

# The State-of-play of Validation in the Voluntary sector across the EU

Stocktaking report

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The present report analyses the current **European State-of-play of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the voluntary sector** and its **relation with employment**. The report is a result of an extensive research combining desk research (EU policy documents, NGO reports, findings from other European projects), two online surveys (one for volunteers, one for organisations hosting volunteers), qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted by 6 organisations from different EU countries (Germany, France, Bulgaria, Spain, United Kingdom, and Belgium). The interviews and focus groups also involved employers from the public and private sectors.

**OVER 1 000 SURVEY ANSWERS - 92 INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED  
IN THE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS!**

The report consists of four sections:

1. A first section looks into why improving validation in volunteering sector is a timely European challenge;
2. A second section, the most important one, looks into the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research (online surveys, interviews and focus groups);
3. A third section provides recommendations for the four stakeholders;
4. Last section with useful references to know more about the topic.

### **FORMALISATION OF VOLUNTEERING AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE: LEARNING BECOMING INTENDED AND STRUCTURED**

Traditionally, volunteering has been classified as “informal education” because there was generally no conscious intention of learning. If there was learning, it was mostly not structured and organised, for instance, between peers and through self-learning. Nowadays, learning in volunteering is becoming more conscious, therefore, the sector is slowly moving to the “non-formal education” sector. Volunteers and organisations establish learning plans, set objectives, and even sometimes assess and certify that learning. It is more and more recognised that, in volunteering, you develop the soft and transversal skills most needed in the 21st Century economy and society.

Validation consists of the process of the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning and skills. Following stakeholders' push and Member States' [Council Recommendation](#) (2012), validation of non-formal and informal learning is increasingly seen as a powerful recognition and valorisation tool for competence development, including in the voluntary sector. Furthermore, for volunteers and former volunteers (in particular young people), acquired competences can be valued in the labour market. Volunteering has the potential to draw attention from employers.



## KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

- Most volunteers have learning expectations, **1 out of 2 expect to gain competences** but less than one out of 10 do it for professional reasons. Paradoxically, **half of the responding volunteers would use their certificate** if they receive one when applying for a job.
- While most stakeholders agree that **recognition** is important in the voluntary sector, they do not necessarily think that going through a validation process is needed.
- Validation in the voluntary sector is perceived to be particularly **relevant for young people** with little professional experience.
- Apart from proving acquired competences, validation also brings plenty of benefits to the volunteers: **making learning visible** to the volunteer and to others, building self-awareness and confidence, increased the level of motivation, commitment and a sense of achievement.
- It brings **benefits to volunteering organisations**: recruitment and retention of volunteers, more effective and quality planning of volunteering experience and can be used to promote the organisation's work to policy-makers and financial donors.
- However, **challenges and barriers** for implementing validation remain and relate to interest of volunteers and facilitators, resources, support and adequacy of tools.
- There is no validation tool, instrument or method among respondents that is widely known or used. Youth Pass is the most known one.
- Most **employers** do consider positively volunteering experience although they have different expectations for evidence / documentation support (no "fits-for-all" model).
- There is a widespread lack of awareness concerning the available **European competence frameworks** (e.g. Key Competences) that can be used to develop competences in the voluntary sector.

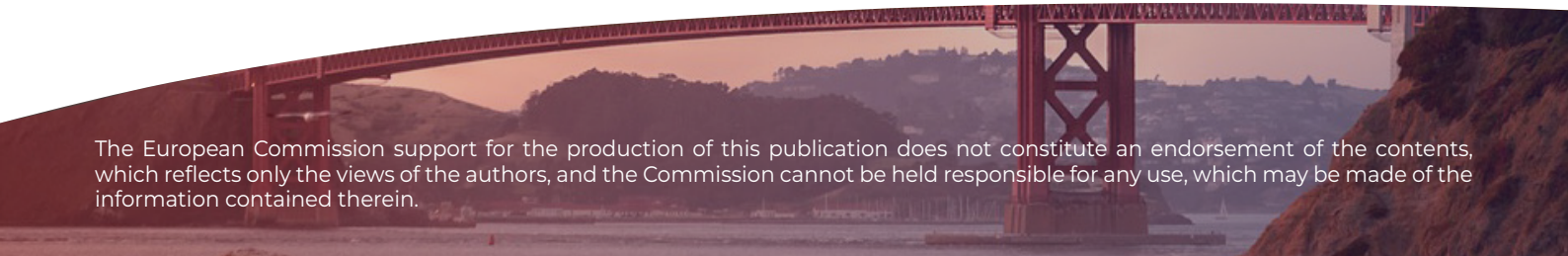
## RECOMMENDATIONS

The report concludes with recommendations for volunteering organisations, validation practitioners, policy-makers as well as for employers. It generally addresses the need to take stock from existing validation tools and methods not to reinvent the wheel, the importance of raising awareness of all stakeholders about the benefits of validation and to train facilitators, practitioners and employers on how to make the most efficient use of non-formal and informal learning and transversal skills. The establishment of a [European Community of Validation Practitioners](#) combining both Validation for Prior Learning (VPL) and VNFIL communities can contribute to provide solutions to the challenges highlighted in this report.

## READ THE FULL REPORT HERE

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Job Bridge is a European project funded by Erasmus (2018-2020). It is coordinated the German organisation BUPNET and involves six EU partners from six EU countries.



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