

THE IMPACT OF A RENEWED VALIDATION AND GUIDANCE PROCESS ON PRACTITIONERS AND THEIR CANDIDATES

Results of the Italian field trials of the European project TRANSVAL-EU

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Introduction

TRANSVAL-EU is a cross-country policy experimentation with a focus on training of validation and guidance practitioners for identifying, documenting, assessing, and certifying transversal skills. During six pilots, practitioners have been trained in order to optimise the validation process of non-formal and informal learning among several validation candidates. An extra pilot in Portugal has been realised. This specific field trial has only been evaluated among the involved candidates. This report describes the results of the scientific evaluation focussing on the impact on the Italian validation candidates and the Italian practitioners involved, who have guided them during this 'renewed' validation process.

More specific background information concerning the research methodology has been provided in the European research report (for more information see: www.transvalproject.eu).

Research questions from the perspective of the practitioner (= focus on training and competence profiling of candidates) which will be answered are:

- Have validation and guidance practitioners been supported (during the field trials) with a suitable practice-oriented and innovative (referring to their current practice) training and tools focusing on validation of transversal skills?
- Have the competences of validation and guidance practitioners of the standardised training curricula and profiles been improved?
- Have the validation and guidance practitioners been more involved in the validation and guidance processes towards the learning environment of the validation/guidance candidates?

Research questions from the perspective of the validation and guidance candidate (= focus on impact innovative and inclusive validation & guidance) which will be answered are:

- Have transversal skills systematically been embedded into validation and guidance processes and procedures?
- Do adult learners perceive an increase concerning chances on education, training, leisure, work, voluntary work, etc. due to improved access, support and guidance to validate their transversal skills gained?
- Have innovative tools for adults (referring to their current practice) to validate transversal skills for upskilling, reskilling, job seeking or self-empowerment and development been offered?

Sample of the involved practitioners

In the overall study 181 practitioners were involved in total. In order to conduct an analysis, only the practitioners who joined the pre- and the post-test were included in the current sample, to mention 78 practitioners (in Austria and Italy most practitioners have been involved due to the fact that in these countries two field trials have been conducted). This sample is too small to describe the sample per country. Therefore the total European sample has been analysed. As shown in table 1 most of them describe their occupation as career guidance counsellor, educator / teacher / trainer / coach or have multiple functions. Besides, most of them work in a centre of education or school, guidance organization, or VET provider. Finally, it seems that the majority has over 5 years of experience in their current occupation (65.4%).

Table 1: Characteristics of work setting practitioners (N = 78)

Characteristic of work setting	Category	Nr. of practitioners (%)
<i>Country</i>	Austria	24.4
	Belgium	7.7
	Italy	32.1
	Lithuania	23.1
	Poland	12.8
<i>Occupation</i>	Career guidance counsellor	27.6
	Validation of non-formal and informal learning counsellor	2.6
	Educator – teacher – trainer – coach	18.4
	Examiner – assessor	0
	Multiple occupations	18.4
	Other	32.9
<i>Organisation type</i>	Centre of education or school (excluding VET schools)	25.6
	Guidance organisation	20.5
	National office concerning the EQF	1.3
	National office concerning validation of prior competences	2.6
	Non-profit employer	3.8
	Private sector company	9.0
	Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider (including VET schools)	17.9
	Other	17.9
<i>Years of experience</i>	Less than 1 year	12.8
	1-2 years	5.1
	3-5 years	15.4
	5- 10 years	23.1
	Over 10 years	42.3

Missing values are excluded in percentage calculations

Sample: Candidates from Italy

Among 57 candidates a pre- and the post-test has been realised, before and after the validation process. According to table 2, more women than men were included (circa 67% versus 33%). Besides, most of them (83%) were born in the country they live in. Also, around 53% of the involved candidates were between 26 and 45 years old. Furthermore, in terms of education, the study covered both high-skilled as low-skilled adults (see table 2). Finally, most of the involved candidates are unemployed (60%).

Table 2: Sociodemographic characteristics of Italian candidates (N = 57)

Sociodemographic characteristic	Category	Nr. of candidates (%)
<i>Gender</i>	Male	33.3
	Female	66.7
<i>Nationality</i>	Autochthone	82.5
	Foreign	17.5
<i>Age</i>	0 – 25 years	35.1
	26 – 45 years	52.6
	46 – 65 years	12.3
<i>Highest form of education</i>	Primary school	0.0
	Secondary school	12.3
	Vocational school	3.5
	High school	38.6
	University	43.9
	Other	1.8
<i>Years in education</i>	5 years or less	1.8
	Between 6 and 10 years	14.0
	Between 11 and 15 years	38.6
	Between 16 and 20 years	36.8
	Over 21 years	8.8
<i>Job status</i>	Paid work	12.3
	Self-employed	0.0
	Voluntary work (unpaid)	0.0
	Paid work and voluntary work	1.8
	Unemployed	59.6
	Looking for a job	26.3

Missing values are excluded in percentage calculations

Description of the field trials

In Italy, the field trials were carried out in two regions, Umbria and Tuscany. The field trial in Umbria was organised by ARPAL FORMA.Azione, and focused on 6 transversal competences (to mention: use of oral communication in one or more languages, communication through digital technologies, building one's career path, developing one's competences and profile, solving problems and reacting to the unforeseen and managing information and critical thinking.). The training was delivered by the two organisations in cooperation. Starting from the tools at their disposal, the practitioners adapted and developed their own tool for the identification and documentation of transversal competences among candidates, and worked in groups to develop one scenario per competence. They also worked remotely and delivered their final proposals in October 2022. Meanwhile, a portfolio was provided which detailed all the steps of the implementation phase with candidates, and collected the EQF framework of the 6 competences as well the tools they had elaborated. Between December 2022 and January 2023 18 practitioners ran the interviews with 34 candidates, and some of the practitioners also moved forward to run a quick assessment of the competences, matching it to an EQF level of the framework provided. The process was also done in the form of a guided self-assessment with the candidate. It was decided that the interviews will continue until May/June 2023, since the practitioners found them very relevant.

The second Italian region trained 20 practitioners who conducted the field trials with 20 candidates. The training set up was different to many others, as Pluriversum specifically focused on a tool they have developed to identify and document transversal skills. The aim of the tool is to identify the skills of the participants through the analysis of a problem that occurred in the past and which they resolved. The skills that emerge are then directed towards writing an effective curriculum vitae and LinkedIn profile for job search.

Impact on competency level of validation of transversal competences of practitioners

This sample is too small to describe the sample per country. Therefore the total European sample has been analysed.

Based on the analysis of the pre- and post-test it becomes clear that most of the practitioners have experienced an increase in their competence level in terms of providing guidance of validation of transversal competences. According to table 3, all scales seem to be reliable and the experienced increase for each of the variables is significant (based on the T-test).

First, circa 76% of the practitioners experienced an increase in their overall competence related to validation of transversal competencies. This means that they feel themselves more capable in e.g., creating a validation and guidance process, procedure, using a method or tool for working with transversal competences, teaching others how to work with transversal competences and defining transversal competences.

Second, most of the practitioners feel themselves more capable in providing guidance in the process of validation (see table 3). As regards, providing guidance in relation to a typical validation process, circa 68% experienced this increase in their competency level. Besides, circa 76% of the practitioners experienced an increase in providing guidance in relation to validating transversal competences. This means that these practitioners have experienced to be more capable in e.g., communicating effectively with the candidates and with other practitioners involved in the process, identifying and adapting the ways to communicate with the candidates, building a relationship with the candidate and conducting the activities required to ensure the quality of the identification and documentation of the candidate's competences.

Third, most of the practitioners have experienced an increase in their competency level related to assessment (see table 3). Based on the analysis circa 72% experienced an increase in their competency level of assessment in relation to a typical validation process and circa 74% experienced an increase in their competency level of assessment in relation to validation transversal competences. More specifically, these practitioners experienced to be more capable in e.g., analysing the evidence and statements provided by the candidate, conducting the activities required to ensure the quality of assessing the candidate's competences, acting in accordance with rules and regulations and characterising the principles of working together with other practitioners involved in the process.

Table 3: Experienced increase of competences among practitioners (N = 78)

Variable	Experienced increase among practitioners (in %)	Cronbach's Alpha of Scale	Significance of T-test
<i>Competency level of transversal competences</i>	75.6	0.96	$t(77) = -6.48, p < .05$
<i>Competency level of providing guidance</i>			
In relation to a typical validation process	67.6	0.97	$t(73) = -4.68, p < .05$
In relation to validating transversal competences	75.7	0.97	$t(73) = -7.58, p < .05$
<i>Competency level of assessment</i>			
In relation to a typical validation process	71.6	0.98	$t(73) = -5.08, p < .05$
In relation to validating transversal competences	74.3	0.98	$t(73) = -6.87, p < .05$

Impact of field trials on experienced increase of competences of Italian candidates

By conducting a pre-and post-test among the 57 candidates involved the experienced increase in several competences of the TRANSVERSAL Competence Framework (TCF) in addition to the rate of social inclusion and labour market position has been analysed.

First, according to table 4, most of the used scales seems to be highly reliable according to the high scores for the Cronbach's Alpha (based on the total European sample). Besides, it becomes that based on the Paired Samples T-test that the experienced increase is significant for almost all variables (based on the total European sample).

Second, according to the experienced increase, it became clear that a significant share of the candidates involved experienced an increase in competences. This varies between circa 25% until 50%. For example, the candidates experienced to be more able to solve problems or foster cooperation or using oral or written communication. Besides, 25% to 28% experienced an increase in social inclusion (see table 4). To be more specific, these candidates meet more people and join new activities like nature or sports activities. Finally, the first candidates experienced after joining the validation process to have a better labour market position. Some of them found a paid job or functions better in that job, or found voluntary work or started seeking a job.

Third, it becomes clear that most of the candidates experienced to be better involved in a validation process concerning validation of transversal skills. According to table 4, circa 74% of the candidates experienced after joining the validation process that they know what transversal skills are, and they are aware of their transversal skills. Besides, they seemed to complete an assessment to test their skills and received a certification. Finally, they experienced that they could discuss which skills they have learned with their teacher and experienced that their learning experiences have been written down.

Table 4: Experienced increase of competences among Italian candidates (N = 57)

Competences	Used or newly constructed variable	Experienced increase among candidates (in %)	Cronbach's Alpha of Scale
Using oral communication	National language skills (SIT)	49.1	0.95
Using written communication	National language skills (SIT)	49.1	0.95
Communicating using digital technologies	Digital language skills (SIT)	19.3	0.96
Solving problems and reacting to unforeseen	Assertiveness (SIT)	38.6	0.87
Cooperating and fostering cooperation	Assertiveness (SIT)	38.6	0.87
Managing information and critical thinking	Newly constructed	28.1	0.76
Building one's career path	Newly constructed	22.8	0.56
Developing one's competences and profile	Newly constructed	22.8	0.56
Social inclusion	Meeting and attempting & Being active in nature and sports (SIT)	28.1 – 24.6	0.82 – 0.70
Paid work	Not applicable	8.8	Not applicable
Voluntary work	Not applicable	1.8	Not applicable
Apprenticeship	Not applicable	8.8	Not applicable
Job seeking	Not applicable	14.0	Not applicable
Job under supervision	Not applicable	14.0	Not applicable
Transversal skills (incl. guidance & validation)	Newly constructed	73.7	0.81

Interpretation of impact

The TRANSVAL-EU project aims to contribute to a more constructive and reliable validation and guidance process. In order to do so, in six European countries (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal) eight field trials have been organised in order to optimize the validation process concerning transversal skills.

According to the results among the Italian candidates, 25% to 50% of them experienced that some of their transversal competences increased. This study showed that learning interventions referring to formal, non-formal and informal learning for adults have impact on a significant share of these learners. The results of the field trials of TRANSVAL-EU are comparable and seem to be promising especially in comparison with the earlier published results of the study of Taris (2007) showing the impact of training of 10% to 20%.

Furthermore most of the involved Italian candidates (74%) experienced that they were involved in a constructive process of validation and guidance of transversal skills and perceived to be among others more aware of their transversal competences.

Second, most of the involved European practitioners (68% to 76%) experienced to have an improvement in their competency level of transversal competences, providing guidance during the validation process and providing an assessment. This increase seems to be significant.

References

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