

Recommendations to improve the nonformal education in communication and marketing across Europe

POLICY PAPER

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1. Executive summary

In the last decade, in the European Union, there have been concerns and recommendations have been made regarding the validation of competencies achieved through non-formal learning, but the implemented measures, nationally, do not seem to reach the objectives suggested by EU.

The monomyths project brings into attention the need of approaching adequate policies for the beneficiaries and gives recommendations from both the target group's perspective, youth that find themselves with a major, but same time unemployed and other actors point of view that might be involved in the process of validating competencies such as NGOs working with youth or in adult's education. Recommendations mainly concern measures of adapting national validation systems to the needs of beneficiaries, better dissemination of information on the existence and functioning of competencies validating process among youth and strengthening the collaboration between the NGOs, public institutions and nonformal qualification centers.

II. Introduction

Non-Formal Education and the increase in its recognition, is a top priority for Monomyths Association. That the recognition has not been sufficiently achieved is in part due to a lack of confidence in the quality of nonformal education within society and within youth organisations themselves.

The Policy Paper provides a comprehensive set of concepts based on the cornerstone definition: The quality of nonformal education in youth NGOs is the degree to which selected needs of society and of learners are reached and addressed. Based on this definition the learning process is designed with a dual purpose: of improving quality and of communicating clearly with stakeholders about it.

The concept of Non-Formal Education was a real discovery that motivates people and gives them a chance to be educated by doing, a chance to improve their skills and abilities in the work field they hold.

III. Context

It is known that one of the major setbacks for youth in Europe standing in the way of social inclusion is the lack of jobs. This low level of employability in the labor market of young people (especially among women) is a direct consequence of a low level of skills, lack of specific qualifications, and the capacity of the state to intervene. However, despite these social deficits, youth have developed certain skills through nonformal learning. Unfortunately, these advantages were not given enough attention and they are not all the time considered as valid.

A topic discussed during the monomyth project was the validation of nonformal and informal learning and the effective management policies in the field of validation of competences acquired in informal and non-formal manner would have positive effects for youth both on personal and social level.

IV. Public policy on European level

Some attention given by the European institutions to the informal and non-formal learning validation system exists for over a decade, but the first concrete action was taken in 2007 by adopting the Action Plan for the Education of Young by the European Commission, where the assessment and recognition of abilities and social skills, regardless of the context they were acquired in, are seen as important tools for social integration. In the same context, in 2010 the European Ministers for Education and Vocational Training, the European social partners and the European Commission said that European countries should develop national procedures to facilitate the validation and recognition of competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning until 2015. In 2011 the European Council's Resolution is launched mentioning a renewed plan for adult education and where the application of a framework for informal and non-formal learning validation is a priority.

A year later, in 2012, the European Council issues a Recommendation¹ throughout which it is recognized the importance of validating competencies, skills and knowledge acquired through informal and non-formal means, also mentioning that their validation would represent an important role for increasing the degree of employability on the labor market of people coming from social-economic disadvantaged groups lacking qualifications. In this Recommendation addressed to the Member States of the European Union it is stated that EU countries, by 2018, are supposed to implement measures for validation of non-formal and informal learning, so that people who have developed these types of skills, knowledge and competencies can obtain, as appropriate, complete and partial qualifications. It encourages states to prioritize the implementation of policies for the disadvantaged sectors according to their particular needs, so that each person has the ability to

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0899:FIN:RO:HTML>

identify the results acquired through non-formal and informal learning, documenting these results, assessing them and finally, obtaining a certification for them.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

In practice, the validation of competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning of the youth has proven difficult to implement, at least in the countries included in monomyths project. This happens most often because the national validation systems are not adapted for individuals who they address. Therefore, to come up with concrete solutions to these problems, the project has gathered opinions, experiences and recommendations of three advisory groups: youth, organizations that deal with youth inclusion and youth educational specialists (Policy Advisor Group).

Among the needs and recommendations discussed by these 3 working groups, it may be mention the following:

A. The fact that youth are not informed about the existence of such validation systems, they do not know the way they work and what are their benefits;

Recommendations:

- ✓ Conducting information campaigns in youth universities by institutions which have activity in this field;
- ✓ General awareness on existing systems should be made understandable for youth: use of simple forms and clear all information material and use of visual communication (videos);
- ✓ Creating a good cooperation between the youth community, youth associations, and public institution, so youth can obtain information in an appropriate manner about the opportunities and the benefits they can access;
- ✓ Provide multiple communication channels (public presentations, posters, flyers, radio, social networks);
- ✓ Training of personnel from the labor agencies and other public institutions to improve communication with the youth community;

B. The discouragement of youth that consider certification of competencies useless if it doesn't get them a job;

Recommendation:

- ✓ Offers regarding competencies certifications should be correlated with the labor market.

C. Most times the cost of validation services exceed the possibilities of the target group;

Recommendation:

- ✓ Granting free access for those wanting to validate their competencies or even giving a bonus for the ones accessing the system and do not have an income;

D. Lack of a validating system adapted to the specific needs of youth

Recommendations:

- ✓ Review certification procedures for youth that take into account the specific needs of the labour market
- ✓ Existence of information points in youth communities, for consultation with community members;
- ✓ Providing support for individual learning and writing adapted learning materials, easy to understand that would mention every detail concerning examination requirements;
- ✓ Existence of a personal mentor or a mediator to facilitate communication, and overcoming fears and misunderstandings about the validation process as well.