

Paper dragons or efficient tools for transparency and mobility`?

Nordic approaches for including non-formal learning and non-formal
qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks

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Project aim

- NOVA will examine if and how non-formal qualifications are included in National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in the Nordic countries as well as a few Central European countries.
- NOVA will also examine if these qualifications can be awarded through validation procedures.

The working definition of non-formal qualifications within the project is all qualifications that are not part of and awarded through formal education



Comparative study – data collection

Survey developed under six areas:



Links between national qualification frameworks and validation arrangements



Transparency



Including non-formal learning and non-formal qualifications in NQFs



Quality assurance



Legal and institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement



Qualification design and development

Composition of the survey

- 36 statements (yes, partly/under development, no, N/A)
- 18 open questions
- The replies in the multiple choice statements carried points: 3p=yes; 2p=partly/under development; 0p=no or N/A
- The overall score of each category in each country was calculated in percentages
- Open questions were designed to gather more specific data on e.g. procedures, stakeholders, communications etc.

Participating countries

- Survey was sent out to seven countries' EQF National Coordination Points end of March 2022

- Austria 
- Denmark 
- Finland 
- Iceland 
- The Netherlands 
- Norway 
- Sweden 

Stages of NQF developments in 2020 overview

According to [2020 CEDEFOP overview of NQFs](#), **Sweden and Iceland** were on Activation stage, the rest on Operational stage

Activation stage

- The activation stage, also referred to as a preparatory operational stage, is characterised by the **consolidation of governance and the concrete building up of administrative and technical capacity and expertise**. During this stage the practical interaction of the NQF with the existing qualification system(s) and qualifications is determined.

Operational stage

- The operational stage is the **stage of full implementation**. The NQF adds value and contributes to meeting the objectives identified and negotiated during previous stages.
 - *In most countries there have been many developments since the CEDEFOP survey*

Results of the survey (overview)



Links between national qualification frameworks and validation arrangements



Including non-formal learning and non-formal qualifications in NQFs



Transparency



Legal and institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

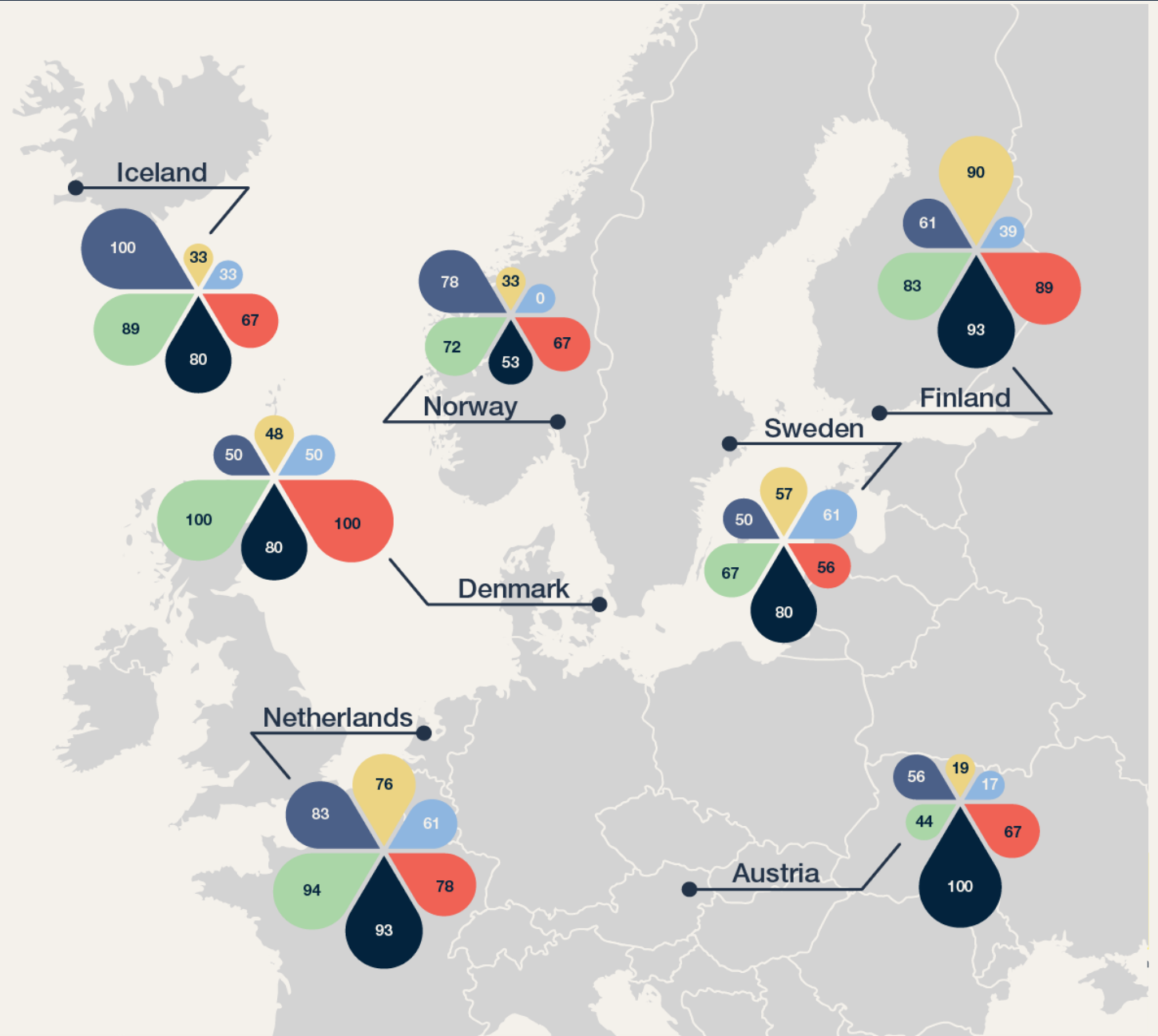


Quality assurance



Qualification design and development

Each number represents the percentage of points the country got in the related area compared to the number of points they could have gotten in said area



General analysis on survey results (multiple choice)

- Countries defined non-formal learning/non-formal qualification very similarly
- The **strongest** overall feature: **legal and institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement**
 - Strong stakeholder cooperation in general
- The **weakest** overall feature: **including non-formal learning and non-formal qualifications in NQFs**
 - Most countries (except for NO) are either levelling non-formal qualifications in NQFs or are planning on expanding access in the near future. *The Netherlands and Sweden have the most open levelling procedures in terms of non-formal qualifications.*
- The **second weakest** overall feature: Links between **NQFs and validation arrangements**
 - Finland and the Netherlands have the widest validation arrangements in relation to NQFs, however all the countries had some validation features in connection with the NQFs.

Focus on the weakest points



Links between national qualification frameworks and validation arrangements

NB! There were no open questions in this category

Statements:

- All qualifications in the NQF can be awarded through validation (*NL 'yes', IS&NO 'no', others 'partly'*)
- Part-qualifications can be awarded through validation (*IS, NO, DK 'no', others 'yes' or 'partly'*)
- There is an individual (legal, subjective) right to validation linked with the NQF (*FI&NO 'yes'*)
- It is possible for learners to accumulate part-qualifications and/or micro credentials towards a full qualification (*IS&AT 'no'; others 'yes' or 'partially'*)

Focus on the weakest points (continued)



Links between national qualification frameworks and validation arrangements

Statements:

- The same learning outcomes (competence criteria/qualification requirements) are used for awarding qualifications regardless of the learning pathway (e.g training or validation of prior learning) (*IS&AT 'no'; others 'yes' or 'partially'*)
- It is possible to obtain non-formal qualifications through validation (*DK&NO 'no', others 'yes' or 'partially'*)
- It is possible to obtain parts of non-formal qualifications through validation (*DE&NO 'no', others 'yes' or 'partially'*)

Focus on the weakest points (open questions)



Including non-formal learning and non-formal qualifications in NQFs

Questions:

- If not possible now, **is there a national strategy/plan to include non-formal qualifications in the NQF in the future?** *(NO 'no', other allow – at least in theory)*
- Can you describe the **procedure for levelling**? Who decides on the level? What factors are considered when deciding level? What is the official body that decides, which qualifications are included and levelled in the NQF? Who is involved in the process of validating the qualification before/during a levelling decision? *(Similar procedures: Ministries, NCPs and stakeholders in cooperation, in NO and DK no procedure description)*

Focus on the weakest points (open questions)



Including non-formal learning and non-formal qualifications in NQFs

Questions:

- **Who is allowed/authorised to have qualifications included in NQFs?** Who is allowed/authorised to have **non-formal qualifications included in NQFs?** **Who can apply for "levelling"?** *(In general all providers are allowed – if possible according to the system – to apply for levelling and have quals included if criteria are met)*
- What type of **credit system** linked with the NQF (ECTS, ECVET, other)? What is the "smallest" qualification that can be included? (Countries have very different practices: *FI only country that adheres to competence points in non-formal qualifications. In formal education ECTS/ECVET or similar are used.*)

What questions should we ask ourselves?

- Formal qualifications are “automatically” levelled according to their type, whereas non-formal qualifications go through a relatively strong scrutiny: does this mean that non-formal qualifications correspond to the NQF level more accurately and are better quality assured?
- If there are no credit point or competence point requirements for non-formal qualifications, but are levelled to NQF, how are they comparable?
- If validation arrangements remain weak in connection with the NQFs and qualifications within, what does that mean from the viewpoint of mobility between countries? And equality of citizens in the Single Market?
- At the moment, the non-formal qualifications that are levelled and included into NQFs are rather sizeable competence units – partly due to the workload connected to the approval process. What could be done to make the process smoother, quicker? What about micro credentials?

Next steps

- More detailed comparative study in a form of a report, with recommendations
- Interactive map online with country information
- Support tool for developing non-formal qualifications
- Collection of best practices in terms of linkages between NQFs, validation and non-formal learning/qualifications