



# VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN SPAIN



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

## Validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in Spain

The evolution of VET policies in Spain cannot be separated from its parallel process of political, social and economic change following the end of the dictatorship and the progressive democratisation and Europeanisation of the country. Although the Spanish government had already included VET as a priority in its agenda since 1993, it was only during the early 2000s that the country began a series of legislative reforms and structural investments to establish a policy-framework for national VET (both at the formal and informal/non-formal level)<sup>1</sup>. It is also meaningful that since 2016 the government has progressively included the subject at education policy-strategy level<sup>2</sup>.

In legislative terms, a series of Royal Decrees between 2002 and 2014 (with a key one in 2009) have led to the legal basis for the recognition of professional competences on both dimensions. Thus, Spain currently holds two vocational training sub-systems: a regulated formal training (*Formación Profesional Reglada*) and a non-formal vocational training for employment (*Formación Profesional para el Empleo*). The main differences lay in the modality of attendance (training courses for the former and lack thereof for the latter), the national ministry of reference for their regulation (the former under Education and the latter under Labour), the typology of certification obtained (academic qualifications or “*títulos*” for the former and occupational certificates or “*certificados de profesionalidad*” for the latter) and ultimately the level of opportunity access in the labour market<sup>3</sup>.

Examples on non-formal/informal acknowledgement in Spain are thus alternative adult examinations to obtain secondary diplomas without having followed an education programme (defined as “accreditations” and based on tests achievable via work experience) or even the recognition of previous labour expertise in the form of credits towards obtaining titles (including university degrees). Ultimately, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes becomes a means to be reincorporated in the formal education system. It therefore enables learners who did not previously satisfy academic requirements to undergo alternative exams and obtain acknowledged certifications<sup>4</sup>.

Nonetheless, due to the country’s decentralised administration (involving a sharing of competences between central government and “Autonomous Communities”), there is not a unique system of validation and certification in Spain. On a first level, the country holds a

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<sup>1</sup> Zaunstöck T. , Marhuenda-Fluixá F. , Ros-Garrido A. & Fischer M. (2021): Europeanisation of VET – the Spanish Vocational Education and Training system and the influence of European education policy, *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, DOI: 10.1080/13636820.2021.1889645

<sup>2</sup> Vale, P. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018. Update: Spain. CEDEFOP. Available at:  
[http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european\\_inventory\\_validation\\_2018\\_Spain.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Spain.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Werquin, P. (2010) Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Country Practices. OECD. Available at:  
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.186.7937&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

national framework of assessment defined as the *National System of Qualifications and Professional Training* coordinated by the *National Institute for Qualifications* (INCUAL). This includes four different instruments which set standards for each diploma and vocational certificate<sup>5</sup>: *a.* a National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications, *b.* a baseline procedure for acknowledgement, evaluation, accreditation and registry of professional qualifications, *c.* information and orientation service for professional training and employment, *d.* evaluation and quality control systems at country level.

On the basis of this common structure, decentralisation of education and training policies has conditioned the development of 17 regional institutions made responsible for the recognition of professional competences on the non-formal/informal level and even the possibility for willing administrations to further add regional level legislation (by 2019, 10 regions including Aragón, Asturias, Balearic Islands, Cantabria, Castille-León, Extremadura, Navarra, Basque Country, La Rioja and Madrid)<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore appropriate for learners to check out regional institutions' websites for understanding conditions for validation and certification according to the place of residency.

In addition, recent assessments on the matter have highlighted the main benefits and limitations of the system in place<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Main benefits:**

- the full coverage of the different validation elements for non-formal and informal learning (identification, documentation, assessment, and certification).
- the existing multilateral governance process which involves education and employment authorities, national and regional level actors, sectoral professional experts and even employers and third-sector stakeholders. These last two categories can even request public authorities to begin validation procedures tailored to their industry sector or professional category.
- the national side of the system has been developing further innovative initiatives such as a recognition system for non-formal education for the Youth and even the validation of transversal competences acquired by collaborating with volunteer organisations ("Reconoce" project with the involvement of the Spanish Youth Institute, INJUVE)

#### **Main limitations:**

- decentralisation can also bring added complexity in terms of different accreditation procedures, obtaining information on validation criteria, distribution of costs (between

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<sup>5</sup> Spanish Ministry of Education & Vocational Training (2020). *I Plan Estratégico – Formación Profesional del Sistema Educativo 2019-2022*. Available at: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:1bc3728e-d71f-4a8e-bb99-846996d8a2f2/i-plan-estrat-gico-de-formaci-n-profesional-del-sistema.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Vale, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Elaborated on the basis of previously mentioned sources.

public administrations and users) and even the quantity and industry-related typology of validation procedures carried out in the country.

- there is still a perceived lack of monitoring data and other information (e.g. participants and their profile beyond raw numbers) relative to the implementation of validation and certification
- there is a perceived limited visibility on the benefits of validation in society. In some cases, sector-broad validations have been seen by workers as an imposition to keep one's jobs rather than an opportunity for professional development.
- although the validation procedure is based on the principle of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, there is still a strong lack of data on vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, or people with disabilities. A dedicated approach involved instead the consistent Roma community in the country but interested civil society actors have signalled the need for further improvement of their integration in VET practices (at all levels).

Following EU trends, the future labour market of Spain is still expected to see a growing demand for professional qualification at the intermediate and senior-skill level. As confirmed by national strategy documents<sup>8</sup>, the country is aware of a structural mismatch between the qualification of its working class and the progressive reduction of low-skilled workplaces. It is therefore expected that the country will introduce further reform to the system in the years to come.

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<sup>8</sup> Spanish Ministry of Education & Vocational Training, 2020, p. 10