanding of situations of professional training systems, concerning real characteristics and scope of validation, recognition and application of Learning outcomes acquired in previous job positions, non-formal and informal education within projects partnerships’ countries. All this research helps highlighting the real situation concerning awareness and implementation of non-formal and informal education, condition for validation of such kind of learning outcomes on the one hand and actual need for such validation and recognition on the other.

2. Research methodology

Focus Group interviews were organized to find out basic situation concerning validation and recognition of knowledge and skills in appropriate sector, interviewing three target groups: low-qualified or/and unemployed person, employers and stakeholders in project partners' countries..

The main tasks of Focus group interviews:

- To interview low-qualified or/and unemployed persons to find out their experience, opinion about need and personal interests in validation and recognition of Competencies acquired in Non-formal and Informal education;
- To interview employers from relevant sectors (Trade, Finance, IT sectors) to find out their opinion about need and organizational interests in validation and recognition of Competencies acquired in non-formal and Informal education;
- Interview Stakeholders to find out their attitudes (need, current situation, perspectives, applicability) concerning validation and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education in National context;

Precondition of the research: Partners corporately created Interview questionnaire for focus group interviews (in annex).

Quantity of Research: 10 Employers (IT, Trade, Finance sectors); 10 Employees and 10 Stakeholders.

The main research questions/aspects to answer:



1. The main differences and peculiarities employing person with low qualification in IT, Finance and Trade sectors?
2. Do focus groups participants have sufficient information about evaluation and recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal environments?
3. What are attitudes of focus groups participants towards validation of such competencies: advantages, difficulties foreseen?
4. Find out Focus group participants willingness to participate in project activities;
5. Foreseeing the main challenges, critical points implementing project.

Outcome of the research: Clarified situation concerning experiences and attitudes Employers, Employees and Stakeholders concerning validation and Recognition of Competencies acquired in non-formal and Informal education

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3. Scope of the interviews (General description of the participants)

In project partnerships countries have been implemented focus group research with unemployed/low qualified persons, employers (Sectors: IT, FINACE, TRADE) and stakeholders.

Requirements implemented for Interviews:

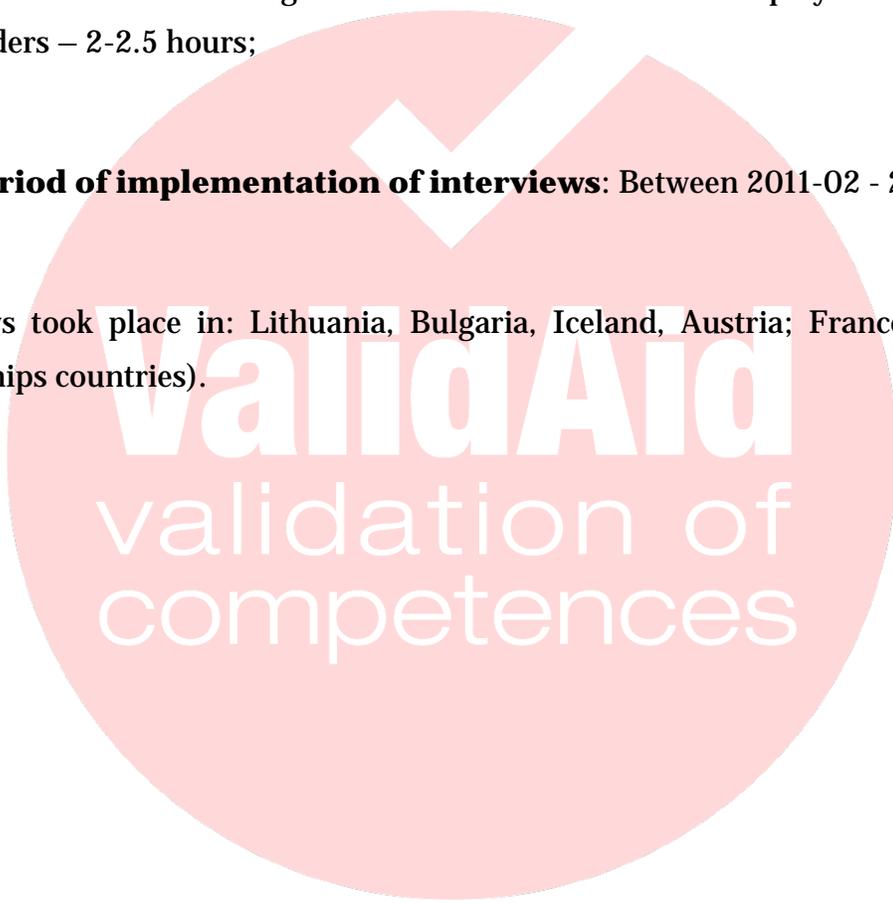
- Each country interviewed at least 10 employees, asking to answer the appropriate questions (see the annexes). The main requirement for employees were:
 1. Persons with low qualification or/and unemployed (Vocational qualification without higher education, Secondary education);
 2. Person connected with Finance, IT and Trade sectors (has professional qualification or/and work experience);
 3. Positive attitude to cooperate in the project and provide detail information.
- Each country interviewed at least 10 employers (optionally: at least 3 for IT, Finance, Trade sectors), asking to answer the appropriate questions (see the annexes). The main requirements for employees were:
 1. Employers represented their organizations from the respected sector (IT; Finance and Trade);
 2. Positive attitude to cooperate in the project and provide detail information.
- Particular countries implemented at least with 10 stakeholders' research asking to answer the appropriate questions (see the annexes). The main requirement for employees were:
 1. Stakeholders should represent some kind of public institutions responsible for adult, vocational education;

2. Stakeholders that represents governmental organizations that are responsible for implementation of educational policy;
3. Other public organizations like employers, employee’s professional unions/chambers, associations.

Time of interview: Average of time of interview with Employees and Employers and Stakeholders – 2-2.5 hours;

Time period of implementation of interviews: Between 2011-02 - 2011-06;

Interviews took place in: Lithuania, Bulgaria, Iceland, Austria; France; Portugal (Project Partnerships countries).



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4. Employees' Summery of Statements (Finance/Trade/IT sector)

Focus group questions	Lithuania	Bulgaria	Iceland	Austria
What education have you acquired?	TRADE/FIN/IT Half of them had secondary education, all other have acquired higher education.	TRADE/FIN Most of interviewees have graduated high school that does not provide vocational training for their job.	TRADE. The participants had various educations; lower-secondary school, office training, technological drawing, as a secretary at a hospital.	FIN/IT/TRADE. Commercial college (Handelsschule); Upper level secondary educational colleague; University degree, MSC level.
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of participants possessed Vocational education (lower or upper); Some had University degrees.			
Do you work according to your profession? Did you have enough knowledge and practical skills when you started working?	TRADE/FIN/IT Two thirds of them are working, but before they started they felt need of knowledge and skills.	TRADE/FIN Focus group participants have declared that they do not occupy a job, similar to profession they acquired in high school. Half of the cashiers starting their work had general information about their job and they had no practical experience and skills in bank services	TRADE. All participants were unemployed at the time the group met. All had been on the labor market before. They intend to find a job and are all active in job-seeking except one who is invalid. Average time in last steady job was about 5 years. Most of the participants were in job "suitable for their knowledge and skills,"	FIN/IT/TRADE. Their professional works match their profession and they have enough knowledge and practical skills when they started working.
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Very different experience among the employees: some of them were working according the professional, while other haven't jobs at all; At the beginning of working some of them felt lack of skills;			

	However - In Austria professional did not have any problems starting to work sufficiently.			
Did you have a chance to retrain? Did you attend any type of courses? Why did you decide to learn? How do you rate these courses, programmes, etc.? Did you find them useful? If you did not attend any courses or professional learning programmes, do you know where you can retrain, acquire a profession, etc?	TRADE/FIN/IT Most of interviewees had a chance to be retrained, and evaluate life-long learning possibilities positively. Most of difficulties arise when additional charges needed to cover for the qualification.	TRADE/FIN Participants in the focus group of bank cashiers had the opportunity to retrain. They have undergone courses, including courses organized by the employer such as: "Course for foreign currency teller"; "Course for tellers" They have received the relevant certificates of training, eg. "Silver certificate", "Gold certificate", etc	TRADE. Participants agreed that their former employers did not offer or enhance people to retrain or motivate to attend courses or learning.	FIN/IT/TRADE. Most of them did have the chance to retrain (training plan in each company).
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Different answers were provided from different countries sectors: depending on enterprises' HRS policy some employers send their employees to learn and cover expenses, some – do not. Some companies have their annual plans for employees' education.			
Are you satisfied with your education?	TRADE/FIN/IT Interviewees pointed that at the beginning knowledge and skills were sufficient, but with the time and new requirements faced, they felt they need to get	TRADE/FIN They say it (secondary education) does not contribute to needed knowledge and skills for cashiers and they cannot rate it as "good". A part of respondents (40%)	TRADE. Unemployed, aged between 30 and 50 they felt and knew they had to add to their education to have any change in the labor market.	FIN/IT/TRADE. For those who attended courses, they learn new skills which will be useful for their daily work.

	additional qualifications.	consider themselves as "old" and have passed the age for learning. Some expresses opinion : "it is too late to continue to learn".		
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of employees in elderly age stress necessity for additional learning/ education to catch up all the new; some of them stress that even its to late something to be changed.			
What jobs did you have? What work experience do you have? Have you ever changed a job? What were the reasons?	TRADE/FIN/IT Respondents had very various work experience (financial managerial, trading). The main reasons of changing work were: too small salaries; decrease of employees' number, restructuring of business.	TRADE/FIN Most of the bank cashiers did not change their profession. After graduating secondary education they started working in the banking sector and have no experience with other professions. They have changed many times the banks, but not the occupation.	TRADE. All the participants had changed jobs more than once during the span of their life in the labor market. Several -reasons were given, such as moving with family, hope of better paid job, try something new.	-
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Very different reasons were declared for changing jobs. Some of them were economical: too small salaries; decrease of employees' number, restructuring of business. Some – personal: such as moving with family, hope of better paid job, try something new.			
What experience of job searching do you have? Where did you look for the information?	TRADE/FIN/IT Most of interviewees were looking for the job over 2 month. Mostly information were search on internet and newspapers. The main	TRADE/FIN The participating bank cashiers have significant experience in searching new jobs. They look for a new job through friends	TRADE. Job-searching basically person to person, private network, word of mouth. Today, as unemployed, the Directorate of Labor also assist the in the job-	-

	reason of refusing from the job were: age, shortage of experience,	and former colleagues, also from ads in the press	searching.	
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Experience of searching for the job very different. They have looking information on the internet, newspapers; asked colleagues promotions; word of mouth; Labor marker exchange offices jobs searching based._			
What was the duration of job searching? How many times were you employed?	TRADE/FIN/IT Average of time for searching for the job is 3-12 month.	TRADE/FIN Bank cashiers have been unemployed up to one year. They have changed jobs many times, more than four times each of them.	TRADE. The participants have been unemployed from several months to over two years. Most of them has never been unemployed before. Just some days or week between jobs.	FIN/IT/TRADE. The duration of job searching is between one to six months.
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Experience of searching for the jobs are very different: from one month - and even until two years. This depends mostly on countries general economical and sectoral situations._			
Have you ever attended a job interview? Please, describe it. What difficulties did you face when looking for a job?	TRADE/FIN/IT Most of interviewees participated in job interviews. The main problem connected with self-confidence and work experience.	TRADE/FIN All bank cashiers participated in job interviews. They did not mention particular difficulties, but they said they were always concerned, which is a natural state.	TRADE. Usually not very difficult experience, but depends on the job and the need for the job. The more the need – the more difficult (more stress).	-
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of employees say that the main concern participating in the interview connected to self-confidence and stress management._			
What general abilities are important when looking	TRADE/FIN/IT The main important	TRADE/FIN Participants could not	TRADE. Self-confidence is the single most important ability when	FIN/IT/TRADE. The general abilities when they look for a job are:

for a job?	general abilities required: Responsibility; initiativeness; ability to learn new things; IT literacy; communication.	formulate general abilities that were essential for new job search.	looking for a job.	competences, opportunism, references, motivation, patience, perseverance and a bit of luck.
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Different of answers are delivered by employees: some of them do not identify any of important of general abilities; some points out more important attitudes like: Responsibility; initiativeness, communication, , opportunism, motivation, patience, perseverance and a bit of luck.			
What kind of professional abilities do you have?	TRADE/FIN/IT Organization management, managerial, pedagogical, work safety, environmental management.	TRADE/FIN Different financial operations, <i>Ability to serve customers, Teamwork with colleagues, Ability to tackle conflict situations, Ability to organize, Ability to work with computers, Additional skills related to work.</i>	TRADE. Most of them had not finished professional education, but non the less, most of them considered the self as professionals in their previous jobs.	FIN/IT/TRADE. he general abilities are: entrepreneur, passionate, enthusiasm, conscientious, handling of office tools, language & communication skills, teamwork, commitment to the company
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of employees declare the following general competences: Organization management, managerial, pedagogical, work safety, environmental management; serving customers, team work; Some reflects work related attitudes: , passionate, enthusiasm, conscientious, commitment to the company and other.			
Do you have any knowledge or skills acquired through work experience, which could be counted as a part of	TRADE/FIN/IT Most of interviewees declares having lots of knowledge and skills	TRADE/FIN Participants declared that the knowledge and skills acquired in formal	TRADE. Computer skills, Word / Excel, customer service, communication, secretary.	FIN/IT/TRADE. It is interesting to notice that most of them would like to have their non-formal/informal

formal learning programme (credits)?	acquired through work: managerial, pedagogical, administrative, financial, IT and other.	education were important, but their professional competence was the result primarily of their practice		recognized but they have a fuzzy idea where they can apply for that.
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of interviewees have a lot of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education. Most of it are general competencies: managerial, administrative, financial, IT, customer service, communicational and other. Employees don't have a clear view how it (non-formal and informal) could be tested in practice.			
Would you like that the knowledge and abilities which you have acquired through non-formal learning programmes work or self-education would be evaluated and recognized with the help of certain techniques?	TRADE/FIN/IT Most of interviewees would like to participate in certain testing to validate their knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning.	TRADE/FIN According to respondents, this is an appropriate way to assess the acquired competencies through practical experience adequately. They expected that validation was something like a practical exam.	TRADE. Yes, of course! To have documents proving the knowledge and skill.	
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of employees would like (would agree) to validate their competences acquired in work, non-formal, informal environments.			
How do you rate the practical benefit of the recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning?	TRADE/FIN/IT Interviewees say that they would value highly procedures of evaluation, validation of competencies acquired in work in case its recognized by employers	TRADE/FIN Bank cashiers mentioned practical benefits of competences validation in professional development, however, prospects are not too big. They saw greater		

	widely.	possibilities for applying the validation procedure for the purpose of annual evaluation (appraisal) and especially when the level of the salary is determined. validation was very appropriate for young people who have no specialized education but have worked as cashier-arrangers		
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of employees say that <i>recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning would be useful in case it is recognized by their employers; this concerns mostly annual evaluation when the level of salary is determined or for people who seeks for a new job.</i>			
Do you know where you can apply so that your knowledge and abilities which you have acquired through non-formal learning programmes, work or self-education could be evaluated and recognized with the help of certain techniques?	TRADE/FIN/IT Interviewees declare that they are not aware about any institutions or held Activities concerning evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal, in-formal education. They add that its not enough information about possibilities to validate such competencies.	TRADE/FIN Most of the respondents in the bank had not heard about the validation of knowledge and skills acquired non-formally or informally.		
Conclusion	TRADE/FIN/IT. Most of employees from the all different sectors haven't heard anything about evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal, in-formal education. They stress that its not enough information about possibilities to validate such competencies.			

<p><i>Do you have the documents which indicate the level of your experience?</i></p>	<p><u>TRADE/FIN/IT</u> Most of interviewees pointed out that they have some of certificates or other papers declaring work experience: work agreements, course certificates.</p>	<p><u>TRADE/FIN</u> Focus group cashiers had <i>documents confirming their participation in training courses</i>, eg. Certificates for attending courses for cashiers and others. Also they can get some certificates from their employer to justify work experience.</p>	<p><u>TRADE.</u> Some of the participants had done a portfolio and said that had forced them to look for documents indicating previous experience but it had been very difficult and some impossible to find. Fortunately the schools and other educational providers keep their records accessible.</p>	
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p><u>Trade/IT/Fin.</u> Employees from all different sectors point to the following documents posses: course certificates, work agreements, reference letters, portfolios, appropriate records from employer.</p>			
<p><i>Do you think that recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning could change your position in the labor market, your social status or make influence of your professional career?</i></p>	<p><u>TRADE/FIN/IT</u> Focus group interviewees revealed they evaluate positively knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal education. They think that evaluation and recognition of those competences would improve their work positions largely.</p>	<p><u>TRADE/FIN</u> Most of the bank cashier respondents believed that the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning <i>can enable their career.</i> Some stressed The acquisition of such a document would not bring them a higher place in the hierarchy, but they stressed <i>it would make them more competitive in the event of a change of their</i></p>	<p><u>TRADE.</u> Yes, definitely.</p>	

		<i>workplace.</i>	
Conclusion	Trade/IT/Fin. Employees from all different sectors agree that recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning could change your position in the labor market.		



5. Conclusions and implications

The Main Conclusions from Employees' interviews

1. Most of interview participants possessed Vocational education (lower or upper); some of them had University degrees;
2. Very different experience among the employees concerning working according their professions : some of them were working according the professions acquired, while other haven't jobs at all; At the beginning of working some of them felt lack of skills; However - In Austria professionals did not have any problems starting to work sufficiently;
3. Different answers were provided from different countries sectors concerning: depending on enterprises' HRS policy some employers send their employees to learn and cover all expenses, some – do not. Some companies have their annual plans for employees' education (banks mostly);
4. Most of employees stress necessity for additional learning/ education in elderly age to catch up all the new knowledge; some of them stress that - its to late something to be changed;
5. Very different reasons were declared for changing of jobs positions. Some of them were economical: too small salaries; decrement of
6. employees' number, restructuring of business. Some – personal: such as moving with family to other place, hope of better paid job, try something new;
7. Experience of searching for the job very different among the interviewees. They have looking information on the internet, newspapers; asked
8. for colleagues' promotions; word of mouth method; Labor marker exchange offices jobs searching based method etc.;
9. Experience of searching for jobs are very different: from one month - and even until two years. This depends mostly on countries general economical and sectoral situations;

10. Most of employees say that the main concern participating in the interview connected to self-confidence and stress management.
11. Different of answers are delivered by employees concerning what competencies important looking for a job: some of them do not identify any of important of general abilities; some points out more important attitudes like: Responsibility; initiativeness, communication, opportunism, motivation, patience, perseverance and a bit of luck;
12. Most of employees declare the following general competences they possess and could be validated: Organization management, managerial, pedagogical, work safety, environmental management; serving customers, team work; Some reflects work related attitudes: , passionate, enthusiasm, conscientious, commitment to the company and other;
13. Most of interviewees have a lot of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education. Most of them are general competencies: managerial, administrative, financial, IT, customer service, communicational and other. Employees don't have a clear view how it (non-formal and informal) could be tested in practice;
14. Most of employees would like (would agree) to validate their competences acquired in work, non-formal, informal environments;
15. Most of employees say that recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning would be useful in case it is recognized by their employers; According some of them - this concerns mostly annual evaluation when the level of salary is determined or for people who seeks for a new job;
16. Most of employees from the all different sectors haven't heard anything about evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non- formal, in-formal education. They stress that it's not enough information about possibilities to validate such competencies;
17. Employees from the all different sectors point to the following possessed documents for declaration of work experience: course certificates, work agreements, reference letters, portfolios, appropriate records from employer;
18. Employees from all different sectors agree that recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning could change (improve) your position in the labour market.

Implications on the Project Development

1. Project and its free of charge methodical tools for Validation of Competencies acquired in non-formal and informal environments should have positively influence on labour force mobility in partnerships country, especially for persons in elderly age who are more demotivated, lack of self-confidence in changing job positions or looking for a better salaries;
2. Project activities should be disseminated as wide as possible: Newspapers, internet resources, TV, seminars and conferences; meeting with stakeholders;
3. A lot of problems in searching jobs are usually faces because of psychological problems (stress, natural conditions), so it would be highly advisable to integrate into validation tools educational mechanism to promote self-confidence and self-assertiveness;
4. Most of employees reflect on their possessing basic competences more connected to EC 8 key competencies. Validation tools should include those competences highly ensuring objective evaluation procedure;
5. Crucial part of the project for all the partners – establish close relationships with employers organizations, different enterprises, companies to work directly with. That would disseminate of validation procedure, tools on the one hand and ensure labour market needs on the other.

6. The Main Conclusions from Employer Interviews from ITC, Trade and Finance Sectors

ITC Sector

1. Most of employers of IT sectors stress necessity to have professional or higher education to be able to proceed with various specific IT operations like Programming, website administration, knowledge and skills of IT technical assistance, quick reaction, ability to make solutions and render assistance;
2. Most of requested employers agreed that they would employ person with strong practical skills than theoretical;
3. Most of employers points such competences to be important in IT sphere: Knowledge about computer hardware, network management, system adjustment with Web technologies; security systems; Programming, website administration, IT hardware assistance; Java developer - should have knowledge about encryption and digital signature and the eclipse platform;
4. Most of employers points such competences (skills) to be important in IT sphere: computer hardware adjustment, manage computer network, adjust systems to Web technologies, and manage computer and information security systems. He might have a designed product; Communication, negotiation, presentation skills. Consulting, “trust- building”, “empathic” skills. IT skills;
5. Most of employers have such employers that have been evaluated on the bases on previously acquired experience ;
6. Most of employers in IT sectors declared that they have no any information about possibility of evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education;
7. Some of employers would rate importance of validation of such competences highly, but most of them would require formal
 - a. documents as well, as it need some specific knowledge and skills in the area;
8. Most of employers stated that they rate practical benefit quite highly, if person can demonstrate practical skills on the

issue. On the other hand such document like CV, reference letters from the other employers are highly beneficial taking decisions as well;

9. Employers from IT sector stated following success factors of evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal, informal competences: clear system, evaluation criteria, and recommendations; The main principle – objectivity; Official bodies (Colleges, universities should implement it); system should be comparable within Europe;
10. Most of employers would issue such a document. But they don't think this document could be impartial evidence suitable for all the cases. In any cases before they employ the person they arrange a meeting with employee to get more information about his work;
11. Opinions largely defers among the employers: some says they would be able to pay for employees' qualification, courses, some –may not.

Finance Sector

1. Employers from Finance sector points, that in order to get job in finance sector, it's important to have at least Vocational education (could be lower Professional education) or higher where it is proper. Most of employers stress importance of competencies like: practical work experience, to have cashier experience as a bank teller or cashier in supermarkets. Situation in different countries differs: In Austria formal education is valued more comparing to Iceland and other European countries where academic degree is not always necessary;
2. Most of employers unanimously approved the recruitment of practical experience in financial matters are more important than
 - a. academic preparation. Anyway still some professional qualification is necessary for working in the financial sector;
3. Employers from the finance sector stress the importance of knowledge of the laws and practical application of accounting knowledge, computer literacy; cash machine operations, basic knowledge of finance;
4. Employers from the finance sector stress the importance of skills in an accountant position: this is a special theoretical preparation, and general abilities (susceptibility, intuitiveness), personal characteristics, which are related to

- this area of work (diligence, honesty); working with cash money; Good customer care (courtesy, politeness, etc.);
5. Focus group research from the most countries showed, that different companies have staff who have competencies gained through experience, but has no formal education in the document, other companies has less;
 6. Only some of Employers from Finance sector from Lithuania revealed that they have some information about validation of such competencies (gained and validated from non-formal, informal education), but declares that still more information needed. Other employers from the different countries haven't had any information about it;
 7. Employers' assessment of needs for recognition of skills acquired in non-formal and informal environments are quite reserved; Practical skills that are demonstrated and professional certificates are appreciated hiring worker;
 8. Most of Employers stress positively the need and use of validation of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education. They would definitely accept person that demonstrate appropriate competences: this validation could promote persons career, looking for another job;
 9. Employers from Finance sector stated the following success factors for evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal, informal competences: Success of the process should lead to cooperation; Employers argue that such an assessment could be carried out either by themselves or be delegated by particular institution; personal interest of person is very important as well; The most important evaluation principles - objectivity, tolerance, fairness, trust in institutions;
 10. Most of employers from Finance sphere would agree to issue for staff certificates of practical experience, other documents, but still questions are about the objectivity of evidence;
 11. Most of employers in Financial sector would support of learning process of employees, because it could benefit both for
 12. However some employers finds difficult to cover all expenses connected to promotion of qualification of employees.

Trade Sector

1. Most employers agree that there are no special qualification requirements for retailer position, pointing that the most important thing is practical experience in the appropriate sphere. In Austria employers value formal education as well as basic competencies in acting in international environment;
2. Practical skills in Trade sector are valued as essential and the most important, while theoretical is more preferable. Employers would hire persons with more strong practical skills;
3. Employers from the Trading sector declares the following competencies to be important: the laws of knowledge and practical application of accounting knowledge, computer literacy; requirements are related to the character of work and stress the practical skills; Basic knowledge of finance, occupational health and safety requirements, food safety and logistics (for cashiers in the retail chain); Project management and acting in international environments;
4. Employers from the Trading sector declare the following competencies (skills) to be important: Time management and determining tasks priority, Motivation and objectives setting; Computer skills; Ability to work with computers and software applications; communication skills; respecting authority, co-workers and work ethic; International projects' management skills;
5. Most of employers have such employees that have been evaluated on the bases on previously acquired experience (Mostly on the basis of CV);
6. Most of employers from Trade sectors haven't got any information about validation of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal environment;
7. Most of respondents gave a positive assessment of the process of recognition of competences, acquired in non-formal and informal learning. However some of them stressed that „they had rather good overview over their own staff and its knowledge and skills which they used for in-house recruitment or when promoting people to new positions. So, from that point of view they were did not see great need for it“; Some reflects that it highly depend on specifics of competence (Ex. whether it's basic of professional);
8. Most of employers stressed that they would value opportunity for validation of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal environments, because such competences usually reflects labour market needs more; However still it's seen

- as a possibility for employees searching for the new jobs;
9. Employers from Trade sector stated following success factors of evaluation and recognition of competencies acquired in non- formal, informal competences: Objectiveness, trusts in institutions; comparability with academic nature; dissemination of old and new instruments and subjects of recognition;
 10. Most of employers in Trade sector would agree to issue appropriate documents that justify employees' experience. Mostly it could be reference letters, special certificates. However they cannot guaranty its objectiveness. Documents mostly could reveal such information: work experience and time at work. Job description, but not personal information or information on salary paid.
 11. Most of employers in Trade sector would be able to support employees 'continued educational process if the price is reasonable;
 - a. Some tends to say that it's more individual responsibility.

Implications on the Project Development (Employers interview)

1. IT and Finance sectors are more demanding for qualification and theoretical knowledge (at least vocational education), while trading sector is more flexible, where could accepted persons with less qualification, but more practical experience. This implicates possibility to use appropriate professional standards from appropriate Vocational education level in the project;
2. Most of employers don't have sufficient information about possibility to validate competences acquired in non-formal, informal education.
 - a. Additionally they would be able to cooperate by testing and issuing some kind of certificates despite they are not sure about its objectiveness.
 - b. It's important to inform and convince employers on necessity to held validation procedures for their own benefit.
3. Most of employers would be able to support their employees education in case its price reasonable, it's important to

provide employers with

- a. free methodology and help to integrate it into the practice by instructing them, cooperating in the real process of validation.



The Main Statements from Focus Group Interviews with Stakeholders

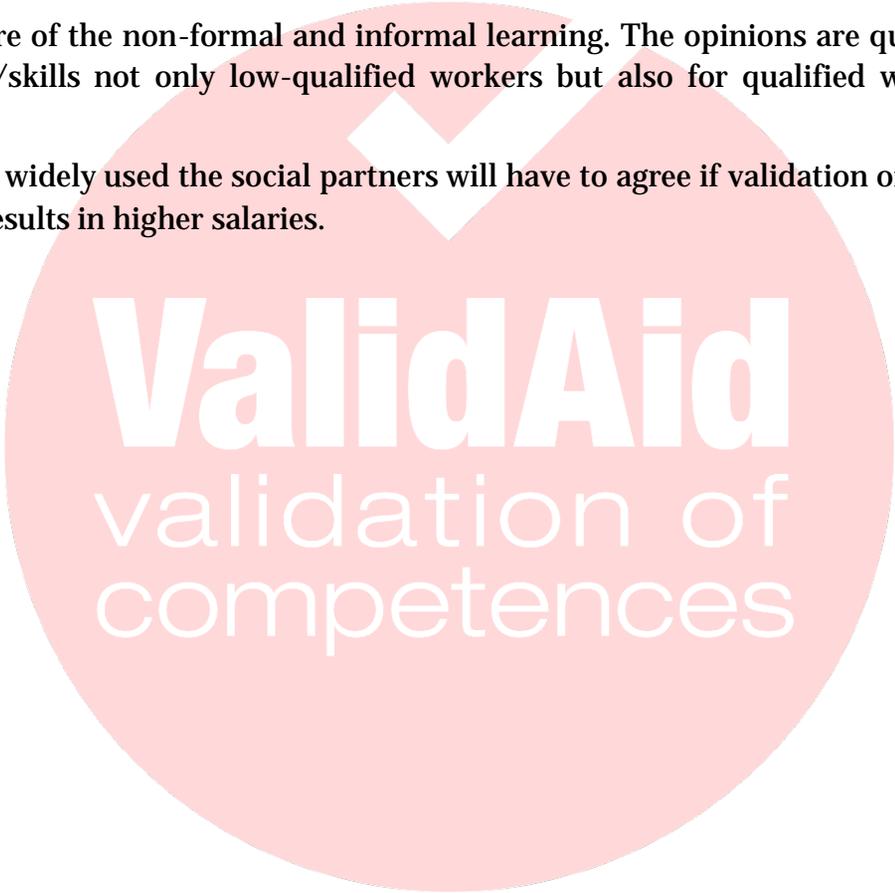
(Holistic approach from all partners' countries)

The main remaining challenge is to create system and make it work. It could be concluded in following:

1. Strengthen cooperation between Private and Educational Organizations: private organizations must be motivated to participate more actively to help to modernize, update existing leaning programmes/ professional standards, because they will be provided with better specialists in the near future (LT);
2. Methodical questions of Validation of competencies should be outlined not only in scientific articles, different methodical literature, but basics of it should be defined in Professional education law. This would help to calibrate all the Educational system concerning Validation and recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal education within different levels and directions of educations (According EQF and NQF) (LT);
3. Information about Validation and recognition of Competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education should be spread widely, creating united information system that could be accessible to everyone (both to acquire/improve qualification or to get better position in the labour market) (LT);
4. During the discussion all participants underlined the necessity for development of uniform national standards (criteria) for the different professions so that the effectiveness of the system for validation of informal and non-formal knowledge, skills and competences is ensured (BG);
5. Some participants could see benefits in the opportunities for career development within the organization i.e. "growth on the spot"
 - a. and “labour force mobility” (ICL);
6. It is expected that the professional standards developed by the Bulgarian Industrial Association to be the basis on which the state educational requirements will be elaborated and the basis on which the validation will be done;
7. A representative of the trade union organizations drew attention to the fact that for selected occupations in these three sectors it was more appropriate to validate not that much the horizontal professional competencies rather than the vertical

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- or core competencies. There were identified some key skills such as work schedules, ability to work in teams and with clients etc. that are valuable for both the low-qualified workers and for the external evaluator (BG);
8. The stakeholders are aware of the non-formal and informal learning. The opinions are quite good concerning this type of recognition of knowledge/skills not only low-qualified workers but also for qualified workers which have to follow in evolving activities (FR);
 9. Before validation becomes widely used the social partners will have to agree if validation of workers in the low-qualified sector will automatically results in higher salaries.
 - 10.



ValidAid
validation of
competences

Appendix

Questionnaire for employers

Dear Employers,

This questionnaire is a part of methodical tool of Leonardo da Vinci Transferring of Innovation projects’ “VALIDAID” initiated in 2010 that aims to help low qualified persons to validate their competencies acquired at work.

You are kindly requested to contribute to the project sharing your experience of the qualification requirements for the present and future employees in your organisation and problems that arise due to it. We ensure that ethical principles we will followed while presenting the results and anonymity of your reflections will be guaranteed.

1. What are the education, qualification, etc. requirements for a potential employee who applies for the position of N? Which of these requirements are essential?

2. Would you employ a person who has better practical skills than theoretical knowledge in this sphere?

3. What knowledge does a person need to work in you organisation in the position of N?

4. What skills does a person need to work in you organisation in the position of N?

5. Are there any employees in your company who have acquired competences through experience but do not have formal recognition of the competences?

6. Do you have sufficient information about recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning in the labour market?

7. As an employer, how do you rate the need of the recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning in the labour market?

8. How do you rate the practical benefit of the recognition of the knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning in a higher school? Would you accept competences acquired in this way and employ this person in your organisation?

9. What do you think could bring success in evaluation and recognition of the knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning? What principles should be followed in the recognition process? Who is the best person to do it?

10. As an employer, would you issue a document which certifies your employee's practical experience in your organization (e.g. description of the employee, reference letter, etc) so that he could recognize the competences acquired in non-formal way? Could these documents be impartial evidence for the recognition?

11. As an employer, would you concern the possibility of sending your employee to an educational institution to have his competence acquired in non-formal way evaluated and recognized?



Questionnaire for employees with low qualification

Dear Respondents,

This questionnaire is a part of methodical tool of Leonardo Da Vinci Transferring of Innovation projects’ “VALIDAID” initiated in 2010 that aims to help low qualified persons to validate their competencies acquired at work.

You are kindly requested to share your personal experience of the employment possibilities in the labour market and problems that arise due to it. We ensure that ethical principles we will followed while presenting the results and anonymity of your reflections will be guaranteed.

1. What education have you acquired?

2. Do you work according to your profession? Did you have enough knowledge and practical skills when you started working?

3. Did you have a chance to retrain? Did you attend any type of courses? Why did you decide to learn? How do you rate these courses, programmes, etc.? Did you find them useful? If you did not attend any courses or professional learning programmes, do you know where you can retrain, acquire a profession, etc?

4. Are you satisfied with your education?

5. What jobs did you have? What work experience do you have? Have you ever changed a job? What were the reasons?

6. What experience of job searching do you have? Where did you look for the information?

7. What was the duration of job searching? How many times were you employed?

8. Have you ever attended a job interview? Describe it. What difficulties did you face when looking for a job?

9. What general abilities are important when looking for a job?

10. What kind of professional abilities do you have?

11. What do you do for a living? What are your duties? How long have you been working?

12. If you are not working, what are the reasons for this? What has to change for you to start working?

13. Do you have any knowledge or skills acquired through work experience, which could be counted as a part of formal learning programme (credits)?

14. Would you like that the knowledge and abilities which you have acquired through non-formal learning programmes work or self-education would be evaluated and recognized with the help of certain techniques?

15. How do you rate the practical benefit of the recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning?

16. Would you like to learn?

17. Do you know where you can apply so that your knowledge and abilities which you have acquired through non-formal learning programmes, work or self-education could be evaluated and recognized with the help of certain techniques?

18. Do you have the documents which indicate the level of your experience?

19. Do you think that recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning could change your position in the labour market, your social status or make influence of your professional career?

Thank you for participation and your answers!