



EURYDICE
REPORT

Validation of **non-formal** and **informal learning** in **higher education** in Europe

Higher
education



Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

European Education
and Culture
Executive Agency

This document is published by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, Platforms, Studies and Analysis).

Please cite this publication as:

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2024. *Validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education in Europe*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Education and Culture Executive Agency

Platforms, Studies and Analysis

Boulevard Simon Bolivar 34 (Unit A6)

1049 Brussels

BELGIUM

E-mail: eacea-eurydice@ec.europa.eu

Website: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu>

Text completed in April 2024.

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

© European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2024

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is implemented by Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Unless otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

For any use or reproduction of elements that are not owned by the European Union, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective rightholders.

Cover image: © Thodonal Photo / stock.adobe.com

Print

ISBN 978-92-9488-605-7
doi:10.2797/34504
EC-09-24-015-EN-C

PDF

ISBN 978-92-9488-604-0
doi:10.2797/296107
EC-09-24-015-EN-N

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education in Europe

Eurydice report

Contents

Table of figures	3
Codes and abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
1. Validation of non-formal and informal learning as an alternative access route to higher education	9
2. Validation of non-formal and informal learning as a way to fulfil higher education study requirements	11
3. Learning activities that can be validated	13
4. Quality assurance processes	14
Conclusion	16
References	17
Annexes	18
Acknowledgements	33

Table of figures

Figure 1: Legal possibility of accessing first-cycle higher education through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2023/2024	9
Figure 2: Legal possibility to fulfil first-cycle higher education study requirements through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2023/2024	11
Figure 3: Learning activities that can be validated within the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education, 2023/2024	13
Figure 4: Presence of top-level (national) steering documents explicitly addressing the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning within higher education quality assurance procedures, 2023/2024	15

Codes and abbreviations

Country codes

EU	European Union				EEA and candidate countries
BE	Belgium	LV	Latvia	BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BE fr	Belgium – French Community	LT	Lithuania	CH	Switzerland
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community	LU	Luxembourg	IS	Iceland
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary	LI	Liechtenstein
CZ	Czechia	MT	Malta	ME	Montenegro
DK	Denmark	NL	Netherlands	MK	North Macedonia
DE	Germany	AT	Austria	NO	Norway
EE	Estonia	PL	Poland	RS	Serbia
IE	Ireland	PT	Portugal	TR	Türkiye
EL	Greece	RO	Romania		
ES	Spain	SI	Slovenia		
FR	France	SK	Slovakia		
HR	Croatia	FI	Finland		
IT	Italy	SE	Sweden		
CY	Cyprus				

Other codes

:	Data not available	–	Not applicable
---	--------------------	---	----------------

Abbreviations

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
E&T	education and training
EU	European Union
HEI	higher education institution
ICT	information and communication technologies

Introduction

People acquire knowledge and skills in various ways. One common way is to follow structured programmes in education and training institutions. Such programmes commonly lead to a certificate or qualification validating the competences acquired. However, learning can also be less structured. It can take place outside of education and training institutions, for example at workplaces or within non-professional activities of individuals.

Activities of the European Union relating to the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The European Union (EU) supports actions that aim to valorise different types of learning. The idea behind this is that the validation of knowledge and skills acquired in different learning contexts can have various positive impacts on individuals. For example, it can increase people's chances on the labour market or support their aspirations for further learning.

When conceptualising the validation of different types of learning, EU steering documents refer to three main concepts – 'formal learning', 'non-formal learning' and 'informal learning' – that are defined as follows ⁽¹⁾.

Formal learning refers to learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma.

Non-formal learning means learning which takes place through planned activities where some form of learning support is present. This type of learning may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers. Moreover, common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, structured online learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources) and courses organised by civil society organisations.

Informal learning covers learning resulting from daily activities relating to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. This type of learning may be unintentional from the learner's perspective. Examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child).

The key EU policy document promoting the recognition of all types of learning is the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽²⁾. This recommendation has invited EU Member States to 'have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and

⁽¹⁾ The definitions provided are shortened versions of the definitions included in the [Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#), 2012/C 398/01.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

informal learning' ⁽³⁾. The design of national validation arrangements has been supported by the European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2009; 2015; 2023) and countries' advancement in this area has been mapped in successive editions of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* ⁽⁴⁾.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education

Validation of all forms of learning has been promoted not only as a general theme, but also in relation to different sectors. For example, the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* maps the validation arrangements within three sectors, namely 'education', 'labour market' and the 'third sector' ⁽⁵⁾. The same source sub-divides the education sector into several distinct areas, including higher education. In other words, higher education appears as a rather specific and delimited area for validation policies and practice. The validation in this sector has also been emphasised and promoted within the Bologna Process, which is an intergovernmental process aiming to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe.

The Bologna Process conceptualises validation of non-formal and informal learning by referring to the 'recognition of prior learning'. This expression appeared in the Bologna Process already in 2003, when ministers responsible for higher education underlined, within their communiqué, the necessity for taking steps 'to enhance the possibilities for lifelong learning at higher education level including the recognition of prior learning' ⁽⁶⁾. The idea was further developed in 2005, when the ministers proclaimed to 'work with higher education institutions and others to improve recognition of prior learning including, where possible, non-formal and informal learning for access to, and as elements in, higher education programmes' ⁽⁷⁾. In 2009, the ministers specified that '[s]uccessful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning paths' ⁽⁸⁾. Finally, in 2015, the ministers specified their intention 'to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning' ⁽⁹⁾.

Following the above, the Bologna Process promotes the recognition (validation) of all types of learning as a means to 1) provide access to higher education (for those who do not comply with traditional access criteria) and 2) facilitate the award of a higher education qualification (for those who have acquired specific knowledge and skills outside formal higher education programmes).

⁽³⁾ Ibid., p. 3.

⁽⁴⁾ The inventory was produced in 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2023 and can be consulted at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>.

⁽⁵⁾ This applies to several editions of the inventory, in particular the most recent ones (see: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>).

⁽⁶⁾ 'Realising the European Higher Education Area'. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003, p. 6.

⁽⁷⁾ [The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19–20 May 2005](#), p. 3.

⁽⁸⁾ [The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28–29 April 2009](#), p. 3.

⁽⁹⁾ [Yerevan Communiqué](#), p. 4.

About this report

This report covers 37 education systems that are part of the Eurydice Network ⁽¹⁰⁾. It examines whether and how higher education systems across Europe recognise and validate learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning. In line with the content of ministerial communiqués issued within the Bologna Process, the report approaches the validation from two angles, namely 1) access to higher education and 2) fulfilment of higher education study requirements, without excluding a potential combination of these two strands.

The analysis refers primarily to ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning’ (terminology used within the EU steering documents). When the expression ‘recognition of prior (non-formal and informal) learning’ or ‘recognition’ (terminology used within the Bologna Process) is employed, it is used interchangeably with the above terminology. Prior formal learning and its validation, which is understood here mainly as degree higher education programmes and courses ⁽¹¹⁾, is not considered in the analysis.

The text is structured in four short sections, each accompanied by an annex with country data.

The reference year of the information is the 2023/2024 academic year.

⁽¹⁰⁾ All EU Member States and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye. Two education systems that are part of the Eurydice Network and are commonly included in Eurydice reports – the German-speaking Community of Belgium and Albania – are not covered by this report. Neither are new Eurydice Network members – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – that do not yet participate in comparative reports. The report was prepared outside the official work programme of the Eurydice Network, as a network contribution to the European Year of Skills (see https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/about_en). All those who contributed to the production of the report are acknowledged at the end of the report.

⁽¹¹⁾ As shown by the EU definitions provided within this introductory section, formal learning encompasses a wider range of learning activities than degree programmes and courses. However, this report understands formal learning mainly as degree programmes and courses, to allow distinguishing such programmes/courses from other types of learning activities.

1. Validation of non-formal and informal learning as an alternative access route to higher education

The validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education is an important means through which candidates who do not comply with traditional admission criteria can potentially access higher education. For this reason, the validation process is often discussed in the context of alternative (or non-traditional) access routes to higher education.

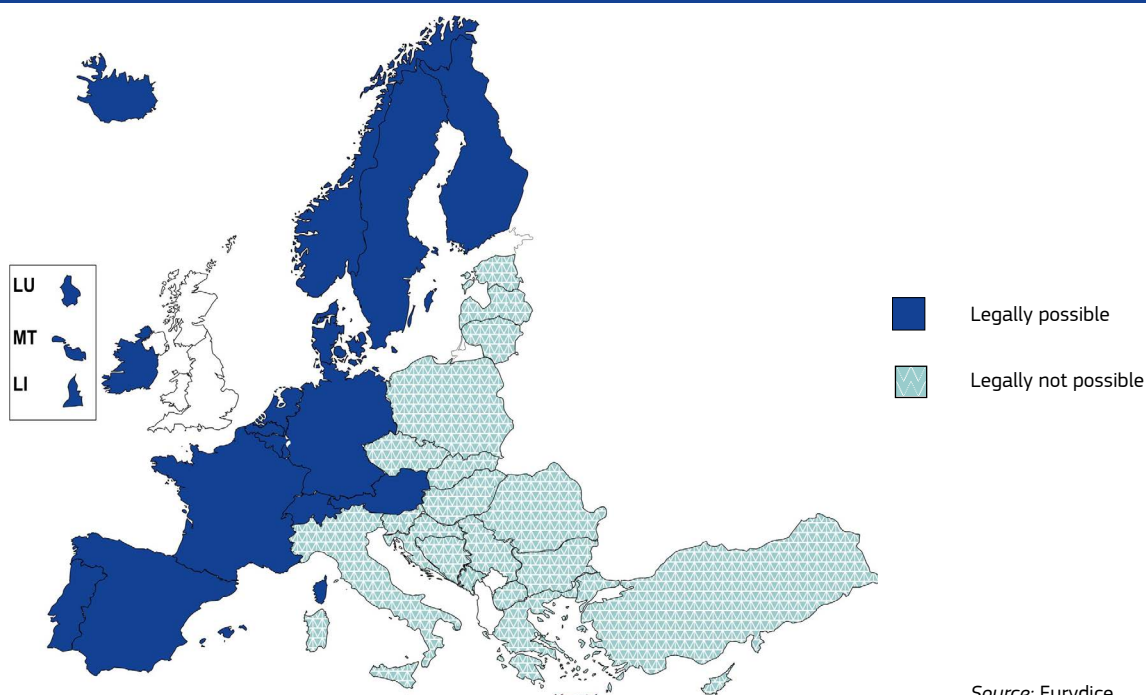
Alternative access routes to higher education are commonly understood as access routes targeting higher education candidates who do not comply with traditional entry requirements. This is either because they followed a short upper secondary vocational path (i.e. a programme which does not allow access to higher education) or because they abandoned initial education prior to the completion of the upper secondary level. In the current policy context, promoting the idea that no talent should be left behind, the theme of non-traditional pathways into higher education gains particular attention. This is all the more important since students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be over-represented in educational pathways not giving direct access to higher education (see e.g. OECD, 2021). In order to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education, the objective is to extend admissions

criteria so that all those who have a capacity to follow higher education studies would be provided with the opportunity to do so, regardless of their prior formal learning achievements.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is the most common way of broadening the admission process and widening higher education access. It involves the recognition and validation of the knowledge and skills that prospective non-traditional students acquired outside of formal learning contexts (e.g. through various non-formal learning activities, professional experience, volunteering, etc.). Through this validation process, candidates not possessing the traditional higher education entry qualifications can also gain access to higher education studies.

Figure 1 depicts legal frameworks for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accessing first-cycle higher education. As the figure illustrates, students without the traditional entry qualifications can access first-cycle higher education on the basis of validating their non-formal or informal learning experiences in only 18 education systems (out of 37), primarily in western and northern European countries.

Figure 1: Legal possibility of accessing first-cycle higher education through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure considers only those cases where the validation of non-formal and informal learning can replace traditional higher education entry qualifications. It follows that the cases where the validation of non-formal and informal learning comes in addition to traditional higher education entry qualifications (e.g. as a competitive element) are not considered. Moreover, the figure does not consider those cases where the validation of non-formal and informal learning is legally possible only for entry to some specific programmes that commonly use talent screening, including programmes in arts, sport, etc.

For country information, see Annex 1.

Even in systems where the validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible, legal frameworks might apply regulatory limitations to this access possibility. A first type of limitation is whether all higher education institutions can provide access to non-traditional students this way. This limitation is applied in Austria, where learners can only access universities of applied sciences through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Secondly, educational authorities might limit the categories of students who can benefit from this alternative access route. This exists for example in Spain, where only learners above the age of 40 can access higher education following a validation procedure, and in Portugal and Norway, where the minimum age is 23. Finally, the validation of prior non-formal and informal learning experience might not be enough for accessing first-cycle higher education. In Austria and Portugal, in most cases prospective students also have to pass an additional entrance examination in order to gain access to higher education studies.

Some education systems leave it largely or entirely to higher education institutions to define their validation procedures. This autonomy can even extend to the decision whether institutions offer this possibility or not (for example in Malta, the Netherlands or Switzerland). Alternatively, higher education authorities can oblige higher education institutions to put validation procedures in place, but leave it up to them to define the exact conditions (e.g. in Ireland).

Many of the education systems making it possible for non-traditional learners to access higher education through the validation of non-formal and informal learning also offer other alternative ways to do so. In order to provide a more complete picture of alternative access routes, these other alternative modes of accessing higher education are briefly examined in this section.

For entrants without formal entry qualifications, some countries offer the possibility of taking an entrance exam or admission test ⁽¹²⁾. These exams exist in the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, Germany (for learners over the age of 25), Spain (two different options for learners above the ages of 25 and 45), the Netherlands (for learners above the age of 21), Austria, Portugal (for learners above the age of 23) and Switzerland. In 2022 and 2023, Sweden conducted a pilot project with a basic eligibility test for admission to higher education, aimed at people who were at least 24 years old. As these examples show, such admission tests are often organised for mature learners.

Some education systems organise preparatory or trial higher education programmes, or programmes leading to alternative entry qualifications. Trial or preparatory higher education programmes exist in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Malta, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Learners can obtain alternative qualifications – which are different from the standard upper secondary school leaving certificate but provide the equivalent access to higher education – by successfully completing specific dedicated programmes in Denmark (Higher Preparatory Examination), France (*Diplôme d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires*) and Luxembourg (*Diplôme d'accès aux études supérieures*).

⁽¹²⁾ This is not to be confused with special aptitude tests offered to the most-talented people, which are most prevalent in the field of arts, sport, etc. To be considered as alternative routes, these examinations should be open to a wider group of learners (e.g. all applicants or applicants over a certain age).

2. Validation of non-formal and informal learning as a way to fulfil higher education study requirements

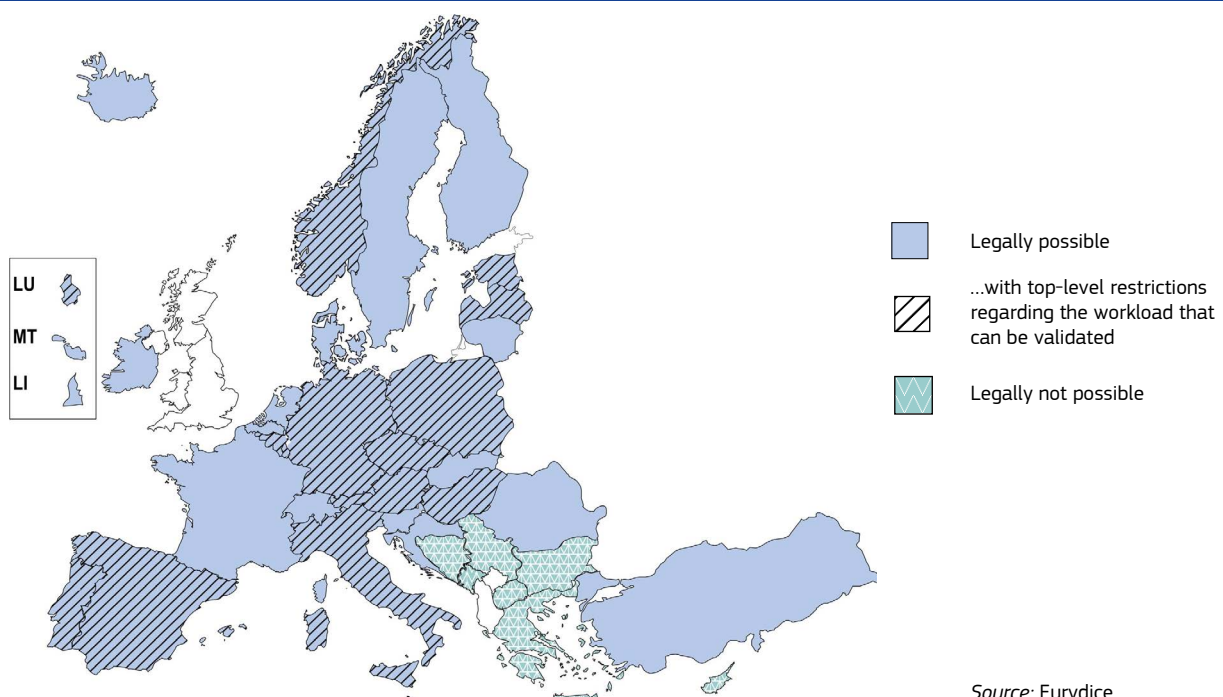
The previous section examined the validation of non-formal and informal learning as a means to access higher education study programmes (for candidates who do not comply with traditional higher education entry requirements). Another way to use the validation of non-formal and informal learning is to exempt learners from some (or potentially all) higher education study requirements if they demonstrate that they already possess the knowledge and skills relating to a specific higher education programme or qualification. This, in turn, can reduce compulsory participation in formal higher education courses and, consequently, facilitate and accelerate the fulfilment of studies.

Figure 2 displays whether it is legally possible to use the validation of non-formal and informal learning to fulfil (fully or partly) first-cycle higher education study requirements. The concept of 'legal possibility', as understood within the figure, covers different regulatory situations. First, it covers situations where top-level regulations explicitly refer to the validation of non-formal and informal learning by either explicitly requiring or explicitly allowing higher education institutions to provide validation opportunities to students. Second, it refers to situations where top-level regulations do not

explicitly mention the validation of non-formal and informal learning, but create conditions allowing higher education institutions to provide relevant procedures. For example, regulations may specify that it is up to higher education institutions to determine how programmes are conducted and/or what type of learning activities can be considered when evaluating learning outcomes. When regulations do not cover the validation of non-formal and informal learning explicitly, the country is displayed under the category 'legally possible' if there is evidence that (at least some) higher education institutions have relevant policies and procedures in place. Such evidence can include related internal regulations or guidelines published on websites of higher education institutions.

Considering the above conceptualisation, Figure 2 shows that the validation of non-formal and informal learning to fulfil first-cycle higher education study requirements is possible in 30 European education systems (out of 37 systems surveyed). It follows that the validation of non-formal and informal learning is more commonly possible for fulfilling higher education study requirements than for accessing higher education studies (compare Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 2: Legal possibility to fulfil first-cycle higher education study requirements through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

When referring to 'legal possibility to fulfil first-cycle higher education study requirements', the figure refers to two possible legal situations: 1) the possibility is explicitly stipulated in top-level (national) regulations, or 2) top-level (national) regulations do not refer to this matter, but policies and/or practice exist in higher education institutions (demonstrated, for example, by internal regulations covering this area and/or relevant information on webpages of higher education institutions).

When referring to 'top-level restrictions regarding the workload that can be validated', the figure means restrictions established at the top level (i.e. the national or system level). Restrictions determined at other decision-making levels (e.g. regional, institutional) are not considered.

For country information, see Annex 2.

Figure 2 also demonstrates that the validation of non-formal and informal learning often comes with top-level (national) restrictions regarding the workload that can be validated. The restrictions in question are most often expressed as the proportion (percentage) of study requirements and/or the number of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. For example, in Spain, work and professional experience may be validated and converted into credits, but the validation cannot exceed 15 % of the total number of credits relating to a higher education programme. In the French Community of Belgium, in the adult higher education sector known as 'social advancement education' (*enseignement de promotion sociale*), the validation cannot exceed 120 ECTS credits in the first cycle and 60 ECTS credits in the second cycle. Czechia allows validating previously completed lifelong learning (non-degree) higher education courses, but the validation cannot exceed 60 % of the total number of credits relating to a degree programme. Hungary, in turn, specifies that at least one third of the total number of credits relating to a programme must be completed in the degree-awarding institution.

When top-level regulations do not specify any restrictions regarding the workload that can be validated, it does not necessarily mean that there are no restrictions. Indeed, the restrictions may be established at lower decision-making levels, especially by higher education institutions. For example, in Ireland, there are no nationally defined restrictions, but higher education institutions themselves address this question. One example is the National University of Ireland, which specifies in its internal guidelines⁽¹³⁾ that its constituting universities are not expected to award full degrees based on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Following the above, the absence of national validation restrictions should be interpreted with caution and should not be confounded with a (widespread) possibility to achieve a higher education degree based on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is even more so considering that top-level regulations with no explicit validation restrictions generally do not specify the possibility to achieve a full degree through validation arrangements. France is an exception in this regard, with top-level regulations stipulating no restrictions regarding the workload that can be validated and, at the same time, stating explicitly that the validation can either be partial, leading to the recognition of some programme elements, or full, leading to the award of a higher education degree⁽¹⁴⁾. Consolidated data published by French national authorities indicate that, in 2022, around 1 000 candidates received a first-cycle higher education degree based on a full validation⁽¹⁵⁾.

⁽¹³⁾ [Degrees and Qualifications of the National University of Ireland: Recognition of Prior Learning](#), p. 5.

⁽¹⁴⁾ For an overview of the validation system in France and legal references, see the [ministerial webpage dedicated to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education](#).

⁽¹⁵⁾ For 2022 national data covering higher education, see <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/fr/la-validation-des-acquis-de-l-experience-dans-l-enseignement-superieur-public-en-2022-94023>.

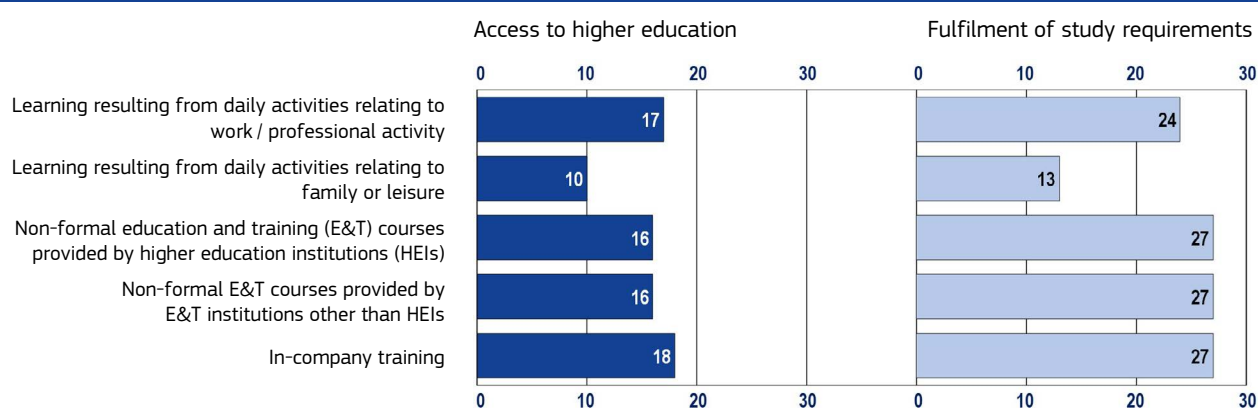
3. Learning activities that can be validated

Non-formal and informal learning are generic terms encompassing many different learning activities. When higher education systems allow learners to validate non-formal and/or informal learning, they may privilege specific learning activities.

Figure 3 refers to some typical learning activities associated with non-formal and informal learning. It starts by listing learning that can mainly be seen as 'informal', namely learning resulting from daily activities relating to work, and learning associated with family or leisure activities. The inventory continues with different types of education and training courses, including non-degree courses provided by higher education institutions, courses provided by education and training institutions other than higher education institutions, and training provided by employers.

As the figure shows, in higher education systems that allow the validation of non-formal and informal learning (for access to studies and/or the fulfilment of study requirements), learning activities that can be recognised and validated are overall quite varied. More specifically, most higher education systems allow the validation of all or almost all of the learning activities displayed in the figure. However, one type of learning is considered less often compared to others, namely learning resulting from daily activities relating to family or leisure. This applies to the validation for both accessing higher education studies and progressing in studies. In other words, higher education systems seem to be quite open to recognising work-based learning and different (non-formal) education and training courses, but less willing to acknowledge that learning taking place within family and/or during leisure time could lead to learning outcomes relevant for higher education.

Figure 3: Learning activities that can be validated within the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The first part of the figure considers only those education systems where the validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible for accessing first-cycle higher education studies, that is, 18 education systems (see Figure 1). The second part of the figure considers only those systems where the validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible for progressing in first-cycle higher education studies (see Figure 2). When it comes to the second part of the figure, out of 30 higher education systems considered, data are available only for 29 systems.

For country data feeding the figure, see Annex 3.

Behind the above general pattern, there are different national approaches to specifying what type of non-formal and informal learning can be validated. Two groups of countries emerge in this regard: 1) those that do not provide specifications regarding learning activities to consider in their top-level regulations; and 2) those where top-level regulations provide some details regarding this matter.

Finland provides an example of the first approach. In this higher education system, regulations do not specify non-formal and informal learning activities that can be recognised and validated. It is entirely up to higher education institutions to determine learning to be considered and/or accepted, which can, in principle, be any type of learning.

Czechia, the French Community of Belgium and France illustrate the approach characterised by more explicit statements in top-level regulations regarding learning activities to be considered. In Czechia, where the validation is only possible for the fulfilment of study requirements (and not for accessing higher education studies), top-level regulations envisage the validation of non-degree lifelong learning courses provided by higher education institutions. This means that if a student of a degree programme had previously completed a non-degree lifelong learning course, they can validate such a course within their degree programme. Regulations do not refer to any other learning activities that higher education institutions could/should consider. The French Community of Belgium provides a contrasting example, with regulations referring to a wider range of learning activities, namely learning through personal and

professional experience, along with previously completed study courses. France, in turn, focuses on informal learning associated with work-related activities. This is particularly prominent in the scheme ‘validation of learning from experience’ (*validation des acquis de l’expérience*), which is open to all individuals who can justify at least 1 year of professional experience relating to the content of the higher education degree they are aiming to achieve.

This analysis shows that countries allowing the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education do not necessarily envisage the validation of the same type (or spectrum) of learning activities. Some caution is therefore necessary when approaching this theme in a comparative cross-country perspective.

4. Quality assurance processes

The previous sections have shown that the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education, when legally possible, is framed quite differently across European countries. The differences lie in the degree to which this area is regulated by top-level authorities and, when it is regulated, in the extent and type of validation opportunities. Looking at validation arrangements from a system-level perspective, a question that arises is whether national higher education quality assurance agencies address the implementation of the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning in their quality assurance procedures.

Figure 4 approaches this question by looking at whether top-level (national) steering documents covering quality assurance procedures in higher education explicitly address the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning. As the figure shows, steering documents with such explicit references are in place in 19 higher education systems (out of 30 with validation arrangements for access to higher education and/or fulfilment of higher education study requirements) ⁽¹⁶⁾. The steering documents in question mostly oblige higher

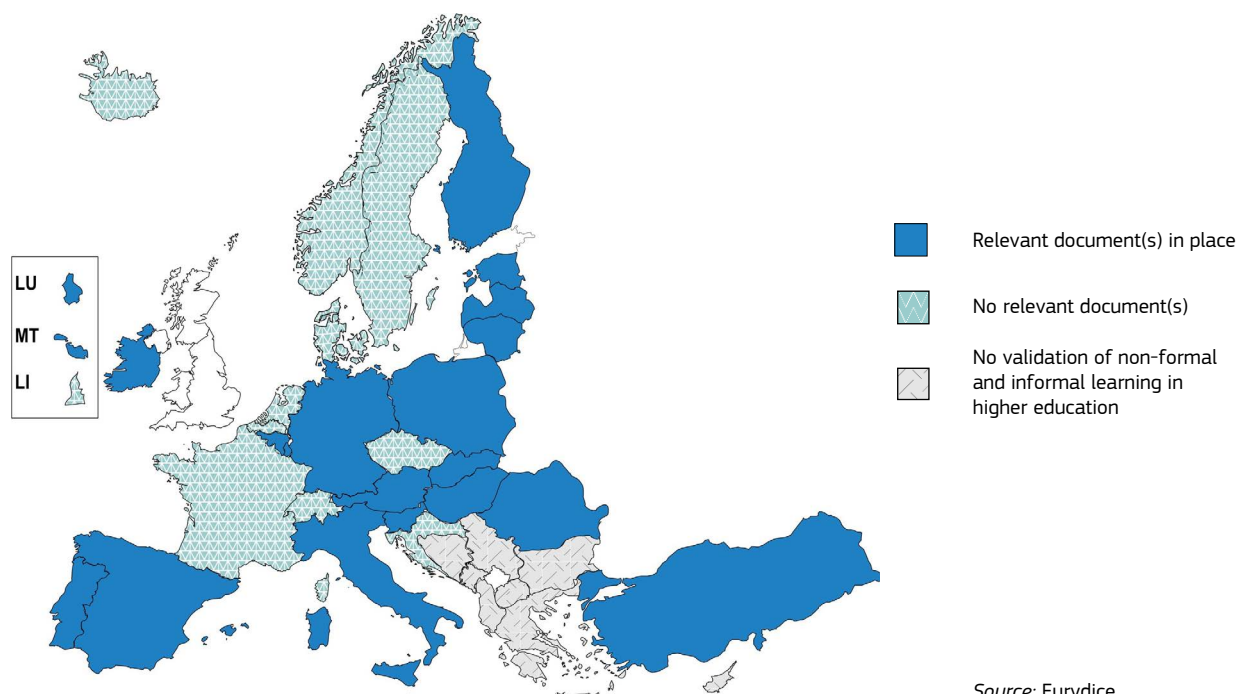
education institutions to define procedures and arrangements for the recognition and validation of different types of learning, including non-formal and informal learning. This means that quality assurance agencies generally do not prescribe any specific approach, but rather concentrate on ensuring that the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is foreseen in institutional policies and regulations, and that it is underpinned by transparent and fair rules. This can be illustrated by the example of Ireland, where higher education institutions must comply with the quality assurance guidelines ⁽¹⁷⁾ issued by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the body overseeing the quality of higher education in Ireland. The guidelines specify that higher education institutions must have pre-defined and published regulations in place covering all areas relating to learner admission, progression, recognition and certification of awards ⁽¹⁸⁾. In this context, the guidelines require processes ensuring fair recognition of education and training qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning.

⁽¹⁶⁾ When top-level (national) steering documents relating to quality assurance in higher education do not explicitly cover the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning, some relevant quality assurance mechanisms may still exist. For example, top-level steering documents may promote, more generally, the implementation of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG) at the national level. This can, in turn, contribute to an enhanced transparency of validation practice at the institutional level. This is because the ESG (p. 13) include explicit references to this area, by stating that higher education institutions should have in place regulations covering ‘fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning’.

⁽¹⁷⁾ [Statutory quality assurance guidelines developed by QQI for use by all providers](#).

⁽¹⁸⁾ When developing their regulations and policies, institutions can rely on the [Principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training](#) (2005).

Figure 4: Presence of top-level (national) steering documents explicitly addressing the validation of non-formal and/or informal learning within higher education quality assurance procedures, 2023/2024



Explanatory note

For country information, see Annex 4.

Beyond general guidelines requiring higher education institutions to have in place policies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance agencies sometimes specify further requirements and/or provide further guidelines. For example, in Malta, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), the quality assurance agency for higher education, has issued a guiding document on the recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning⁽¹⁹⁾. Should a higher education institution be interested in introducing a recognition policy, it must adhere to the guidelines and obtain an approval of its intended policy from the MFHEA.

While not displayed in a dedicated figure, another important system-level feature of validation policies and measures is the (system-level) monitoring of the actual validation practice. This may enable policymakers to understand whether, to what extent and by whom validation measures are used. The present report is not able to systematically capture which European higher education systems monitor the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education⁽²⁰⁾. However, an older report covering the validation practice in Europe noted that 'data collection on different aspects of validation (participation, type of qualification or outcomes achieved, user characteristics, success rate, length of procedure, etc.) remains at a low level' (Cedefop, European Commission and ICF, 2019, p. 33).

⁽¹⁹⁾ [Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines](#).

⁽²⁰⁾ As shown in Section 2 of this report, France, for instance, has in place national monitoring of the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education.

Conclusion

This short report has examined the extent to which higher education systems across Europe provide opportunities for learners to validate their knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The focus was on whether the validation of non-formal and informal learning can 1) replace traditional higher education entry qualifications and 2) contribute to the fulfilment of higher education study requirements. Within these areas, the report looked at the amount and type of learning that can be validated, and the quality assurance mechanisms underpinning validation practices.

The report shows that less than half of higher education systems in Europe (18 systems) provide opportunities for those without traditional entry qualifications to enter higher education based on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Among the systems providing such opportunities, several offer additional alternative entry routes to higher education, including special entry tests or examinations, or preparatory higher education programmes. Most higher education systems providing alternative access routes to higher education, including the access through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, are situated in western and northern Europe.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning for the fulfilment of higher education study requirements is more common than the validation for accessing higher education studies. More specifically, this type of validation is possible in all higher education systems with alternative access routes to higher education and in 12 systems requiring standard qualifications for higher education entry (30 systems in total). However, while the validation contributing to the fulfilment of studies is commonly possible, regulations often set restrictions on the amount of non-formal and informal learning that can be validated within higher education study programmes. This means that learners using validation opportunities commonly have to participate in at least some formal degree courses before achieving a higher education qualification.

Data also suggest that some learning activities might be easier to validate than others. Indeed, higher education systems seem to be more open to validating learning outcomes resulting from work-related activities and/or different education and training courses than those initiated by family or leisure activities.

Finally, the report shows that around two thirds of the systems with validation arrangements explicitly address this theme in top-level (national) steering documents relating to higher education quality assurance procedures. When the theme is addressed, the aim is generally to ensure that the validation practice taking place in higher education institutions is underpinned by clearly defined rules.

Overall, the report identifies several different approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education, ranging from no relevant policies and measures to policies and measures opening rather extensive validation opportunities. Beyond the topics examined in the report, further themes to be investigated include system-level aspects, such as national monitoring of validation practice, along with operational aspects, such as methods and approaches used to evaluate non-formal and informal learning in higher education. Moreover, it seems important to survey how a relatively new topic in EU policy discussions – the topic of micro-credentials ⁽²¹⁾ – translates into validation policies and practice across Europe.

⁽²¹⁾ For details, see <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials>.

References

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2009. *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Cedefop, 2015. *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop reference series; No 104.

Cedefop, 2023. *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop reference series; No 124.

Cedefop, European Commission and ICF, 2019. *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update*. Synthesis report. Available at: http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_synthesis.pdf (accessed 11 December 2023).

OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], 2021. *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>.

Annexes

Annex 1: Legal possibility of accessing first-cycle higher education through the validation of non-formal and informal learning and other alternative access routes, 2023/2024

Data in this annex feed Section 1 of this report (see Figure 1 and the related analysis). The table indicates whether it is legally possible to access first-cycle higher education through the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁽²²⁾. Whenever possible, the table provides a short description of the system. In addition, the last column specifies whether there are alternative access routes to higher education (i.e. access without traditional higher education entry qualifications) other than the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

	Access through validation is legally possible	Description of the system	Other alternative access routes
BE fr	Yes	<p>The validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (<i>valorisation des acquis de l'expérience – VAE</i>) is covered by Article 119 of the Decree 'Paysage'. This article approaches the admission and the allocation of credits in a combined perspective. The evaluation is organised by higher education institutions, which judge whether the candidate's skills and knowledge are sufficient to follow the chosen studies. Within the evaluation, it is possible to consider personal and professional experience, as well as studies. The personal or professional experience must correspond to at least 5 years.</p> <p>Moreover, the validation of non-formal and informal learning can also be used for entry to higher education programmes provided within the adult education sector known as 'social advancement education' (<i>enseignement de promotion sociale</i>). This sector covers both secondary and higher education.</p>	<p>Admission test organised by higher education institutions for candidates without secondary qualification.</p> <p>Admission tests are also possible for entry to higher education programmes provided within the adult education sector known as 'social advancement education' (<i>enseignement de promotion sociale</i>).</p>
BE nl	Yes	<p>The basic principles of the procedure for validating non-formal and informal learning in higher education are covered by the decree 'Codex Higher Education', Articles II.232 – II.240. The validation of prior non-formal and informal learning is managed by higher education institutions and by associations (official entities regulating the cooperation of a university and one or more university colleges). They should have documented validation procedures to guide staff and applicants through the different stages of the process. At the end of the procedure, applicants can receive a 'certificate of competence'.</p>	<p>Admission test / entrance examination for students without the necessary entry qualifications can be organised by higher education institutions. On the basis of the assessment, the institution's board can make enrolment conditional on the successful completion of a preparatory programme (Codex Higher Education, Articles II.177 (short cycle), II.179 (first cycle) and II.183 (second cycle)).</p>
BG	No	–	–
CZ	No	–	–
DK	Yes	<p>Applicants without an upper secondary qualification can in principle apply for short-cycle, first-cycle and second-cycle programmes. The higher education institution will assess their application on an individual basis. However, it is difficult to get accepted without any other formal qualifications, such as vocational training or single subject courses.</p>	<p>Alternative entry qualification: Higher Preparatory Examination (hf)</p>

⁽²²⁾ The table does not include systematic information on study cycles other than the first cycle, as such information is outside the scope of Figure 1. However, some references to other cycles are included for some countries, depending on the availability of information. The same principle is followed in Annexes 2–4.

以上内容仅为本文档的试下载部分，为可阅读页数的一半内容。如要下载或阅读全文，请访问：<https://d.book118.com/608115124007006076>