

NATIONAL POLICY COHERENCE REPORT

Belgium

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Main authors

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Introduction

The TRANSVAL-EU project

Transversal skills are often only an implicit part of the existing validation and guidance process. The aim of the TRANSVAL-EU project is to experiment on how to make those skills more explicit and to embed the lessons learned in validation and guidance provisions. TRANSVAL-EU proposes innovative approaches for the validation of transversal skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), which were tested in five pilot countries – Austria, Belgium, Italy, Lithuania and Poland.

TRANSVAL-EU aims to increase the knowledge and awareness of validation assessors, counsellors and career guidance practitioners on transversal competences through capacity building. The project strengthens cross-sector cooperation between practitioners, policy-makers and other stakeholders in order to build coherent VNFIL systems. The project life span encompasses 30 months, starting on March 1st, 2021 and ending in August 2023. It is co-funded by Erasmus+ (Call KA3 Policy Reform – Policy Experimentations).

TRANSVAL-EU National Reports

In the last phase of the project, partners were looking into the potential for translating the successful experimentation that took place within the project frame into sustainable policy change.

Successful policies often rely on policy coherence and coordination. Policy coherence refers to how policies are connected between them and across silos, avoiding overlap and inefficiencies. It does not just happen by default. It implies a set of collaborative and knowledge-sharing practices between the responsible authorities in charge of the policy, their institutions and the staff in the institutions (the policy-makers). It is dependent on this cooperation to materialise in the policy texts.

A partner in the TRANSVAL-EU project, the Lifelong Learning Platform investigated coherence at the European level with the support of the other partners (see TRANSVAL-EU, European Policy Coherence Report, August 2023 and its short version). At national level (or in the case of Italy and Belgium, taking the regional dimension into consideration), partners from the five EU countries or regions where the experimentation took place (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Lithuania and Poland) plus a partner representing Nordic countries (for the case of Sweden and Iceland) also looked into the issue of policy coherence at national and regional levels. The National Policy Coherence Reports are the results of these reflections. They mostly relied on desk research and dialogue with the respective public authorities involved in the project. The National Policy Coherence Reports address the issues of main policies relevant for validation, guidance, skills and competences, coherence between these policies (e.g. terminological

coherence), coordination between the institutions in charge of these policies, among others. All Reports include recommendations for policy-makers at national and regional levels.

The results of this work complete the early research made in the first phase of the project which led to the publication of the TRANSVAL-EU, European State-of-Play Report on the Validation of Transversal skills and Country sheets for the five countries ([download links here](#)).

Belgium - Policy Coherence Report

Main national policies and policy coherence challenges

CEDEFOP's 2022 Report on skills anticipation describes very well the key challenges regarding policy coherence in Belgium, the approach being both "collaborative and fragmented. Collaborative in the sense that stakeholder involvement is relatively high, but also fragmented given its dispersal over several levels of governance with little co-ordination at the federal level"¹. There is indeed little coordination in terms of VNFIL at the federal/national level, as the very large majority of those competences have been delegated at the regional/community level. Both Flanders and the Walloon regions have developed their own VNFIL systems, each of them working independently.

Inter-institutional coordination

As pointed out in CEDEFOP's 2018 Report on validation of non-formal and informal learning, "since 2016, French-speaking Belgium has kept the validation of competences high on its agenda" (page 2)². The policy on VNFIL in French-speaking Belgium is highly coherent, with the creation, in 2003 of the Consortium de Validation des Compétences (CVDC, celebrating its 20 years of existence this year). CVDC - in charge of developing and implementing VNFIL in BE-FR is the result of the cooperation between the French Community (Communauté française), the Walloon Region (Région Wallonne) and the French Community Commission (Commission communautaire française). Moreover, it is composed of the public providers of vocational training (Bruxelles Formation, le Forem, IFAPME, SFPME) and the social advancement education institutions (enseignement de promotion sociale).

¹ CEDEFOP, Skills anticipation in Belgium (update 2022), <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/skills-anticipation-belgium, 2022>.

² Popovic, M. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Belgium –French speaking community. https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Belgium_French.pdf (page 2). (accessed 05/04/2023)

The recitals of the first Cooperation Agreement (adopted on the 24th of July 2003), as well as of the Cooperation Agreement that is now in force (adopted on the 21st of March 2019³) give a thorough idea about the different levels of cooperation in BE-FR, as well as the connection with the EU level (for instance the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning). The very philosophy that underlies CVDC is based on collaboration and partnership.

In terms of coherence related to the mechanisms and procedures used to identify the training and validation needs of the job market and those of society in general, the VNFIL system in BE-FR takes into account the requests coming from professional sectors (sectoral social partners - employers and trade unions), governments, public providers of vocational training, citizens, partners, companies and their workers.

These different channels are set out in the Cooperation Agreement (21st of March 2019) and are further specified in CVDC's Strategic Orientation Document (Note d'orientation stratégique) drawn up by the social stakeholders and Governments every 5 years.

Is there coordination between national and regional levels?

As stated before, the federal/national government is not directly in charge of VNFIL in Belgium, those mandates being in the hands of regions and communities. Although there is no formal link or coordination between the VNFIL systems in the northern and southern regions, contacts are being made to share experience and good practices, thereby initiating some sort of coordination. This coordination could be further advanced, to harmonise the systems and facilitate the mobility of candidates within the country.

Still, there is already a lot in place as regards the flexibility in terms of learning pathway, as the units of learning outcomes (approved by the Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications) are included in the Skill Certificate (Titre de compétence), which makes the training pathway flexible (see in particular Art. 20. § 4. of the Cooperation Agreement). The Skill Certificates are positioned in the French-Language Qualifications Framework (CFC) that is compatible with the European Qualifications Framework and Flanders' VKS (Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur). Moreover, a Europass Certificate Supplement is issued.

Has progress been made in the policy on transversal skills and competences since the first year of the project (Belgium country sheets)?

Since the beginning of the project, transversal competences have been placed higher on the agenda of VNFIL. The contacts with different stakeholders showed a genuine interest in including transversal competences in the different systems (for instance, l'Interfédé or the

³ Accord de coopération conclu entre la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire française relatif à la validation des compétences 21 mars 2019, http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&table_name=loi&cn=2019032123, 2019.

public providers of vocational training: IFAPME, le Forem, etc). While no legal act nor policy towards the formal introduction of transversal competences in the VNFIL system has been adopted in this period, CVDC is currently working to include the findings of the field trials carried out within TRANSVAL-EU in its Strategic Orientation Document, which sets up its strategic orientations for the period 2025-2029.

Coherence with EU policies

CVDC's cooperation agreement and Strategic Orientation Document are consistent with the reskilling approach, the Upskilling Pathways Strategy and the New European Skills Agenda (especially – but not only - when it comes to its second work strand, i.e. making skills and qualifications visible and comparable). Different projects were/are carried out by CVDC (as a coordinator/partner/associate partner) and financed either by the European Social Fund (Plus) or by the Lifelong Learning Programme/Erasmus (+), such as: “Capacity building of the CVDC, in line with the skills expected on the job market market” (ESF+, ongoing), ECVET in Progress (Leonardo, 2011-2013), Validoss (Leonardo, 2013-2015), RECTEC (Erasmus, 2016-2019), Start Digital (EaSI, 2019-2021), TRANSVAL-EU (Erasmus+, ongoing) etc. RECTEC and TRANSVAL-EU respond especially to one of the key lessons for implementation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: “Establishing fully functioning validation systems continues to require a concerted policy effort. Among others, it is important to consider how transversal competences can be better taken into account in qualifications/learning outcomes, since these are crucial for low-skilled adults, but not generally well addressed in validation systems” (page 9)⁴.

Terminological coherence challenges

Legal documents systematically use the term “compétences” to refer to competences. “Savoir-faire” (i.e. “know-how”) is another very common term; as a matter of fact, CVDC's Cooperation Agreement uses “savoir-faire” and “savoir-faire comportemental” (i.e. « behavioural know-how ») to define the components of a competence (with the addition of “connaissance”, i.e. “knowledge”) : “la compétence : l’aptitude, mesurable, à mettre en oeuvre les savoirs - savoir, savoir-faire, savoir-faire comportemental - strictement nécessaires à l’accomplissement d’une tâche dans une situation de travail” (article 1, §1).

There is more ambiguity when it comes to transversal competences, as “compétences transversales”, “compétences transférables” and “soft skills” are somewhat used interchangeably. Further confusion can arise when concepts such as “compétences de base”, “compétences-clés” (i.e. “key competences”) and “savoir-être” (i.e. “behavioural skills”) are placed together with transversal competences. There is a need to clarify the distinction

⁴ European Commission (2022). Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults - Final Report, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8516&furtherPubs=yes>, (accessed 31/05/2023).

between those concepts to ensure that all stakeholders speak the same language when referring to transversal competences.

The actual confusion can be detrimental to the coordination and synchronisation of the different (past and present) initiatives and projects working in the field of transversal competences, as the very basic concepts are not always common.

Policy recommendations for BE-FR

On a more holistic approach to skills and better visibility of transversal competences in validation and guidance policies:

- Support and facilitate the explicit introduction of transversal competences in CVDC's Strategic Orientation Document. This would place transversal competences as part of its priorities for the 2025-2029 period.
- Support the establishment (with all stakeholders) of an official definition (and scope) of transversal competences to strengthen terminological coherence, thereby facilitating future discussions on their validation.

On the professionalisation of practitioners:

- Facilitate the training of validation and guidance practitioners to identify and document the validation candidates' transversal competences. This could potentially have a very beneficial impact on their success rate at the validation tests as well as their future professional progression (in line with TRANSVAL-EU National Action Plan).

References

CEDEFOP, Skills anticipation in Belgium (update 2022), <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-insights/skills-anticipation-belgium>, 2022.

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