



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Thematic report: current
approaches to skills audits in
the public sector

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1 Introduction

This thematic report forms part of the 2014 update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (the European Inventory). The updated European Inventory is made up of the following outputs, which together form a 'snapshot' of the state of play in relation to validation of non-formal and informal learning (validation) in Europe:

- Country updates covering 33 European countries¹;
- 2 case studies providing examples of validation 'in practice';
- Eight thematic reports (of which this report is one); and
- A final synthesis report identifying overall findings from the project.

The thematic reports are intended to provide more detail in relation to a number of subjects of central interest to policy makers and practitioners. Using the 2014 country updates and case studies, as well as the results of an online survey carried out between 3 October 2013 - 11 November 2013 and other literature relating to the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning, these reports aim to identify and analyse key issues and trends, as well as examples of good practice and lessons learned in relation to a specific aspect of validation. They are intended for use by stakeholders in the field of validation.

This thematic report focuses on nation-wide and/or regulated forms of skills audit – mostly carried by the Public Employment Services or other public services.

2 Context

The Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning defines skills audit as a process “aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and/or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and **to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes**”². The Council Recommendation refers to the provision of opportunities for unemployed people or people at risk of unemployment to undertake a 'skills audit' aimed at identifying their knowledge, skills and competences within a reasonable period of time, ideally six months of an identified need.

In order to monitor the use of skills audits in the short and long term; it is important to explore the different models of skills audits that could be envisaged in Europe. However, given that this is the first time that the Inventory has collected information on provisions for skills audits, following the adoption of the Recommendation - the amount of information available is actually limited and this report is exploratory in nature. Furthermore, in terms of how the notion of skills audit is understood and interpreted differs among the 36³ country updates covered by this 2014 update of the European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

While in some countries the concept of skills audits is well developed and established (e.g. Bilan de compétences in France), in others, skills audits are not defined as such but could be seen as part of the validation process. There are also countries where national measures for skills audits have not been reported, but career orientation/professional plan initiatives, mostly carried out but the Public Employment Services (PES), take place. Finally, there are examples of countries from which information on skills audit initiatives has not been reported, It is important to add that in some countries specific services are explicitly called 'skills audit'

¹ There are 36 country updates in total, as two reports have been prepared for Belgium and three for the UK, in order to take account of the devolved responsibility for education and training policy in these countries.

² Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

³ Covering 33 countries – there are two reports for Belgium and three for the UK

or a similar term whilst in other countries, similar services are essentially similar in nature but not called skills audits.

Therefore, the way in which countries define and interpret the concept of a 'skills audit' varies considerably and this thematic report aims to assess the different approaches to skills audits used across the countries covered by the Inventory, with a view to developing a common understanding of what skills audits currently entail, and how this relates to the definition provided in the Council Recommendation.

The thematic report is structured as follows:

- The rationale for skills audits and the different interpretations of the skills audit concept
- Governance and allocation of responsibilities
- Different target groups
- The different approaches to skills audits (self-audits, one-to-one audits, panel audit)
- Different feedback formats, content and durations
- Mandatory and voluntary approaches
- Outcomes of a skills audit and cost implications

3 The rationale for skills audits and the different interpretations of the skills audit concept

The definition and interpretation of 'skills audit' varies among the countries covered in the 2014 update of the Inventory. However, the reasons for developing and implementing skills audits seem to be common across Europe:

- To help individuals to reflect on their own career background (competences, learning), their motivations and to plan a career path or prepare for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- To help the unemployed increase their employability prospects;
- To help disadvantaged/vulnerable groups (migrants, women) to increase their employability and develop their career;
- To help employees to plan / move forward in their career or to change their career path;
- To help the low-skilled / low-qualified to identify and understand their skills and competences, and where they can go next with these;
- To provide users with a means of marketing their skills and competences (e.g. to employers);
- To map needs for further training, taking into account the importance of matching the individuals' competences with labour market needs.

Based on the research evidence, skills audit are a fundamental part of active labour market policies in some countries (e.g. Switzerland). They also enable the recognition of competences gained through formal and non-formal learning and work experience (e.g. the Italian Libretto - as the 'citizen's identity card for countrywide mobility).

As previously explained, the definition and interpretation of the concept of a 'skills audit' varies among the countries produced for the Inventory, in general, when existent, skills audits are mainly regulated by public administration and specifically by the Public Employment Services (PES). While in some countries the concept of skills audits is well developed and established (e.g. Bilan de compétences in France), in others, skills audits are not defined as such but could be seen as part of the validation process. Finally, there are countries from which information on skills audit initiatives has not been found and countries where only career orientation/professional plan initiatives have been reported. The different types of skill audits identified represented with examples from the Inventory country updates are explained below:

3.1 Skills audits (bilans de compétence)

Skills audits (bilans de compétence) are well developed in some European countries such as France, Belgium-Wallonia, Luxembourg and Switzerland. They aim to assess the

competences, knowledge, aptitudes and motivation of individuals and they target the general public or specific groups (especially unemployed, job seekers or workers).

The French bilans de compétence model is the paradigmatic example of this category. Bilans de competence aim to help employees, the unemployed and job seekers enhance their employment prospects. The purpose of the bilan de compétence is stated in the Labour Code: the aim is to allow individuals to assess their professional and personal competencies, their aptitudes and motivation, with a view to define a professional project or re-training project.

In the case of employees; a bilan de compétence can be requested from both the employee and the employer, but it is voluntary. The assessment has to be carried by an external and accredited provider (different from the employer and from the PES). The result of the bilan de compétence is a synthesis document drawn up by the professional counsellor in charge of maintaining interviews with the candidate. The document contains information on the competences and aptitudes, together with one to three proposals for career evolution as well as an action plan. The process lasts between 3 weeks and 1 month. During this time, there are 10 hours of face-to-face interviews between the individual and the professional counsellor.

Unemployed individuals can be offered by the PES a slightly different type of skills audit in order to support their job search, typically of shorter duration than the above-described bilan de compétence for employees.

In Belgium-Wallonia: the PES provides career orientation (for all citizens) and information to individuals interested in skills audits. Skills audit are carried out by skills audit professionals (skill auditors) and these can be sometimes be carried out free of charge. For instance, the employment office in the Brussels region helps job seekers to elaborate a professional project.

In Luxembourg, the service is provided by the PES (Agence pour le développement de l'emploi - ADEM) and is available for jobseekers, with the purpose of identifying personal and professional skills of the individual and documenting them, creating a personalised action plan for job search. Support is also provided for the concrete implementation of the action plan.

Skills audits (Bilan de compétences) are also widely used in Switzerland and these form part of the career guidance process, being the skills audits complemented by a personal or professional portfolio. The Cantonal services for the labour market policies use them with the aim of clarifying the jobseekers' perspectives; reduce the period of unemployment and to reduce skills mismatch. "Centres de bilan" or "competence assessment centres recognised by the government carry out the Bilans de compétences.

3.2 Career orientation/professional plan initiatives

Some European countries do not have a definition or national measures for skills audits in place. Nevertheless, they provide various initiatives for career orientation or professional planning (including information on education and sometimes validation opportunities) through the PES. In most cases these services are offered to jobseekers or the unemployed. The aim is to identify an individual's knowledge, competences, and aptitudes in order to define a career project or to match an individual's competences to those required by employers. Many countries would fall into this category, such as Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium-Flanders, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Norway or Poland.

For instance, in Austria, there are no national measures for skills audits in place but there are several initiatives aimed at identifying and analysing an individual's competences, aptitudes and motivations in order to (re-)define a career pathway. Such procedures are mainly offered in adult learning institutions (particularly aimed at those who lack basic skills or did not graduate from a lower secondary school), but also by the PES or by freelance guidance practitioners or coaches.

In Bulgaria, the Public Employment Agency provides career orientation (open to all citizens) and individual plans to specific groups (unemployed, disadvantaged groups, etc). In Estonia, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund helps unemployed people find employment. It

provides individual career counselling/orientation and labour market training. The aim is to provide recommendations to individuals on the choice of occupation, access to employment and career path, so creating an individualised action plan. The goal of labour market training is to help unemployed people find a job.

In Greece, the unemployed can also consult the Greek PES to develop an action plan (consisting of potential training and job applications available) which will be based on their competence and previous training, as well as their motivations. There is no certification linked to this action plan. It is important to highlight that the post-2008 economic crisis together with high unemployment rate has meant a lack of follow up with the persons that seek career orientation. Therefore, it is up to the unemployed to come back to the PES if they do not find employment and require further orientation.

In Latvia, the State Employment Agency is the basic public provider of career consultation and employment services. The agency provides individual career consultation, career diagnosis consultation (assessment of the dispositions and competencies in specific professions in comparison to client attributes), self-determination career consultation to determine professional suitability and even group career consultation (informative lecture on educational and career opportunities or a diagnostic lecture on the assessment of one's skills and motivation before taking part in the active measures of employment). In Norway, registered job seekers supported by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) are entitled to career orientation. As in the previous examples, this service would include an assessment of competences, education and training; without including any form of certification related to the process. The plan may also include actions towards the validation of non- formal and informal learning, labour market measures, health assessments and treatment, as well as formal education. Counter to the Greek case, follow up of the individual action plan is carried out.

3.3 Skills audits as integral part of the validation process

There are some countries where skills audits are interpreted as part of the validation process. That is to say that in certain cases, the process associated with aspects of the skills audit bears some resemblance of the 'identification phase' of the validation process. Whilst this happens in many countries, it may not necessarily be labelled as a skills audit. For example, in the Netherlands the start of the procedures leading to the award of a work experience certificate organised by labour market stakeholders (different from a formal qualification) could also be considered relatively similar to a skills audit.

In Iceland, skills audits have been provided at the accredited Lifelong Learning centres for low skilled unemployed adults, with the result of creating a portfolio of competences that can lead to validation or other types of career decisions. In Spain, in relation to the recognition of skills acquired through work experience, once a candidate has been accepted into the validation procedure, mandatory counselling then takes place. The professional counsellor supports the candidate in the preparation of the evaluation process, in the development of his/her past professional and educational trajectory. He/she also provides the evaluation committee (composed by secondary and/or VET teachers, trainers, or professional experts), with a report on the suitability of the applicant to participate in the process. This report sets out the applicant's suitability to pass the assessment phase, the justification of professional skills, and where appropriate, on the training required to complete the unit of competency that is to be evaluated. At the end of the evaluation process, the competent administrations write a report to the individuals where they explain different training options to acquire a professional certificate of VET if the competence units accredited are insufficient to obtain the VET diploma or professional certificate directly.

In Liechtenstein, skills audit and guidance constitutes the second phase of the validation process (after information and advice). In this phase of the validation process, the candidate describes and documents his/ her competences in a dossier. Candidates can attend guidance seminars or be assisted by a professional consultant. After the assessment, the candidate receives a portfolio that states the person's competences, knowledge and skills acquired both through formal and non-formal and informal learning, as well as the necessary steps to achieve a full qualification.

3.4 Countries where the existence of Skills audits has not been reported

According to the 2014 Inventory country updates, there are some countries where the concept of a skills audit does not exist or it is not regulated. These include for example, Cyprus, Lithuania and Portugal. In Romania, although a new law on education was approved in 2011, which defined concepts related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, no reference is made to skills audits. In Slovenia, there is no national regulation on skills audits and therefore these differ, depending on the institution or field. Nevertheless, personal lifelong learning portfolios are widely promoted by the educational institutions in education and training at all levels of the education system.

4 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

Across Europe, national, regional or/and local administrations are responsible for skills audits through the Public Employment Services; although in some cases, services are provided by external contractors (Czech Republic, France) or these are offered in collaboration with other associations. For instance, in Luxembourg, a programme for young people has been offered in cooperation with a non-profit organisation, (InterActions asbl, Schlaiffmillen). In Iceland, skills audits have been provided at the Lifelong learning centres. Furthermore, in some countries schools and adult education institutions are also responsible for skills audits. For instance, in Poland, there are two systems of career counselling. These systems, one within the formal education system and the other operated by the labour offices, are explained in the box below:

Skills audits in Poland

In Poland, skills audits are carried out under the provisions of regulations on the Education system and on the Promotion of Employment and Institutions of the Labour Market. These fall under two different systems of career counselling:

- One system is organised within the formal education system, where the tasks associated with skills audits are generally carried out by the school professional counsellors and the psychological and pedagogical guidance services. It should be noted that the school system is aimed primarily at formal education, analysing the achievement of learning outcomes set by the curriculum and special educational needs. The services of school counsellors are open only for students of public and non-public schools.
- The second guidance system is operated by the district labour offices, where the tasks associated with skills audits are carried out by job counsellors. In this case, the services provided by counsellors are available for unemployed people and jobseekers who are registered with the employment office. This system should be considered more universal than the school system and targeted primarily on the analysis of competences and social skills in demand from employers. As a result of the skills audit, an unemployed person or job seeker receives an action plan including, inter alia, the scope of professional qualifications, skills and competencies that must be completed or acquired in order to find employment. These skills and competencies can be acquired both in the formal, informal and non-formal context. Skills audits can be also carried by the non-public employment agencies on the same basis as in the case of labour offices.

In France, concerning skills audits for unemployed individuals, these are provided by the PES, which can outsource the provision of this service to external providers. France has a different system concerning the delivery of the bilan de compétences for employees, as this form of skills audit can only be carried out by accredited providers, which can either be private training/guidance providers or so called 'inter-institutional structures'. Lists of accredited providers are established by the bipartite training funds which collect contributions from employers (known as FONGECIF or OPCA). Bipartite training funds cover part of the costs of the bilan de compétences. These institutional arrangements and the professionalization of those carrying out skills audits in France, suggest that it takes time to develop a framework assuring that skills audits have considerable impacts.

5 Different target groups

Overall, most countries use skills audits to help the unemployed and jobseekers define a career path. In addition, there are also initiatives targeting the general public and initiatives targeting specific groups (employees, students, immigrants, women or the low qualified). The following sections describe examples of how skills audit has been used to support different target groups across Europe.

5.1 All citizens (No specific target groups)

- In Belgium-Flanders, making competences visible is an objective targeting all citizens, in order to match their competences with the job market requirements. "Competent" is the online competence management system comprising occupational profiles where citizens can make their skills and competences visible and this would enable them to move between jobs and sectors, therefore reducing skills bottlenecks and mismatch. Part of the competence based matching platform is a tool "My Career" (Mijn Loopbaan) which facilitates the identification and documentation of competences.
- In Italy, there is an initiative (the Libretto formativo del cittadino) that targets all citizens, aiming to constitute the 'citizen's identity card for countrywide mobility:

The Libretto formativo del cittadino (Citizen's training booklet)

The Libretto formativo del cittadino is similar to the Europass Portfolio and European Skills Passport, although this tool is not self-managed but issued by the institution.

It aims at establishing a tool to record the citizen's learning history and competences (acquired both in formal and non-formal and informal learning settings), which aims to be used as the 'citizen's identity card for countrywide mobility. The steps for elaborating the "Libretto" are as follows:

1. Reception and guidance. Before introducing the Libretto in detail, practitioners must inform the beneficiary of its general characteristics and the implications of its use. The individual's motivation and the nature of their personal project should also be specified at this stage.
2. Reconstruction of the applicant's experience and competences. During this stage, the practitioner analyses the individual's education and training history, employment experience and any self-learning they have achieved. The results of this analysis and a summary version of it are recorded under the responsibility of the individual concerned.
3. Production of proof or evidence, documents "supporting" the reconstruction of the individual's experience. The range of possible types of evidence has already been described. However, the guidelines also mention "examples of products accomplished". Practitioners must not merely "demand" evidence: they must also help Libretto users to find and present it.
4. Recording of the data and information to be included in the Libretto, and its compilation. This stage concerns the formalisation of the information collected. As a result, the quality of this process largely determines the quality of the final document.

Although the Libretto has not yet been implemented in most regions, it has been tested in Tuscany and it has been considered as useful and effective. During 2011/2012; 25 000 people received a Libretto in Tuscany with a pre-registration of competences, ready to be further validated and certified. The Libretto is not yet operational in most Regions, but it is the subject of initiatives such as experimental applications or constructions of specific regional regulations.

5.2 Employees and employer oriented

The paradigmatic example of skills audit (the French Bilans de competences) is mostly used by employees, although jobseekers can also benefit from a slightly different form of skills audits offered by the PES. The main objective is to ensure that individuals are aware of their competencies and motivations in order to define or redefine a professional project (including training needs). Some countries have also developed skill audits focused on workers of a specific sector. This would be advantageous for both the employer and employee. An example of the skills passport in the UK's nuclear sector is presented below.

NUCLEAR Skills Passport (UK-England, Wales and Northern Ireland (UK-E & NI))

The Nuclear Skills Passport aims to contribute to the recognition of internal and external skills development training. It has been implemented since 2011 with an important support from the nuclear industry.

The Nuclear Skills Passport is an online system for organisations with information on the training completed by their workers as well as contracting organisations. This helps organisations to assess and plan the training, skills and workforce needs.

The Skills Passport comprises five main elements:

1. A web based learner database: contains a training records for individual passport holders and it enables the creation of a skills passport card. Roles, qualifications and Industry Training Standards are held on the Nuclear Industry Training Framework (NITF), which has been developed by the Sector Skills Council and recognised by employers through the Skills Passport User Group and the Nuclear Employers Steering Group.
2. Dataset repository for Job Contexts. Job Contexts are common job roles across industry with aligned competencies.
3. Benchmarking tool that supports and enables existing employee's skills to be recognised and mapped against defined standard industry Job Context roles, highlighting gaps in skills and/or training.
4. Training signposting tool which supports up-skilling by signposting learners to Skills Academy Quality Assured training provision (courses/programmes/qualifications) to meet any identified Skills Gaps. It aims to close skills gaps through continuous learning and career development with accreditation against national industry standards.
5. A reporting suite that generates statistics at industry, regional and corporate levels.

Another example of a sector approach is the Skills Profiling of the Maltese Government Public Administration Human Resources Office explained below. This example is especially relevant for this report, as it shows how the outcomes of skills audit are being used within the public sector.

Skills Profiling of the Maltese Government Public Administration Human Resources Office (Malta)

The Government as employer has introduced a programme of skills audit for its workers, as "a summary of their work experience, skills and abilities". The Skills Profile includes:

- The Present Employment Details,
- Formal Qualifications,
- Employment History and Part-Time Employment,
- Language Skills,
- Organisational & Social Skills,
- Computer & IT-related Skills,
- Technical and Artistic Skills,
- Work Preferences and Job Mobility,
- Human skills such as intra and interpersonal communication styles

In their first day of work, individuals must complete a Skills Profile, which enables the creation of employees' skills profiles.

Skills Profiling helps identifying Skills Gaps of the employers and to propose methods to solve gaps (training opportunities, redeployments, etc.). At the same time, this enables the personal development of employees, increasing their motivation at work.

Regarding employer oriented initiatives; the Public Employment Service of Flanders (VDAB) recently (in 2013) implemented a platform for matching the competences of an individual to those required by employers. It is based on an online competence management system (Competent) consisting of occupational profiles validated by social partners and stakeholders. These would enable people to move softly between jobs and sectors. This would help individuals to gain labour market relevant skills, to make their skills visible, or to re-skill to match the needs of labour market. This system has been considered as good practice in Europe⁴.

5.3 Unemployed and job seekers

With the rise of unemployment since the start of the economic crisis in 2008, the role of the Public Employment Services, and of skills audit for unemployed is even more important than before. In some cases, some priority is given to specific unemployed groups (e.g. the long term unemployed or young people). Most countries offer skills audits or career counselling to this group. For instance:

- In the Czech Republic, skills audits can be offered by PES under the name 'professional and competence diagnosis' (or action plan). Practitioners had been provided with methodological support (inspired by the French Bilan de competences) for more than a decade. However, in recent years, due to restructuring in local PES offices, this service is increasingly provided by external contractors to PES offices and the situation nowadays (December, 2013) regarding the provision of this service is unclear. While in some regions PES offices do tender out this form of support, in others they do not. Only limited numbers of staff trained remain employed by PES offices and hence it is unlikely to be provided internally. The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund provides career counselling and labour market training for the unemployed. As in the Czech Republic, an action plan is elaborated with the activities needed to find and secure employment (including information on the professional and working skills of the individual).
- In France, the Public Employment Services offers to registered jobseekers a service called 'Evaluation of competences and professional skills', which aims to map the skills of the person related to the main job sought, identify any transferable skills or training needs. This evaluation lasts from half a day to and includes interviews and practical simulation exercises⁵.

The economic crisis has put additional pressure on the PES to deliver this type of services. As previously explained, in Greece, although individual action plans have been developed, follow-up services are not systematically provided to unemployed individuals. In Iceland, during the first years of the post-2008 crisis, it proved difficult to provide skills audits for all unemployed/jobseekers, but the current lower unemployment rates have enabled a stabilisation of this service.

5.4 Students and young people

Different initiatives targeting students and young people are taking place in some countries:

- In Luxembourg, the Agence pour le développement de l'emploi (in cooperation with a non-profit organisation) has offered a specific type of skills audit to young people (aged 16-29) since 2007. This is a three-week programme called Bilan de compétences professionnelles (BCP). The measure is delivered in cooperation with the non-profit organisation, InterActions asbl, Schlaifmillen. In total, 119 young people participated in 2013. In Switzerland, among other groups, young people and specifically VET students are encouraged to take part in skills audit, where recognition can boost assimilation of knowledge and skills gained in their dual VET programme (i.e. school and work based).

⁴ Magazine of the Support Centre of Work and Social Economy 'Over werk', 'Competence orientated matching', Acco Publishing, 1/2011

⁵ <http://www.pole-emploi.fr/candidat/l-evaluation-des-competences-et-des-capacites-professionnelles-eccp--@/suarticle.jspz?id=4827>

- Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has implemented a career management skills assessment process for on young people (aged 16-19). However, this is voluntary.

5.5 Other disadvantaged groups

In many countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Finland, Switzerland), besides targeting jobseekers and the unemployed, the employment services target other disadvantaged groups; especially the low qualified and people at risk of unemployment, but also women and immigrants. For instance, in Norway, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service and the county education authorities have specific agreements to assist low skilled individuals in order to increase job opportunities and eventually complete training.

6 The different approaches to skills audits (self-audits, one-to-one audits, panel audits)

Different approaches to skills audits have been identified in the country updates for the 2014 Inventory. While in some countries individuals are responsible for their own assessment (in most cases through the completion of an online portfolio), there are countries where one-to-one audits are offered. These face to face consultations are usually offered by the professional counsellors of the PES, the skills auditors and in some cases by school professional counsellors and/or and the psychological and pedagogical guidance services of adult learning institutions/schools. Panel audits do not seem to be a common approach in Europe but are found in Liechtenstein or Switzerland, for instance, where a panel of experts is responsible for the assessment phase where the candidate's dossier is examined. In Slovenia, candidates are required to attend an interview with the validation committee. Most self-assessments are carried by using by using online tools, for example, in Hungary, through the national career orientation portal, electronic questionnaires are available for everyone, in order to see the competencies they have and any training or career pathway that would suit them. In Scotland, online tools are used to *"identify their skills, interests and motivations in the workplace, as well as employment opportunities and prospects"*. In Denmark, most tools include self-assessments during which the individual is to grade his/her experience, knowledge or competences on a scale typically ranging from 1 to 6. For instance, My Competence Portfolio: www.minkompetencemappe.dk is an online tool directed to all citizens, although different links are proposed for different target groups: jobseekers, students, people that want to validate their competences and all other citizens. It is a tool where the individual can clarify and describe all of his/her prior learning in order to identify future choices of job and education. Examples of one-to-one audits can be found in most countries. In France, the external accredited provider responsible for undertaking skills audit carries out a minimum of 10 hours face to face interviews with the candidate. In Austria, initiatives aimed at identifying and analysing an individual's competences, aptitudes and motivations are offered by professional counsellors in adult learning institutions but also by the PES or by freelanced guidance practitioners or coaches. The *Competence profile* is an example extracted from the Austrian country report:

Competence profile KOMPAZ6 (Austria)

The centre for the recognition of competences at the Adult Education Centre Linz (*Volkshochschule Linz*) was founded in 2004 (funding organisations are the city of Linz and the Chamber of Labour Upper Austria). The centre offers workshops for identifying non-formal and informal acquired competences (from all areas of life and work). The Swiss Qualifications Handbook (CH-Q) System of Managing Competencies is used for methodological orientation. The results of competence identification are compiled using a competence profile created through the portfolio method (cf. Schildberger, 2010;

⁶ www.kompetenzprofil.at

Reumann, 2012). The CH-Q was established in 2001 in Switzerland with the aim of making it possible for young people and adults to record and document formal, informal and previously acquired skills in a process oriented way and to apply for the validation of these skills. It is conceived as a portfolio and contains comprehensive instructions on how to use the instrument, a folder with a wide variety of forms enabling a clear, systematic, and chronological sorting and filing of evidence, references, and individual remarks and notes. It is intended to encourage and support the process of self-reflection. Additionally, there is a possibility to attend a one-day assessment centre carried out by external assessors. Upon successful completion of the workshop series, participants receive the well-known CH-Q certificate for self-competence management (level 1). Since 2007, the CH-Q model for competence management is also applied by the Adult Education Centre of Burgenland (VHS Burgenland). This initiative is called '*Wissen, was ich kann – 'Knowing what I am capable of'*'⁷.

In Estonia, a career counsellor (referred to as a job mediation consultant) of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund is responsible for assessing the individual situation and compiling an Individual Action Plan. The aim is to advise the individual on the options and potential activities required to find and secure employment, including a description of the professional and working skills of the unemployed person, and of his or her broader skills which facilitate employment. Similarly, in Finland, counsellors of the Finnish employment service assess the competences, skills and objectives of the individual and help the unemployed or jobseeker to make an individual career and job search plan.

In some countries, both self-audits and one-to-one audits take place. In most cases, self-assessments are complemented with counselling and assessment provided by the Employment Services, education institutions or external accredited providers. Some individuals need the support of an adviser to help them to understand/identify their own skills and competences, and how to present/describe these. Although self-assessments can constitute a good documentation tool of self-reflection, in order for the documentation to be reliable, self-assessments do not seem enough if skills audit or validation is to be carried out. Besides the assessment and consequent documentation provided by professional counsellors, in some countries other methods used are multiple choice tests or written assignments (e.g. Denmark). Another example of a tool that can be independently verified at any time is the previously described UK Skills Passport. This increases its validity.

In some cases, self-audits and one-to-one audits are complemented with third parties evaluations, psychological and performance tests, as in the case of Switzerland. Croatia is another example where one-to-one career guidance counselling is offered and is also possible to perform a self-assessment of skills and competences as well as to undertake psychological testing. In the UK, the National Careers Service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland provides voluntary Skills Health Checks, which can be undertaken using online tools or face-to-face with a Careers Advisor.

The great diversity of approaches to skills audits (self-audits, one-to-one audits, panel audits or a variety of them) show the difference among the countries covered by the inventory. There seems to be a need for the development of a common understanding/definition of skills audit. The development of a common template on how to conduct skills audits is one option for consideration.

7 Different feedback formats, content and durations

Regarding feedback formats and the content of those, although information is not available for all countries, the results of skills audit are usually a document/portfolio that states the competences, skills and aptitudes of the individual, in many cases including a "next steps" plan regarding training and sometimes recommending the involvement in the process of

⁷ <http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/home/Kompetenzfeststellung.html>

validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is not always a physical document, but an online tool. In Denmark and as previously explained, there are online tools, such as My Competence Portfolio Competence and the tool for documentation of and dialogue about personal competences. In the UK-EWNI, Skills Passports constitute an online record of an individual's career history, current skills and training. The advantages of these online tools are that these are easily updated and securely accessible via the internet. Nevertheless, physical portfolios are still broadly used for employees and employers, as these may be still regarded as a more reliable piece of evidence.

In other countries, despite the existence of an action plan elaborated by professional counsellors of the Public Employment Services, there are no formal certificates linked to these services (e.g. Norway).

Regarding duration of the process, although the Council Recommendation refers to the provision of opportunities for unemployed people or people at risk of unemployment to undertake a 'skills audit' ideally within six months of an identified need, for most countries, it has not been possible to identify a specific time frame.

8 Mandatory and voluntary approaches

Skills audits seem to be voluntary in most European countries. In fact, these are in some cases considered a right of the citizen. For instance, in Belgium-Wallonia, the 'appraisal of skills' (identification and validation of skills gained inside and outside the formal education system) is a worker's right since 2002. Similarly, in France, employees or their employers can request a skills audit; however, this is in all cases voluntary for the individual. In Ireland, the EGFSN report recommends the provision of an entitlement for all adults to an assessment of core skills with a view to making their prior learning in this regard visible and promoting their participation in further education and training. In Luxembourg, skills audit were created via legislation in 1998, together with a National Action Plan for Employment. The service is provided by the Public Employment Service and according to the 2012 activity report of the Public Employment Service, 155 jobseekers took part in an information session and 113 skills audits were carried out. In 2013, 47 skills audits were carried out.

In other countries, although not covered by a specific law or considered as a right per se, skills audit can be requested by the unemployed/jobseekers registered with the PES, though individuals would need to be aware the opportunity exists to make the request in the first instance. This highlights the fundamental importance of awareness raising, guidance and counselling.

Skills audit are mandatory in those countries where these are part of the validation process (e.g. Spain, Netherlands, Iceland or Liechtenstein). In Spain, for instance, all people admitted in the validation process receive mandatory counselling by a professional counsellor that supports him/her on the completion of the self-assessment questionnaire.

9 Outcomes of a skills audit and cost implications

Skills audits make the individual reflect on the knowledge, competencies, skills, motivations and aptitudes that he /she possesses. The main outcomes are related to an increase in the motivation of the individual and the possibilities of finding a job for jobseekers or the unemployed, especially for those in disadvantaged conditions. Outcomes relate also to career development in the case of employed people. At the same time, given the emphasis on fulfilling training needs and thanks to its formative purpose, skills audits contribute to lifelong learning and to build workforce that is up-to-date and meets the requirements of an increasing technological and knowledge advanced labour market. In Belgium-Wallonia, for instance, the formative purpose is embedded in the process. It has been reported that the main objective of a skills audit is that it enables individuals to "analyse their competences, not only professional but also personal, as well as motivations and skills, in order to define a professional project and ultimately, a training project. The advantage for workers is to be

able to undertake new tasks in the same job position, or move to new positions (with the same employer or with a new company)”⁸.

In this sense, skills audits are also positive for employers, as they have more motivated and skilled employees as well as potential employees that will be more qualified. Among their employees, skills audits help them to analyse the existing competence/knowledge gaps and fulfil any training needs. In some countries, there are special instruments developed for employers. In Scotland, for instance, there are three toolkits that employers can use: to support in the identification of skills and training needs of their employees, to understand and describe the skills they need when offering job positions and how to undertake skills audit and identify any skills gaps.

Regarding cost implications, it is not possible to provide an analysis given the lack of data available. In a few cases, the number of days (and therefore human resources) spent by employees working in the public administration has been provided. For instance, in Italy, during the process to develop the above mentioned Libretto, on average, two to four individual interviews are needed with the individual, depending on the length of his/her experience, self-consciousness and self-reporting abilities. The counsellor requires at least equal time in back office activities. Therefore, it takes between four and eight hours for each Libretto. In France, the skills audit process lasts at least 24 hours, including 10 hours of personal interviews with the professional counsellor that take place during a period between 3 weeks and 3 months.

10 Conclusions

This report has explored the use of skills audits among the 36⁹ country updates covered by the 2014 update of the European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. As emphasised above, given that this is the first time the Inventory has collected information on skills audits, the amount of information available is limited and this report has therefore been exploratory in nature.

It is however absolutely clear that the concept, understanding and approach to skills audits vary significantly amongst the countries covered by the Inventory. In some countries, skills audits are regulated and well developed (Bilan de compétences); in others, there are not yet regulated at the national level or cannot be distinguished from the procedures in place for the validation of non-formal and informal learning or the generic services of the PES (e.g. support in finding employment) that offer career orientation/professional plans.

In relation to target groups, the research evidence has shown that skills audits are primarily directed at those who are unemployed, jobseekers and employees. However, the 2014 Inventory has also been able to identify some initiatives that target all citizens, including for example, young people or specific disadvantaged groups (low qualified, immigrants, women, etc.). Most approaches are voluntary and although the Council Recommendation establishes a time frame for skills audits (ideally within six months of an identified need), no information about the timeframe of skills audits can be found in the 2014 country reports and fiches with the exception of Finland. Here a jobseeker receives a ‘light’ skills audit after registering as unemployed. A more in-depth skills audit is carried out if the person has been unemployed for 5 months or more. Given the lack of information reported on timeframes and the different interpretations of skills audits across countries, it is not possible to comment further on the benefit of introducing specific timeframes.

The outcomes associated with skills audits relate to an increase of motivation, self-confidence and information about potential training needed to increase employment opportunities or re-define a career path. Therefore, skills audits empower people who are in contact with the PES, but they are also an instrument with high usability for Human

⁸ Cedefop (2014) European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Country Report - Belgium FR.

⁹ Covering 33 countries – there are two reports for Belgium and three for the UK

Resources staff in enterprises, adult education staff in charge of retraining adult learners or those who are unemployed. The research evidence also provides some evidence that skills audits can also be more useful in some sectors than others. In the UK-EWNI, the utility of skills passports has proven to be more useful in some sectors (e.g. nuclear) than others (e.g. Process). This utility is influenced by how important it is for workers to have a passport (for instance, if there are regulatory drivers, or if other certificates in the profession); how transferable the passport is given the specialisation of that sector; the cost; and the collaboration of employers and workers. Furthermore, skills audits may be especially useful for those sectors with a low-qualified workforce. In this case, employees would have recognition of the competences gained from work experience and at the same time, they would benefit from the definition of a professional project/training plan. In this sense, skills audits would help to support up skilling and career development in the sector.

In view of the current high unemployment rates across Europe, skills audits could be considered a useful tool to help increase the labour market opportunities of citizens. However as reported in the case of France, it takes time to develop a framework that assures the success and maximum impact of skills audits. In order to understand how skills audits are designed in each country more fully, there is a need for policy learning of how the supporting institutional arrangements are set up. This is a prerequisite for the successful development and dissemination of skills audits across Europe.