



STATE OF PLAY REPORT ON CERTIFICATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL TRAINING



EQUALvet Development of a vocational training program for people
with intellectual disabilities in three professions:
cook assistant, gardener assistant and cleaner

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EQUALvet

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Contents

CONSORTIUM.....	3
CHAPTER I	4
Introduction	4
CHAPTER II	7
State-of-Play in Italy, Spain, and Greece.....	7
ITALY.....	7
SPAIN.....	11
GREECE	16
CHAPTER III	23
Stakeholder’s Interviews.....	23
CAPTER IV.....	28
Conclusion.....	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY	29

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

As the European Union is shifting from an **industry-based society to a knowledge-based society**, one has to note that the vast variety of **formal, non-formal and informal learning processes becomes more and more important**. According to the European Council, education, and training both play a major role in achieving the 'Europe 2020' objective of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. One way to reach this goal is by **equipping citizens with the skills and competences Europe needs to remain competitive and innovative**.

Non-formal and informal learning enable **individuals to acquire skills, competences, and knowledge in a context outside school**. These types of learning should not exclude any category and should be aimed at every individual since it can improve their access to professional life or to educational programmes, thus reasserting their identity and their role in society. Indeed, employment and training are, for instance, privileged ways for people with disabilities to achieve economic and social independence. Acquiring relevant skills, through education and training, will enable them to compete for jobs. In that sense, training opportunities for people with disabilities should be as relevant and available as those for any other person.

VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

So as to gain legitimacy with regards to their acquired knowledge, an individual would need to have their non-formal and/or informal learning outcomes **validated**. As a result, the validation of these types of learning represents a major goal for the European Union. To this end, the **Council of the EU** published, on 20 December 2012, a **Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning**.¹ **Validation does not just play a role in enhancing employability and mobility but also in increasing motivation for lifelong learning**. It recommends that the EU Commission and the Member States take measures with regards to the validation process. They would have to promote the involvement of all relevant stakeholders to achieve that goal. Also, the EU Commission is asked to support the Member States and the stakeholders, for instance by facilitating peer learning and exchanges of good practice, and to consider developing further instruments to facilitate the transparency of validated learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

¹ Official Journal of the European Union, *Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* (20 December 2012, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>)

The CEDEFOP European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning were published in 2015, following closely the recommendations of the Council. They emphasised the fact that validation arrangements should benefit all citizens, not only by **helping fight unemployment but also by improving social cohesion**: indeed, the citizens would thus be able to communicate the value of their skills and competences, to potential employers for instance. These guidelines are targeted for European, national, regional, and local institutions from different contexts.

Validation is presented as having two objectives. On the one hand it will make visible the learning of individuals and, on the other hand, it will attribute value to their learning independently from the context in which it took place. **The main purpose of the validation process is to provide a proof of learning.** Once provided with this proof, the individual gains legitimacy in the eyes of employers, for instance, and of society. This process can be carried out by different stakeholders outside education and training, e.g., economic sectors.

The guidelines define **four phases to follow so as to have non-formal and informal learning certified.** First of all, the knowledge, skills, and competences one has acquired need to be clearly identified. Then, one would need to provide evidence of the learning outcomes that were acquired. In some countries, these two phases merge into one as part of the building of a dossier which consists in gathering both the information and the evidence. The next step is to compare the individual's learning outcomes against standards. Finally, the process ends with the certification being granted. As defined in the 2012 Recommendation, the individual must remain, during the whole process, at the core of the validation arrangements.

National experience with regards to the topic of this document has shown that coordination is a concept that must prevail during the process: relevant information and advice have to be given. Also, individuals must be informed of both the costs and the benefits of validation. **Stakeholders thus have a role to play in advising, guiding, and providing impartial and comprehensive information during the process.**

Besides, as validation is a complex process, it needs to involve various actors with different responsibilities and functions. The idea is to allow communication and coordination between these actors in order to develop and implement guidance services.

Implemented across Europe, the **National Qualifications Frameworks may support the introduction and the integration of the validation process.** In that sense, the question is the following: are validation arrangements regarded as part of the national qualifications' frameworks and as a means to achieve qualification?

Also, when based on non-formal and informal learning, awarding a certificate **requires a standard**. Assessment and certification indeed need to be conducted following an agreed and approved standard. Qualifications, when done via the validation process, are linked with two categories: on the one hand, the occupational category which can be related to employment and which focuses on what people need to do, how they do it and how well they do it. On the other hand, qualifications are also connected with education-training standards which focus on what people need to learn and how they learn it.

CERTIFICATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In regards with **people with disabilities**, more specifically people with intellectual disabilities, the Vocational Educational Centres represent a main actor for this public which is not provided with any official post-school education, nor training, especially designed for them: it is not recognised nor certified. In that sense, it seems a priority to validate the non-formal and informal learning outcomes they can acquire in different contexts. Without official status, the chances to provide evidence for the professional skills acquired, through experience are poor.

The absence of official certification for people with disabilities shows the need to create an educational training programme equal to the standard education.

Yet, despite this observation, one has to note that there are many attempts to provide people with disabilities with recognition of the knowledge, skills, and competences they acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

In France, for instance, the AFPA (Agence nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes), a national agency responsible for adult professional learning, introduced in 2001 the 'Reconnaissance des Savoir-Faire Professionnels', i.e. the recognition of professional savoir-faire.² It is aimed at a specific public: people with disabilities, either working in protected workshops or in ordinary working environment, students from special education, and employees from insertion structures via economic activity. **The aim is to get their competences validated**, thus leading to them to a better self-esteem: gaining self-confidence, pride, autonomy, professionalism, and personal and social development. Some of the competences are identified and classified **according to standards agreed by professionals**. The RSFP aims at a validation level, **yet it is not a qualification**.

² 'RSFP – la reconnaissance des savoir-faire', AFPA, 2019, <https://www.afpa.fr/actualites/rsfp-la-reconnaissance-des-savoir-faire>

CHAPTER II

State-of-Play in Italy, Spain, and Greece

ITALY

In Italy, the National Accreditation Body is designated by the government, in compliance with the European Regulation 765/2008, to ensure the competence, independence and impartiality of the certification, inspection and verification bodies.

The process of recognition of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts started with the approval of the Law 92/2012 of labour market reform, followed by the D. Lgs. 13/2013, with the aim of designing a set of rules common to all competent Italian institutions. These regulations were put in place with the main aims of:

- Articulating the validation and certification function in three distinct functional phases (identification, validation, certification).
- Releasing an educational booklet.
- Defining minimum requirements for the certification of qualifications and competences.
- Defining the system standards necessary to ensure homogeneous and quality services everywhere.
- Establishing a national Directory of education and training qualifications and professional qualifications, which constitutes the unitary reference framework for the certification of competences.

The legislative decree makes the new National Competence Certification System operational and aims to **highlight and develop the professional skills acquired not only at work but also in free time**, in order to promote geographical and professional mobility, favour the meeting between supply and demand in the labour market and increase the transparency of learning and the usability of national and European certifications.

Based on this decree, on 30 June 2015, an inter-ministerial decree (Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education) defined the national framework for regional qualifications. It established:

1. a mutual recognition mechanism between **regional qualifications**,

2. process, certification, and standard system procedures for the **identification/validation services of non-formal and informal learning** and the certification of skills.

Finally, with the inter-ministerial decree (Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education) of 8 January 2018, the **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** was established as a tool for describing and classifying the qualifications issued within the framework of the National System for the certification of competences.

The NQF is the national device for referencing Italian qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework, with the function of linking the Italian qualification system with the systems of other European countries. It has the objective of **coordinating and strengthening the various systems** that contribute to the public offer of lifelong learning and of the services for the identification and validation and certification of skills.

With regards to VET for **people with disabilities or for people with special needs, there are not any specific training paths.**

At the age of 14, young people, also people with disabilities (Medium-mild disability), make the choice between general education and VET: they have the right/duty to stay in education up to the age of 18 to achieve 12 years of education and/or a professional qualification.

At the level of upper secondary education, the following VET courses are offered:

1. **five-year programs (EQF level 4):** in technical institutes that provide a technical education diploma; in professional institutions, which provide a diploma in vocational education. The programs combine general education and VET and can also be carried out in alternation education. Graduates have access to higher education.
2. **three-year courses (VET Education and Vocational Training)** which provide a certificate of professional qualification (EQF level 3); usually most of PWD make this choice.
3. **four-year courses providing a professional technical diploma (IeFP) (EQF level 4).**

IMPLEMENTATION OF VALIDATION

In the partnership experience, it is fair to say that people with disabilities usually do not have the consciousness that validation of non-formal and informal learning can help them.

However, validation of non-formal and informal learning can assert one's identity and improve self-esteem.

COORDINATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

The stakeholders involved in the validation of non-formal and informal learning are the following:

- The Ministry of Education
- University and Research (MIUR) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLPS) that define the general rules and common principles for the education and training system.
- Regions and Autonomous Provinces that are responsible for VET programs and most apprenticeship programs.
- Chambers of commerce, industry, and crafts
- National bodies involved in the process of recognition of professional qualification.
- Employment services
- Socio-educational operators
- Educational and training institutions/services
- Public bodies and private bodies accredited for the provision of employment services.
- SIL (Labour Integration Service) from Public Body

SIL is composed of a team of "mediation operators" specifically trained for the accompaniment and support of people with disabilities and/or disadvantage social integration in work integration paths. It acts in conjunction with the specialized services of the Public Health System, with the Municipalities, with the Employment Centres and with the educational, training, and social Agencies of the territory. The SIL pursues the objective of labour integration assuming the method of personalized planning, different according to the needs of the people.

It offers:

- Advice and guidance to assess the potential and/or aptitudes of the person in terms of autonomy, learning and to acquire basic rules for job placement.
- Training in work situation through internship.

- Mediation in placement, to encourage the learning of specific work skills, the achievement and maintenance of a work relationship.
- Maintenance of the workplace through monitoring and support in the workplace.
- Promotion of information and awareness-raising initiatives.
- Collaboration with the Employment Services for the purpose of an effective application of Law 68/99 also through participation in the Provincial Technical Committee required by the law 68/99.
- Joint participation with the various local subjects, in the realization of projects financed by the Region, by Foundations, and private Organizations by the European Union for the financing of innovative actions and for the dissemination of new practices.

Often, coordination of stakeholders is not easy, even though SIL strives for better cooperation.

ACTORS INVOLVED:

Normally these profiles are involved in validation program with PWD:

- SIL “mediation operator” which accounts for the accompaniment and support in work integration paths, monitoring and support in the workplace, advice, and guidance to assess the potential and/or aptitudes of the person in terms of autonomy, learning and to acquire basic rules for job placement, analysis of the job application and identification of possible tasks, selection of the job offer to identify the profiles suited to the companies’ needs.
- Technician/teacher/educator who is responsible for the acquisition of transversal skills by training.
- Public Body/Municipality mediator as responsible of PWD’s general project

SPAIN

In the education system in Spain there is a big offer of VET programs. However, the majority of them are not accessible for PWD (especially for those with intellectual disabilities). Most of the PWID are not able to comply with requisites or access criteria.

Focusing on vocational education of PWID or people with special needs, in Catalonia there are currently only 3 specific training itineraries (named IFE – *Itineraris Formatius Específics*) aimed at students between the ages of 16 and 20 (during the calendar year that begin the itinerary) with special educational needs associated with a mild or moderate intellectual disability that are not able to follow ordinary VET programs.

These specific VET itineraries are:

- Assistant in Animal Healing and Green Spaces
- Assistant in Sales and Customer Service
- Assistant in Maintenance of Sports Facilities

This initiative started only a few years ago. The opportunities of vocational training for PWID are mainly offered by organizations providing **employment services and other services for PWID**. In this context, **service providers have an important role** in offering opportunities for non-formal and informal learning.

In Catalonia, the different service providers that offer vocational training need to be authorized (with a process of homologation according to regulations criteria³):

- Accreditation of classrooms and spaces where the training takes place.
- Accreditation according to training specializations⁴ (in terms of contents, materials, number of students, etc.). For each specialization it is required to present a project. There is a catalogue (list of) professional specializations (based on the Spanish Public Employment Service - SEPE catalogue).
- Accreditation of teacher / trainer. Verification of the fulfilment of some requirements in terms of experience, degrees, etc. It varies depending on each specialization.

³ Regulations regarding the accreditations and register of entities that give vocational training:

<https://serveiocupacio.gencat.cat/ca/entitats-i-proveidors/eines-i-recursos-per-les-entitats-de-formacio/registe-inscripcio-i-acreditacio/>

⁴ Catalogue of training specializations: <https://www.oficinadetreball.gencat.cat/socfuncions/CercarEspecialitats.do>

In Catalonia there is a prioritization list **targeted to vulnerable groups or groups with low qualifications**. In fact, there is a prioritization list by territories. The entities that give training for PWDI can be only accredited to give professionalism certificates at Level 1 (note that the catalogue contains not only programs, duration, etc. but also the level and if it is linked to a professional certificate, it contains the specific regulation). It is known under the name of FOAP⁵ – *Formació d’Oferta en Àrees Prioritàries, Training Offer by Priority Areas*)

The organizations can choose (according to their capabilities and preferences) to be accredited or to enter into the register without being accredited. This lets to two types of entities:

1. **Accredited training centres or entities:** that provide training aimed at obtaining the certificate of professionalism, and that meet the requirements established in the specific regulations of each certificate (and those that Public Employment Service of Catalonia – SOC can establish in a complementary way).

If the accreditation is requested to teach the courses of certificates of professionalism, the technical staff of SOC, before resolving the application, will conduct a visit to verify if the centre or the institution has the spaces and facilities necessary to impart it.

2. **Registered training centres or entities** are those entities that provide training not conducive to the acquisition of certificates of professionalism and that meet the requirements established by the SOC.

If registration is requested to provide training specialties not aimed at obtaining certification of professionalism, this presentation includes the responsible declaration of having sufficient facilities and human resources that guarantee the training, both theoretical and practical. Likewise, it is necessary to present the accreditation the corresponding fee payment that qualifies to start the activity. This means the entrance into the register of training entities, notwithstanding the subsequent supervision of compliance with the requirements.

On the other hand, and in relation to the different programs reported in the Catalan system, *Acredita’t* is based only on the experience, not on the training itself. This program has also some lines for PWID, and it is based on the accreditation of competences only by experience.

⁵ FOAP: <https://serveiocupacio.gencat.cat/ca/soc/ambits/formacio-professional-per-a-locupacio/formacio-doferta-en-arees-prioritaries-foap/>

IMPLEMENTATION OF VALIDATION

PWID usually **do not have many aspirations to obtain qualifications**, they give little importance to professional career. The feeling sometimes is that they have already resigned due to difficulties and barriers.

Normally, the courses / trainings when managed by the entities like service providers are linked to inclusion itineraries. This approach the **most appealing** to PWID, that is, **when the training is linked to a job placement program** (and supported employment program). Training is usually the first step in the labour inclusion itinerary, and the job placement is the main objective, more than to obtain a titles or diploma.

There is a need of recognition for a better self-esteem and asserting one's identity. Most people with disabilities like to be recognized by the training they have done.

Moreover, during the trainings and from the very beginning of them, participants learn and work on transversal skills. These helps a lot to strengthen their self-knowledge, responsibility, initiative, communication, among others.

Currently the only option to access formal VET is through IFE itineraries. But as abovementioned there are only 3 options and in only few places. This is a program addressed to 16-20 years old people with special needs. For example, in Girona, at the moment there is a secondary school giving one IFE.

Once you reach the age of 20 years-old there is no formal option of accessing a VET program. The options are **non-formal or informal education through inclusion and employment programs given by service providers and entities of the third sector**.

Lastly, the majority of our vocational trainings are linked to a labour inclusion itinerary as supported employment is absolutely necessary for most PWID.

COORDINATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders involved in the validation process:

- Public Employment Service of Catalonia (SOC) – Employment Department (Catalan Government). This organism is the one responsible for the accreditations of organizations and certificates of professionalism.

- Employers – specially for the internships, in case that the VET programs comprise them. most training itineraries of the Catalogue there are internships – in fact on the paper there are free of choice, but the organizations that receive funding for giving trainings they are committed to find internships for a determined number of students. Moreover, in most programs with public funding (i.e., SIOAS, FOAP) required letters of support from companies and employers.
- Accredited training entities
- Registered training entities
- Service providers of PWID that provide guidance and training programs (or other accredited and registered organizations)
- Institut Català de Qualificacions Professionals - ICQP (Catalan Institute of Professional Qualifications): we guessed that is the main institution, above SOC. So, there might be a coordination between ICQP and SOC (but we are not familiar with it, should be validated). So that, there is a collaboration between Employment (SOC) and Education (ICQP).
- Consell Català de Formació Professional –The Catalan Council for Vocational Training is the consultative and advisory body on vocational training, not binding, of the Catalan Government, with the participation of the business organizations, trade unions and public entities involved, with respect to all the vocational trainings, regulated and non-regulated, assigned to the Education Department.

Moreover, besides Employment and Education, there are other departments and areas involved, in order to provide support, we received users for different services:

- EAP (Equip atenció persones especials dificultats, team of professionals at schools and secondary schools to support people with special needs) – education level.
- SEMSDI (Mental health network) – Health level
- Municipal social services – social services level

The core of the action is normally the organization or centre giving the training. There is always a tutor (coach) that connects the participant with all the resources.

Regarding the coordination of the stakeholders, this is managed in Catalonia, but it still needs work in its coordination and particularly in adapting the trainings to the needs of the companies, while keeping the interests of the users.

ACTORS INVOLVED

Generally, for the itineraries offered in supported employment programs (comprising vocational training) there is a team consisting of:

- Tutor (transversal training, more geared towards cross-disciplinary skills, and guidance for people at the job search level)
- Technical trainer / teacher (activity specialist, professional of the specialization)
- Prospector (connects job market opportunities with the person)

GREECE

In Greece, there is currently **no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning**. However, EOPPEP (<https://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/>) (JMD 119959/H/20.10.2011 and [Law 4115/2013](#)) is the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, an all-encompassing statutory body investing on better quality and more efficient and reliable lifelong learning services in Greece. EOPPEP operates under the supervision of the Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and is seated in Athens. It has derived from the amalgamation of three national bodies, all under the supervision of the same Ministry: The National Centre for the Accreditation of Lifelong Learning Providers (EKEPIS), the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications (EOPP) & the National Centre for Vocational Guidance (EKEP). The newly established (2011) national authority corresponds to the pressing need of creating and maintaining a holistic and interrelated policy framework for the development of lifelong learning and certification of qualifications in Greece, linking with the open market and responding to the needs of the citizens. Their mission is geared towards linking VET with labour market needs, upgrading people's occupational qualifications, reinforcing their employment perspectives, and strengthening social cohesion. EOPPEP develops and implements the National Accreditation and Certification System for non-formal education, including initial and continuing vocational training and adult education, and provides scientific support to Vocational Guidance and Counseling services in Greece.

More analytically, EOPPEP aims at quality assurance in:

- **Inputs:** accredited Providers implementing VET programs, developed upon accredited standards & specifications, based on accredited occupational profiles, employing accredited Trainers for Adults, with the aid of accredited Support Services Professionals for socially vulnerable groups.
- **Outputs-learning outcomes:** accredited knowledge, skills and competences acquired via non-formal & informal learning pathways and certification of qualifications.
- **Vocational guidance & counselling services:** viable services & tools for supporting citizens of every age, as well as educational information tools according to the latest ICT applications.

Greece's participation in a survey of adult skills organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with the support of the European Commission was launched on 31 March at the Mapping skills shortages, planning the future, conference in Athens.

The survey, known as 'survey of adult skills' (PIAAC), assessed the level of proficiency in key foundation skills among approximately 5.000 adults and the extent to which these skills are used in the workplace.

The initial results from all the countries in the first round were published in October 2013. Skill development and lifelong learning fall markedly with age. This is worrying for Greece and some other European countries, which have an ageing workforce that needs to keep up with technological and organisational developments.

There is not currently accreditation of non-formal and informal training focusing on people with disabilities. These people are not excluded from procedures aimed at the general population, but these procedures are not adequate for them to follow. The lack of any references pertaining to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, focusing on people with disabilities, in the equivalent official CEDEFOP pages that follow, is indicative of the lack of policy concerning this issue.

IMPLEMENTATION OF VALIDATION

The relevant law (4547/18, articles 88 and 89)) has only recently changed, leading to the accreditation of qualifications for some professions (e.g., pertaining to Vocational Training Institutes – IEK) by EOPPEP. There is no response to the interest of people with disabilities since there are no procedures adequate for them.

The certification (or lack of it) can definitely affect people with disabilities' **self-esteem**. Accreditation will lead to professional rights; thus, it **will lead more easily to the free labour market**.

In Greek society, a fundamental fact that characterizes it is the need of a young or older employee to own a degree – certification that bears the statement of their proficiency in a particular expertise. It is **difficult for an employee to be trusted by their employer, unless they have a certificate that proves the fact they have been trained in this field and that they are able to perform tasks pertaining to this field**. This is a mentality that has flourished for decades and Greek family has invested a great amount of money and effort in order to see their children entering a university or a technological school.

Policies in the Greek context

In Greece, a great number of laws have been established by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs over the last 50 years regarding special and inclusive education.

Law 3699, established in 2008, declared that free, compulsory and upgraded education will be available to each person with SEN (Special Educational Needs) at any educational level (Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2008). According to this Act the implementation of the principles of **“designing for all”**, which targets at ensuring accessibility of students with SEN, is compulsory during the designing of interventions or the choice of equipment (Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2008, p. 281). In this law K.D.A.Y. are renamed as Diagnostic, Assessment and Support Centres (known as K.E.D.D.Y.) for students with SEN. The main change that this law brought is the improvement of the interdisciplinary teams that staff K.E.D.D.Y. and are responsible for diagnosing students with SEN and designing, along with their teachers, the most appropriate interventions (Karamitopoulos, 2015).

This law indicates **that students with mild SEN can be educated in general schools**, having three options of support (Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2008). The first option is to attend a regular classroom and be educated by the classroom teacher who will be in constant cooperation with K.E.D.D.Y. and the general or special school advisors in order to support them effectively (ibid.). The second option indicates that students with an official diagnosis from K.E.D.D.Y. can attend a regular classroom having parallel support from a specialist teacher (ibid.). The last option is the partial withdrawal to special organised integration units located within the school where students with or without official diagnosis from K.E.D.D.Y. can attend (Soulis et al., 2016). Integration units are also described in international literature with other terms, such as “inclusive classes” or “resource rooms” (Anastasiou and Polychronopoulou, 2009). Students with severe special needs have to be educated in different settings than that of a mainstream classroom that is, **in special schools or even at home** in cases of severe health problems that prevent them from attending school (Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2008).

The most recent law 4368 (2016), **highlighted the need for implementing inclusion in Greek schools**. Specifically, article 82 promotes inclusive education by underlying the need for educating all students in mainstream classrooms implementing programmes that would meet the needs of both mainstream and special schools’ learners (Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2016).

Evidently, Greece strives to keep up with the international standards regarding inclusive education and promote core inclusive values such as equity and acceptance of diversity of every student (Tsakiridou and Polyzopoulou, 2014; Kitsou, 2015). Nevertheless, Greece is still in **an initial stage regarding inclusion since it is not being understood appropriately in Greek context** (Tsakalou et al., 2018). Literature indicates that the existing legislation endeavours to establish inclusion within an education system and a school culture which are unprepared to welcome it (Symeonidou and Pthiaka, 2014). Indicatively, the terms used in the law 3699/2008 regarding inclusion are quite vague and non-

systematic (Lampropoulou, 2008; Tsakalou et al., 2018). This law prioritises diagnosis, by inserting several medical specialties in the special education structures, while the educational intervention is underestimated, since the educators receive resignedly the decisions of K.E.D.D.Y. specialists (Lampropoulou, 2008). Thus, students are determined based on their pathology rather than their educational needs or strengths (ibid.), and apparently, there is a general medical orientation (Lampropoulou et al., 2005).

There is a great confusion regarding the meaning of inclusion, which arose from the inclusive policy documents, where the meaning of inclusion was quite vague (Tsakalou et al., 2018).

CHALLENGES

Evidence suggests that the Greek **education system and curricula** impede teachers from implementing inclusion (Coutsocostas and Alborz, 2010). The school curriculum is compulsory and the same for every school and requires all teachers to strictly follow it (Vlachou, 2006). The inflexible curriculum, along with its highly exam-oriented philosophy, prevents teachers from taking initiatives and urges them to use traditional teaching methods (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006). This results in having **a teacher-centered education system which focuses on the covering of the curriculum and the exams**. The latter are usually accompanied by outdated ways of assessment, encouraging “rote learning and memorisation” (Tsakalou et al., 2018, p.7) and high competition among students (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006).

Probably the most crucial challenge **is the lack of funding** as schools and teachers are not provided with the appropriate infrastructure for implementing inclusion (Koutrouba et al., 2008). Greek schools are not well-equipped in order to accommodate and support every student (Anastasiou and Polychronopoulou, 2009).

Another challenge is the lack of appropriate training regarding the inclusion and support of students with SEN. Inclusion needs **ongoing and systematic training in order to be implemented**, which is not provided to them. Literature highlights the fact that Greek teachers are willing to enact inclusion in their classrooms, however they do not receive any relevant training (Koutrouba et al., 2008). This lack of training makes them have low self-efficacy since they feel completely unprepared to welcome a brand-new concept such as inclusion and sometimes this leads them in forming negative perceptions towards inclusion (Tsakiridou and Polyzopoulou, 2014).

RECOMMENDATIONS

At first, schools have to be **reformed in such ways that they will correspond to the needs of every student** (Angelides and Stylianou, 2011). This means that new infrastructure has to be created and schools have to be financed sufficiently in order to acquire special equipment that will accommodate students with disabilities and will help teachers in creating more inclusive environments (Koutrouba et al., 2008).

The Greek education system has to become **more flexible** so as to provide teachers with the chance of taking initiatives and critically examine which are the most appropriate ways to deliver the teaching material based on the needs of every student (Koutrouba et al., 2008). Having more flexible curricula the education systems' philosophy **will become less academic-oriented** and will allow teachers to provide all of their students with a more holistic education which will focus on social-emotional development except for the cognitive (Farrell et al., 2007).

Thus, the Ministry of Education, which is completely responsible for education issues, has to implement training seminars with experiential character, so as to update all mainstream secondary teachers regarding the needs of students with SEN and equip them with the appropriate strategies to include them effectively (Koutrouba et al., 2008; Coutsocostas and Alborz, 2010).

In order for schools to improve and for teachers to achieve effective cooperation and implement inclusion, as discussed above, it is essential to practice the plan of distributed school leadership (MacBeath, 2006; Obiakor et al., 2012). Teachers cannot make it if they do not share the responsibilities within the school context. When few people take responsibility for leading the school and implementing inclusion, then mistakes are more possible to happen, as the way that few people think creates an environment of inflexibility (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003; Harris, 2008; Harris and Spillane, 2008). Thus, according to distributive leadership the school staff has to be provided with the chance to participate in decision-making and undertake leading roles in several sectors within the school community to ameliorate the function of the school regarding the implementation of inclusive policies (Savva and Angelides, 2011).

Common understandings and shared values regarding inclusion have been proved to be key elements for the effective implementation of inclusion (Curcic et al., 2011). Unluckily, the Greek policy documents do not display a clear meaning of inclusion, which results in a generalised confusion depicted in teachers' different understandings and practices regarding inclusion (Tsakalou et al., 2018). Hence, it is essential that inclusive policies become clearer regarding the meaning of inclusion

and the practices that have to be followed for its effective implementation, helping this way, school members to follow a common route towards inclusion (Ainscow et al., 2012).

Moreover, certification increases the chances of people with disabilities to find a job. Beneficiaries, who graduate from “Margarita” or other similar entities, only take a written confirmation for their participation in “Margarita’s” activities that does not correspond to a certification of their professional skills they have acquired.

People with intellectual disability who wish to **continue their education after completing their studies in special schools in order to acquire professional skills have the following options**. They can be either enrolled in one of the 8 Public Technical Vocational Schools (TEE) or one of the 16 Specialized Vocational Education and Training Workshops (EEEEK). By graduating from the EEEK, the person has a certificate - degree equivalent to the High School Certificate, but this does not allow them to continue studying at the High School. They also receive a Level 1 Vocational Training Certificate.

People with intellectual disability **can also join classes offered by professional workshops established by NGOs and parent’s associations**. These workshops provide education services outside the national education system. They were established as private-law legal entities on the initiative of parents and sometimes with the subsidy of the State or, since 1981, with the support of the European programs. Their role is to provide programs for the assessment of people's skills, educational support, programs to promote self-care, independence, and social integration of people with disabilities, as well as vocational training and professional rehabilitation programs. The terms and procedure for the integration of individuals into these workshops are determined by each centre separately. Each centre also decides on the professionals it needs for staffing, which may be psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, special pedagogues, occupational therapists, speech therapists and craftsmen.

Another model of occupational rehabilitation is that of supported employment, implemented in particular by VTC “Margarita” and “Theotokos Foundation”.

Non-governmental organizations providing vocational training and rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities also assess the progress of their graduates, **based on each person's professional skills, behaviour, consistency, and professional consciousness**. These evaluations can give a full picture of the promotion of an individual in the open labour market. The assessments are complemented by the internship stage, where the graduate participates in a training course on career guidance, problem solving in the professional environment and professional diligence.

The final assessment of the graduate's readiness for professional rehabilitation is carried out after the internship. The process of assessing the graduate's ability to work is usually done by the interdisciplinary team and the trainers of the vocational training workshops.

Within the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED), training programs are being developed in three VET schools for people with special needs with a total capacity of 300 seats. They are said to be adapted to the developments and needs of the labour market as well as to the specific characteristics of the trainees.

COORDINATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders involved in the validation process:

- National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP)
- General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, acting as the executive authority for Lifelong Learning in Greece
- Non-public entities, providing inspection and product certification services
- Private enterprises, providing services that people with disability can offer

There is not a structured relationship between these stakeholders. Programmes are implemented at the initiative of entities-service providers for people with disability.

Stakeholders do not manage this coordination very well and, sometimes, there is the implementation of similar programmes by different service-providers, who are not conscious of the programme implemented by other service providers. This leads to bad management of human resources and material resources. These stakeholders should inform one another on the field of the programmes implemented, so that they can maybe join forces.

ACTORS INVOLVED

Professionals working for entities like “Margarita” (providers of services for people with disability) are the professionals taking the initiative for the implementation of related programmes.

CHAPTER III

Stakeholder's Interviews

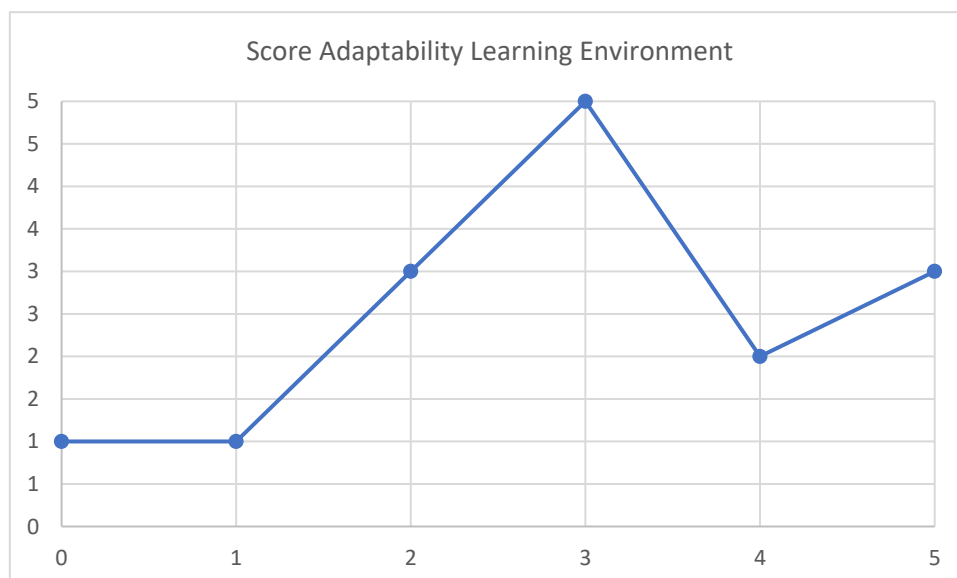
To fully address the complexity of the different systems, both at national and European level, the consortium agreed on interviewing relevant stakeholders with knowledge on the field of validation and certification of non-formal and informal training for people with disabilities.

The survey was agreed with the partnership and applied to fourteen relevant stakeholders from the European level, Italy, Greece, and Spain. The stakeholders targeted were representatives of formal education, representatives of informal education, Universities (with focus on disability or equality issues), certification/validation agencies and public authorities responsible for education in several countries and European level.

The answers were later analysed using comparative analysis, comparing the different points raised by the stakeholders and trying to find the communalities and disagreements.

The results are as follows:

CURRENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN TERMS OF ADAPTABILITY TO THE INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF THE LEARNERS



The first relevant result that we can underline from the stakeholder questionnaire is the score of the adaptability to the individual needs of the learners of the learning environment. Here we can see that

the average score is 3.23, with most of the answers concentrating below 4. We can then say that there is an average discontent with the adaptability of the learning environment.

Stakeholders from Spain commented as well that while they themselves tried to adapt their own learning programme, the general situation of the country is not as good. This can be good also for other stakeholders that have made efforts in working for a stronger adaptability of the learning environment but recognise that the context of their country does not reflect those efforts.

ENSURING THAT TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONALS CAN ADAPT NON-FORMAL LEARNING

When asked what could be done to make sure that teachers and professionals have the knowledge, capacity, and creativity to adapt non-formal learning to persons with special needs and/or disabilities, the stakeholders pointed out two main problems:

1. Teachers training teachers need to be trained, either during their education or afterwards, to be able to think creatively and innovatively on how to adapt their lessons and exams. This includes training both on new possible curricula for people with learning disabilities and training on how to in fact teach people with disabilities. The stakeholders also pointed out that people with disabilities have different needs, so the training needs to address that, and the teachers should be involved and capable to address the various needs.
2. Contextual changes: All of this cannot be done without contextual changes. The different stakeholders should come together in order to make progress and advance in the way learning is developed, as to facilitate the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

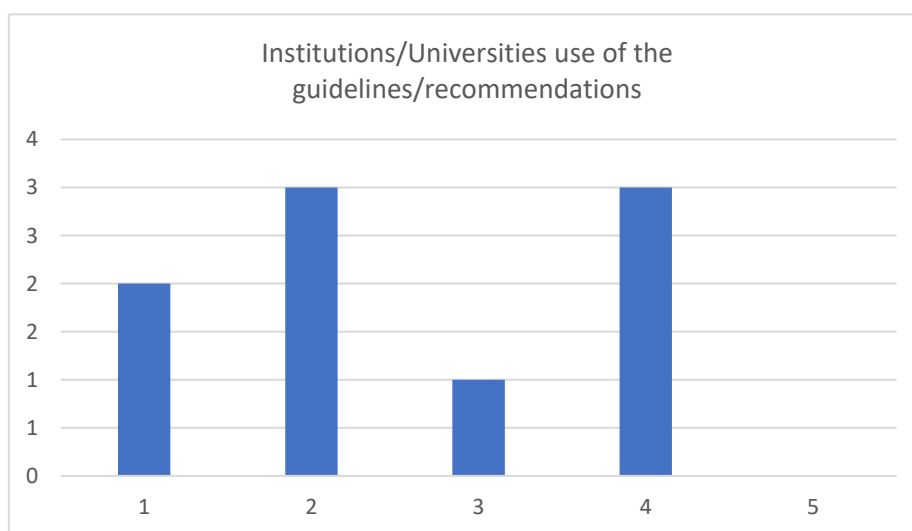
INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WITHOUT EXCLUDING THEM FROM MAINSTREAM VALIDATION

How to make sure the validation of non-formal and informal learning can be adapted to people with disabilities without excluding them from mainstream validation?

First of all, it was reinforced that people with learning disabilities have specific needs, which that certifications for people with learning disabilities needs to account for their learning limitations, while still assessing their knowledge, e.g., allowing the supporting person to accompany the person to the test, or opting for image-based questions instead of text; or even, as some stakeholders state, using

standardized tests. Multiple stakeholders also pointed out that persons with learning disabilities have an excellent capacity to work with both physical tools and with computer technology.

INSTITUTION/UNIVERSITY USE OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES



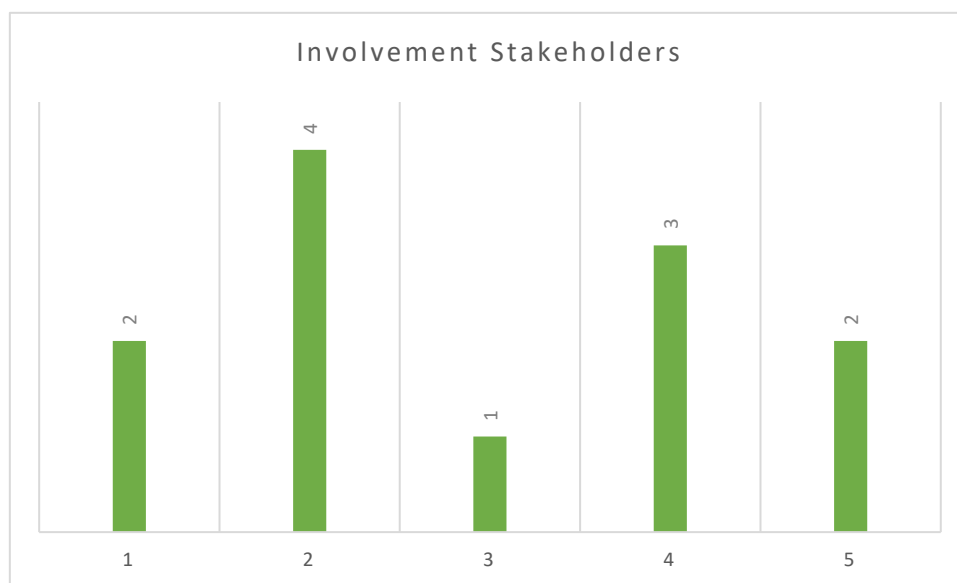
When coming to how much the institutions or universities use the guidelines or recommendations already in place, we can see that no stakeholder said that this was a perfect use, but rather most of them stay in the 2 and 4 values, which lead us to think that they sometimes or often times do attempt to use these recommendations but indeed it is not something that is perfectly used.

TOOLS AVAILABLE IN TERMS OF QUALIFICATION

Stakeholders report difficulties in the existence of tools in terms of qualification for people with learning disabilities. There are some tools, but they are not widely used, there are promising experiences by EU supported projects but not systematically harvested.

Unfortunately, in Greece there are no tools or procedures for the validation of professional skills of persons with disabilities acquired through experience and through non-formal and informal educational programs. In Italy, the university system seems to not prioritize this issue and in Spain, there are some government guidelines for qualification, but they are not perfect.

INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS



Stakeholders divide when thinking about their own involvement regarding accessibility and inclusive education and the validation itself. Most people answer that they are sometimes involved, however the average is quite neutral.

When asked what can be done to improve the coordination of stakeholders to get better services and guidance for learners with special needs in case, they answered below 3, the stakeholders gave a lot of interesting possibilities.

1. Setting up enlarged platforms where stakeholders from various areas and fields of expertise can exchange information and ideas and set up groups to solve particular problems.
2. Assessment of the individual needs of children with disabilities.
3. Involvement of all relevant stakeholders (including people with disabilities and their families) in all processes of decision making.

In summary, authorities, persons with learning disabilities and their family/support staff, and other stakeholders need to be brought together to the discussion to exchange ideas to create a strategy on how to adopt inclusive education into the mainstream education system. This solution could benefit from having standardized guidelines.

TRAINING FOR VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

Regarding training for validation practitioners for the special needs of persons with disabilities, there are some specialist courses along the fringes of the medical / health fields (for example speech therapy, physiotherapy) which acknowledge the special needs of this group of learners, but these are very much in the minority and their focus is more of a medical one rather than a training/developmental focus on the individual and their skills.

Networking and exchange of best practices between professionals and countries appears to be a good solution to ensure the accessibility of the validation process. Training for teachers is also seen a possible solution.

The proposed trainers would be professionals with experience in special education, professionals in the subject that is taught who also have the skills to work with people with learning disabilities.

With regards to the format of the training, the stakeholders proposed some concrete ideas:

1. Creation of an appealing and adapted learning environment by the inclusion of more breaks and diversified tasks, in contrast with the desk/lecture-type of training.
2. Creation of an adapted curriculum specially designed to reach out persons with disabilities. While creating this curriculum we should keep in mind that the learning goals will need to be adapted and that this process will vary accordingly to the specific disability.
3. Investment in stakeholder coordination: only when involving all the relevant actors can we effectively create an inclusive setting for training. Dialogue with stakeholders is an important source for learning ways to optimize these trainings.

CAPTER IV

Conclusion

Despite the efforts in legislation and practice, the walk to inclusion in non-formal and informal training is still long from being over. The lack of adaptation of the training to the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities, problems in coordination of the stakeholders responsible for non-formal and informal training and the lack of a multidisciplinary and integrated response to create a different response are pointed out as major difficulties in achieving inclusion.

One of the major problems that was repetitively brought-up and that has an impact through all the system is the lack of coordination between stakeholders. Communication is limited which makes the sharing of good practices difficult, in particular when there are different entities involved (public authorities, service providers, training centres)

Another important finding is that in almost all partner countries, trainings are rarely adapted to individual needs and there is a systematic use of rigorous curricula and standard exams.

However, we can see a lot of positive notes for the future. Firstly, often the training for people with disabilities is provided by service providers who also try to create these trainings as a way to better access employment opportunities. This is particularly interesting when the courses are combined with supported employment.

The second and most hopeful conclusion of this report is the way our project, EQUALvet, can offer a solution to all the problems mention, putting into practice concrete actions that will work towards:

- Creating a more adapted learning environment that answers to individual needs
- Designing a specific curriculum adapted to people with disabilities.
- Involving all the relevant actors in the creation of an inclusive setting for training

As such, it is clear that there is a need for contextual changes and training if we are willing to overcome the difficulties above. The different stakeholders should come together in order to make progress and advance in the way learning is developed, as to facilitate the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. The EQUALvet project will play a crucial role in the partner countries in starting this discussion, however, it should be a transversal discussion in other European countries if we aim at a fully inclusive EU.

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