

**Position paper**  
**Validation in the voluntary sector**  
**Past, present, and future**

A contribution to the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of  
20 December 2012 on the validation of non formal and informal  
learning.

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## 1. Foreword

With this position paper we contribute to the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on validation, not only by looking back, but also by looking forward. The paper is not based on scientific research, but on experiences, projects, conferences, and similar developments in the voluntary sector.

Bemmel, The Netherlands, 13. November 2019  
Jo Peeters, Chairman of EDOS Foundation

## 2. Objectives of this position paper

The objectives of this position paper are:

- To contribute to the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non formal and informal learning.
- To position the voluntary sector as an important environment for non formal learning
- To contribute to coherence and synchronization when it comes to validation projects and activities in the voluntary sector
- To support and encourage new initiatives in this field.

### 3. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thankfulness to all those who have contributed to this position paper, either by writing texts, expressing their support, or giving feedback:

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- PDCO Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations in Slovakia - Mrs. Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová
- Talentum Foundation for Support of Volunteering in Hungary – Mrs. Edit B. Balogh
- Centrul de Voluntariat Cluj-Napoca, also representing Pro Vobis National Resource Center for volunteerism Romania, Mrs. Nicoleta Chiș-Racolța
- National Alliance for Volunteer Action Bulgaria – Mrs. Vera Mihaylova
- Pista Mágica School for Volunteering, in cooperation with the Portuguese National Institute of Sports and Youth (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude) – Mrs. Ana Luísa Azevedo
- Mr. Pavel Trantina, former Chair of the Czech Council of Children and Youth
- European Volunteer Center - Mrs. Gabriella Civico
- Cedefop European Centre for the development of Vocational Training - Mr. Ernesto Villalba-Garcia

Several of these contributors have send a description of how they deal with validation, and/or which challenges they see for the future, in this way at the same time showing the strength of the voluntary sector as well as the challenges that they face. These contributions are included in this position paper as annexes.

#### 4. Introduction

This position paper is an initiative of EDOS Foundation, based in The Netherlands. EDOS Foundation initiates training courses, projects, and other educational activities to stimulate and facilitate the personal and professional development of adults and youngsters who are professionally or voluntarily active in the field of adult education, youth work, and welfare work.

Since the publication of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non formal and informal learning, EDOS Foundation has been involved in national and international projects and activities dealing with validation in the voluntary sector.

EDOS Foundation has also contributed to the VPL Biennale in Aarhus (May 2017) and Berlin (May 2019), and has participated in the European Validation Festival (Brussels, June 2018), the "Peer Learning Activity on Validation of Soft and Transversal Skills acquired through Non-Formal and Informal learning by adults when volunteering" (Brussels, January 2019), and the Cedefop conference "How to make learning visible" (Thessaloniki, December 2016).

Our efforts in this field are based on the belief and trust that people can also gain knowledge, skills and competences by other means than through school, and that this is as worthy as learning through formal education.

## 5. Background information on validation in the voluntary sector

The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is highly relevant in the European educational area. This is widely acknowledged on EU level, as written in these policy documents:

- "The role of voluntary activities in social policy", Council of the European Union (October 2011)
- "Volunteering: passport to a job?", Committee on culture and education of the European Parliament (June 2012)
- "Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning" (December 2012)
- "Towards a European area of skills and qualifications", European Commission (June 2014).
- "Validation of skills and qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning", European Economic and Social Committee (September 2015).

Mechanisms to validate non-formal and informal learning contribute to tackle unemployment, and to achieve a better match between jobs and skills by acknowledging those acquired outside the formal education system.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning also gives opportunities for second chances, improves access to education, and enhances motivation to learn. It contributes to social inclusion, personal development, empowerment and employability.

The role of volunteering:

*"Volunteering is widely acknowledged as an outstanding source of learning, and an important contributor to personal and professional development. Volunteering is an element of social innovation that can mobilise people's creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources.*

*At the societal level, it can be a tool for the empowerment of people, especially for disadvantaged groups in society. At the individual level, volunteering can be a means for citizens to acquire important soft and transversal skills, to play a useful role, and to connect or reconnect with society.*

*Volunteering is understood to be a driving force behind social cohesion and personal development, and the EMPL formation of the European Council Conclusions encouraged the 'promotion of the role of volunteering as a form of non-formal and informal learning contributing to obtaining new skills and competences and improved employability in each and every age and social group.'*

(Source: Background paper of the European Commission, in cooperation with the European Volunteer Centre and the Life Long Learning Platform, for the Peer Learning Activity on Validation of Soft and Transversal Skills acquired through Non-Formal and Informal learning by adults when volunteering, Brussels, January 2019).

## 6. What has been done so far

Since the publication of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non formal and informal learning, there have been many projects dealing with validation in the voluntary sector: around 20 projects have dealt in one way or another with the validation of skills/competences of volunteers: Euravon - Volcar - VaPoVo - e-VOC - ReValue - Volunteer Validation - Global Recognition - Lever - Lever Up - GREAT - CivCil - Volunteering Validation Highway - Destination E-validation - Innoval - I've Experienced, ImProval, UpVal. The outcomes of these projects are/will be included in the Erasmus+ dissemination platform: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/>

More than 50 organizations in 20 EU member states were involved in these projects. Thus, more and more people and organizations are becoming aware of the educational value of volunteering, and of (the benefits of) validation opportunities in the voluntary sector.

More than 40 validation tools for the voluntary sector have been developed and tested in EU member states. An overview and analysis of these tools can be found on [www.improval.eu](http://www.improval.eu)

So, we can say that the voluntary sector is very active in the field of validation, and very motivated to contribute to new developments. See the attachments for some good practices.

## 7. What is missing?

It seems that, so far, the structural use of validation tools and -methods in the voluntary sector is still limited. Apparently, something more is necessary to make validation an integrated part of volunteering.

Also, hardly any bridges between projects have been created, which includes the risk of reinventing the wheel on one side, and "missing links" on the other side, e.g. in connecting the validation tools and methods with the European Guidelines for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, or instruments like the European Qualifications Framework.

According to Cedefops "European Inventory on Validation 2018", presented at the VPL Biennale in Berlin (May 2019), and to be published soon, the so called "third sector", which includes the voluntary sector, is far behind "education and training" and the "labour market" when it comes to offering outcomes of validation arrangements (award of a qualification, exemptions, access to formal education, training specifications).

## 8a. Perspectives on the future, part 1

### Creating bridges between projects

We think that it makes sense to create cooperation / connection / exchange between projects dealing with validation in the voluntary sector. They can support each other, benefit from each other, and learn from each other, and in this way strengthen each other by

- inviting each other for participation in project conferences or other activities
- sharing intellectual outputs and research findings
- making use of each others dissemination and publication channels
- developing ideas for dissemination and impact

Here we see a role for Erasmus+ National Agencies, as far as it concerns projects in the framework of the Erasmus+ program. Also platforms on European level, such as the European Volunteer Center and the Life Long Learning Platform, could play a role in connecting projects with each other.

## 8b. Perspectives on the future, part 2

### Making use of the existing infrastructure in the voluntary sector

In many EU-member states there are platforms on national level, for example the Italian Association of Volunteer Support Centers, the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations in Slovakia, and the National Alliance for Volunteer Action Bulgaria. These platforms can play an important role in introducing, implementing, and strengthening validation in the voluntary sector. At the same time, organisations from member states where such a platform doesn't exist can be invited to join projects, in this way encouraging them to initiate such a platform. More strategic use of programs like Erasmus+ could support this.

### 8c. Perspectives on the future, part 3

#### Creating stronger connections between developments on EU- and national level and the voluntary sector

- A) European guidelines for validating nonformal and informal learning  
The projects and validation tools mentioned in chapter 6 show that not all initiatives in the voluntary sector are based on these guidelines, which can make the outcomes weaker, and harder to connect with national validation arrangements.  
Organisations in the voluntary sector should be more aware of these guidelines.
- B) National validation strategies  
All EU member states were supposed to have a validation strategy by 2018, or at least to have started working on it. According to Cedefops "European Inventory on Validation 2018", presented at the VPL Biennale in Berlin (May 2019), and to be published soon, a validation strategy is in place in 25 member states, while under development in 11 member states.

Connecting validation initiatives in the voluntary sector with the national validation system can play a role in strengthening the external value, and in creating connections with formal education and the labour market.

- C) New Europass platform  
A new Europass Platform will be introduced in all member states in 2020. In some member states, the "Europass certificate for volunteers" has already been introduced during the last years. A similar document, aiming at validation of non formal and informal learning, will be connected with this new Europass Platform. Making use of this document (not yet available at the moment), can probably also strengthen the external value of validation in the voluntary sector.

Cooperation between National Europass Centers and national volunteering platforms can be a first step in this process.

- D) European qualifications framework  
The European qualifications framework, and the national qualifications frameworks based on it, can help to create more transparency and visibility of qualifications.

Looking at these frameworks when describing skills/competences/qualifications of volunteers can create bridges between the voluntary sector and the labour market.

E) New Erasmus+ program

The new Erasmus+ program will start in 2021. In publications announcing the new program we read:

*“New or reinforced synergies could be established at several levels: at strategic level (enhanced coherence of policy objectives), at programming level (enhanced coherence of priorities and compatible implementation frameworks), and at project level (strategic pooling of funding from several resources).*

Keeping in mind what is written above, it is certainly worth exploring which new opportunities this could create for the voluntary sector. Erasmus+ National Agencies could play a role in supporting national volunteering platforms in this process.

8d. Perspectives on the future, part 4

Recommendations from other resources

As already mentioned in chapter 4, there have been several meetings during the last years, where the future of validation has been discussed. Here we mention the conclusions/recommendations from these meetings which are, in our opinion, most relevant in the framework of this position paper:

**Cedefop conference “How to make learning visible”** (Thessaloniki, December 2016):

- *“validation needs to move from policy to implementation”*
- *“social partners and specially employers, need to be involved in the design and implementation of validation practices”*
- *“raising awareness of the importance and benefits of validation”*
- *“better understanding of the benefits of validation for the individual, will also facilitate the recruitment of disadvantaged groups into validation processes”*

The full summary of the conference outcomes is available on the Cedefop website.

**“Peer learning activity on validation of soft and transversal skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning by adults when volunteering”**

(Brussels, January 2019):

*“Further developments should be based on a bottom up approach and maximum cross sector collaboration in order that there is common ownership and ‘buy in’ to the process and eventual results and outcomes.”*

*“The possibilities offered by the new Europass for documenting soft, transversal skills acquired through volunteering that are validated should be maximised.”*

*“Efforts to compile a directory of existing validation tools should be supported by all stakeholders especially and in particular the ongoing process within the project IMPROVAL.”*

*“The CEDEFOP Guidelines on Validation should be updated in order to include the advanced knowledge of the topic in the field and the recent developments. They should provide the foundation for quality assurance processes for validation tools.”*

**VPL Biennale (Berlin, May 2019)**

The so called “Berlin Declaration”, discussed and adapted at the VPL Biennale in May 2019, contains recommendations for the further development and implementation of validation arrangements. Related to the voluntary sector, these are, in our opinion, the most relevant ones:

- *Relevant stakeholders should cooperate, so that VPL and its results hold value and are highly recognised in society.*

*The value and importance of validation needs a widely and continuous attention of all stakeholders and potential users to get really implemented and acknowledged in society, work and education. This is a responsibility for all involved in VPL. The needed cooperation of course leads to an equal position of all sectors where non-formal and informal learning takes place.*

- *VPL should include guidance and support at every stage of the process.*

*In our current projects we aim to define what kind of support is needed on individual and organisational level to stimulate the use of validation in the volunteering sector. More specific the support of organisations by local, regional or national support organisations, like volunteer centres or volunteer organisations, can be a valuable condition for further implementation and use of validation tools. This support structure should of course be part of an overall (national) system for VPL.*

- *Validation pathways need to be modular, transparent, and comprehensible at all stages of the process, in order to allow for flexible work and education pathways. The learner should be at the center of the VPL process.*

*This implies that the way to validate of someone's non-formal and informal learning outcomes can vary per learner. When the procedure adapts to the learner, the thresholds to start VPL will be easier to overcome. Easier access and the entrance to VPL will stimulate the use of VPL and thus further learning and working. This contributes also to life long learning as an important way to decrease unemployment and increase societal participation and inclusion.*

### Epilogue

"What's the news?", you might ask yourself after reading this position paper. Well, in fact nothing; for "insiders", everything that's written here has already been written, or presented in one way or another, somewhere else.

By putting it all together we think we contribute to clearing the position of the voluntary sector when it comes to validation. At the same time we hope to inspire people and organisations to take next steps in this challenging field of work, in this way strengthening the voluntary sector and its role in society.

For further information or explanation please contact:

Mr. Jo Peeters, chairman of EDOS Foundation, email [jo@edosfoundation.com](mailto:jo@edosfoundation.com), phone 0031615387104

For general information about EDOS Foundation, please visit [www.edosfoundation.com](http://www.edosfoundation.com), or write an email to [post@edosfoundation.com](mailto:post@edosfoundation.com)

## Annexes:

As mentioned in chapter 3, several persons have contributed to this position paper, most of them representing the voluntary sector, and all of them involved in validation developments.

Some have shared with us their experiences, good practices, and challenges, which can serve as examples from the work field. These are summarized here, coming from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, and Czech Republic.

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### Le Passeport Bénévole de France Bénévolat

#### The French Volunteer Passport of France bénévolat

A tool to promote the experiential skills of volunteers

Because every professional career is enriched by each experience, France Bénévolat launched, in 2007, a tool that allows the recognition of experience and the enhancement of volunteer skills: "Le Passeport Bénévole"<sup>®</sup>.

The Volunteer Passport makes it possible to list the volunteer missions carried out, to identify and promote the skills acquired in this context.

The skills of volunteers, who are essential actors of Civil Society, can finally be known and recognized:

The volunteer is an essential actor in civil society. The volunteer makes available to the society not only part of his time, but also his ability to fulfill his mission in the association to which he is committed - and therefore his skills. Until now, these have not been recognised, because they have not been identified as such, either by society or even by the volunteers themselves, who are reluctant to value themselves, and see their mission essentially in terms of their usefulness to others.

The Volunteer Passport<sup>®</sup> aims to compensate for this deficiency by keeping a record of what the volunteer has done.

The Volunteer Passport<sup>®</sup> is also a tool for professional development:

It is also, for volunteers interested in enriching their professional career, a privileged tool for professional development: any associative volunteer can make his actions, his achievements, the skills he has acquired in an association, in short his voluntary experience, bear fruit in the same way as a professional experience.

The Volunteer Passport<sup>®</sup> is a resource for volunteers who wish to mobilise their experiences for professional purposes: skills assessment, professional reorientation and job search, access to training or validation of prior learning (VAE -Loi française de 2002).

The Volunteer Passport<sup>®</sup> thus contributes to the security of the professional career path. The challenge of securing the professional career path is to enable everyone to have a coherent and rewarding professional career path, regardless of their relationship with a company.

Moreover, the volunteer passport is a tool for unemployed to stay busy and at the same time acquire new skills while waiting or searching for a job.

The volunteer passport is a tool for migrants to get an original experience in their new country, and a first taste of professional integration. It is used to learn more French as migrants fill in its content.

The volunteer passport is also a tool for prisoners doing volunteer work to prepare them for their coming out of prison and arrival in the work market.

The Volunteer Passport<sup>®</sup> is a personal booklet, which allows each volunteer to record with the head of association the missions he or she has carried out in associations, regardless of the association, its field of activity and the mission carried out. It is intended for all those who have done or are doing volunteer work.

The Volunteer passport can also constitute a means to consolidate a demand for validation of prior learning (VAE) and facilitate the acquisition of part or of a complete diploma.

In other words the volunteer passport gives hope and an incentive for the future

The intention for the future could be to sale many more copies (up to now more than 170.000), to translate it in different languages both for foreigners in France and for other countries, to have a simpler version, to have an electronic version.

The French volunteer passport is a know-how to be combined with other similar experiences in other countries

For more information, visit [www.passeport-benevole.org](http://www.passeport-benevole.org)

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### Validation of learning gained through volunteering in Spain

Steps have been taken at national level to promote the validation of NFIL, as it is the case of Spain.

In Spain, within the legal context, the Volunteering Act (2015) establishes recognition of competences gained while volunteering as a right of volunteers. Both in the elaboration of this act and the subsequent regulatory development required to make this right effective,

the Spanish Volunteering Platform (PVE) is participating as speaker and representative of volunteering organisations at national level.

In this line, since 2014, PVE has been implementing VOL+, a programme aimed at certifying soft (transversal) competences acquired through volunteering action. From its very beginning, **VOL+** has been financed by public funding from the ministries with responsibilities in volunteering.

Simultaneously, a group of youth organisations has been developing the programme Reconoce, for the recognition of competences of volunteers in youth organisations (also publicly funded by the Youth Institute).

VOL+ and Reconoce share objectives, principles and competences, and differ in target groups (VOL+ covers all areas of volunteering) and methodologies. They coexist, and advocate jointly to warrant the volunteering sector a leading role in the definition of the procedures for the validation of NFIL.

On the basis of experience gained after VOL+, PVE has set about leading projects at European level (co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme) related to recognition of competences: e-VOC (e-Validation Of Competences – 2016-2018) and **eVA-VOL** (e-VALidation Of VOLunteering – 2018-2020).

e-VOC (with the participation of EDOS Foundation, CSVnet and the National University of Ireland) has produced an online training course, addressed to professionals in volunteering organisations, that enables them to incorporate the development and recognition of competences in their own volunteering management.

eVA-VOL (with the participation of Cork Institute of Technology, Confederação Portuguesa do Voluntariado, CSV Lazio and Meath Partnership), currently ongoing, goes a step further. Through an online platform with information, training and guidance tools aims at facilitate the recognition of competences gained while volunteering by the formal education context. Its ultimate goal is to create a bridge between the identification+documentation phases of the validation process (where almost all existing methodologies focus) and the evaluation+validation phases, which depends on educational institutions.

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Pista Mágica – School for volunteering, with the collaboration of the Portuguese National Institute of Sports and Youth (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude)

- National Erasmus+ Agencies should adopt and disseminate one specific tool, like they did with Youth Pass, for example, so everyone knows and uses that validation tool.
- Educational institutions and companies should also be involved in order to understand what they value in students/employees so we can meet that through the validation tool
- Disseminate the validation tool among companies and educational institutions so they can recognize the value on voluntary activities as a way to develop skills.

- The promoter organizations must validate and recognize the learnings that the volunteers did, although this should always be a self-evaluation done by the volunteer, otherwise we will be compromising the non-formal learning. Also, these entities should understand how important it is to recognize these competences and do this in a regular way with their volunteers.
- The educational institutions should be involved in this process as a validation entity to recognize, but not evaluate. One way of doing this could be through Service-Learning Projects, for example.
- Value and validate also the act of volunteering, not only the task. Even if the task doesn't allow any new learnings, the act of volunteering should be also recognized in a regular way and validated, since it shows that the volunteer is a person that sees him/herself as an active citizen, and is willing to donate the time in order to make good.
- Be aware that volunteering is a non-formal learning, so we should also keep in mind that exists the risk of formalizing too much something that should be non-formal. The volunteer should always be the one doing this evaluation, with the validation of the promoter organization.

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CSVnet – Italy:

According to our experience, despite methods and tools what is important for validation in volunteering in Italy are:

- Common guidelines and standards recognized by national governments
- raising awareness within volunteers and volunteering organization
- raising awareness within employers and enterprise.

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Talentum Foundation – Hungary:

Talentum Foundation for Support of Volunteering is a regional organization, representing further 5 Volunteer Point in the county.

As a future recommendation we would find it useful and forward looking to have intersectoral projects to understand better the added value of volunteering, especially matching the skills in the labour market and empowering the soft skills needed also in the forprofit sector. This could cause a higher recognition of the importance of the learning outcomes gained during volunteering, as well as the force of validation of competences from the side of forprofit sector.

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Czech Republic:

Pavel Trantina, former Chair of the Czech Council of Children and Youth

In 2007, Czech Council of Children and Youth (CRDM) has initiated and played a strong role in project called Keys for Life (<http://znv.nidv.cz/projekty/realizace-projektu/klice-pro-zivot/>), managed since 2010 by the National Institute of Children and Youth. This project enabled discussion between youth organisations, formal education sector and employers, which resulted into jointly signed Memorandum on recognition of NFE, expressing willingness to cooperate further. A set of so called “minimum competence profiles” was developed, which were later turned into professional qualifications within youth work, designed by experts coming from youth organisations within the National Qualifications Framework.

Professional qualifications created and approved so far:

- Coordinator of volunteers
- Main leader of recreational activities of children and youth
- Independent leader of free-time activities of children and youth
- Leader of free-time activities of children and youth
- Expert worker in the area of international cooperation with children and youth
- Guarantee of safety in work with children and youth in leisure and non-formal education

Obstacles in using these professional qualifications:

- Complexity for youth organisations
- Expenses
- Acceptance by the state and employers
- Relation to the diplomas of formal education world

An on-line Personal Competence Portfolio was created during Keys for Life project, enabling to complement EuropassCV with experience, skills and competences acquired through youth work – in a structured way. However, due to the slow development at the EU level, it was never connected to Europass.

“A set of self-evaluation tools – or Valuate your competences gained through youth work” (<http://crdm.cz/download/KPZ-sebeevaluacni-nastroje.pdf>) brings Czech translations of foreign materials (CoE European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers. Francie, Valorise-toi and others), as well as a guide how to fill-in the original Czech on-line Personal Competence Portfolio. Some of them are still used, especially Valorise-toi/Empower Yourself.