



Recognition of VET qualifications in the European Union

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training


Cedefop

- EU Agency
- Supports and monitors the development of European VET policy developments
- Monitors skills and labour market
- Looks into the future of VET
- VET and qualifications
- Actively supports the development and use of European tools and principles for transparency



Structure of the presentation

- **What is recognition and how can it be supported?**
 - Complex landscape (much has been done and is being done!)
 - Professional purpose
 - Academic/further study purpose
 - Legislation, incl. recommendations, codes of good practice
 - Supporting tools and initiatives (transparency)
- **Validation of prior learning (non-formal and informal)**
- **CEDEFOP work on comparing and recognising qualifications**
- **Summing up: longer term and recent developments**

The background features a network diagram with glowing white and light blue nodes connected by thin white lines. The nodes are scattered across the frame, with some appearing brighter than others. The overall color palette is a gradient of blue, from a lighter, almost white blue on the left to a darker, muted blue on the right.

**What is recognition and
how can it be supported?**

Recognition

Mutual recognition of qualifications

“Process of official acknowledgment by one or more countries or organisations of the similarity of value of qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) awarded in (or by) one or more other countries or organisations, including the associated rights and duties.” [Cedefop Glossary](#)

Close concept/comparison: At its core, comparison of qualifications is about understanding how programmes and qualifications align or differ, and to what extent similarities can be observed and agreed on.



Recognition

- Legally-binding instruments:
 - EU Directive on Professional Qualifications → automatic recognition for 7 professions; conditions for general system (all other regulated professions)
 - Lisbon Recognition Convention on the recognition of Qualification concerning Higher Education in the European Region
 - UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education
- Non-legally binding instruments
 - EU transparency tools → support recognition of skills and qualifications by promoting transparency of qualifications, including learning outcomes and building trust
 - EU Recommendations

2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad (higher education and upper secondary education and training) → transparency tools are promoting progress towards automatic mutual recognition

2020 Council Recommendation on VET → make best use of transparency tools to facilitate automatic mutual recognition of qualifications

EU Directive 2005/36 on the recognition of professional qualifications

- The directive establishes rules according to which a member state must recognise professional qualifications acquired by an EU or EEA citizen in other another member state.
- Central concept: regulated profession
- Three systems
 - General system: recognises qualifications when the applicant has full access to the same profession in the home country; may impose compensatory measures (adaptation period of up to three years or an aptitude test) when there are substantial differences in education
 - Automatic recognition (harmonised training requirements): nurses, midwives, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, architects and veterinary surgeons.
 - Recognition based on professional experience

Lisbon Recognition Convention

- Drafted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO (1997)
- Ratified by over 50 states
- Recognition of foreign qualifications for academic purposes, i.e. further study, periods of study
- Applies also to VET in case VET gives access to higher education
- Implementation supported by subsidiary texts
- Governance and (overseeing) implementation: inter-governmental committee and national ENIC/NARIC centres
- The recognition can only be refused if the qualification is substantially different from that of the host country



A complex landscape, but much work has been done – and is being done

Cedefop works on several related topics, e.g.:

- European Qualifications Framework/National Qualifications Frameworks
- Learning Outcomes
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Micro-credentials
- Quality Assurance
- Project on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

In addition to initiatives specifically focused on recognition there is a broad range of other initiatives that support recognition of skills and qualifications by promoting the use of **learning outcomes**, their **transparency**, **comparability** and fostering **trust**.



EQF

- Designed to cover the **all qualifications** (irrespective of the learning setting or institutional context)
- Common reference point/translation grid through 8 learning-outcomes based **level descriptors** (knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility)
- Supported the shift from input to **outcome-based approach**
- Links with many initiatives

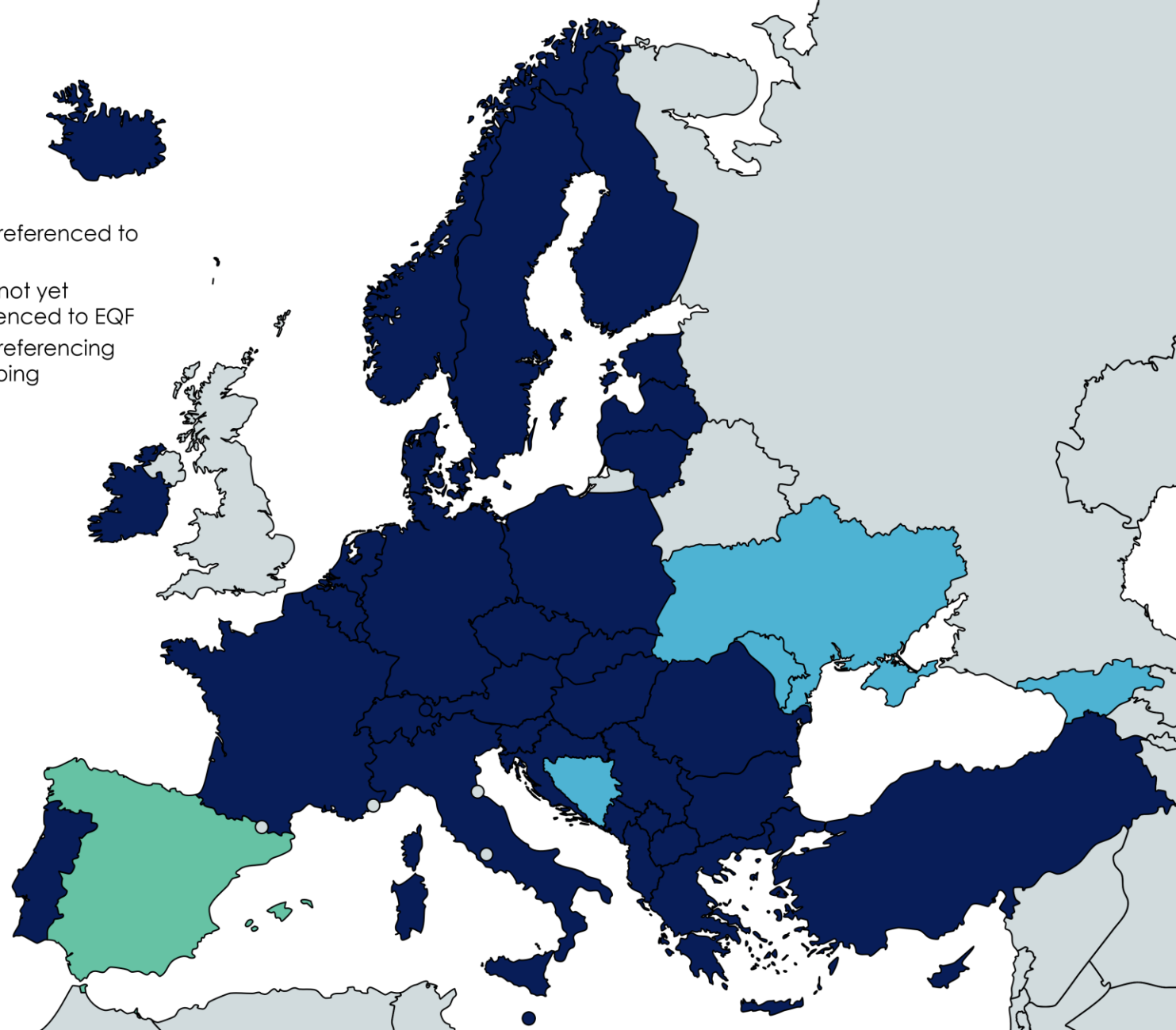


Countries in the EQF process

41 EQF countries –
36 countries have linked
their NQFs to EQF

*The sample of this analysis is
38 country-specific reports*

- NQF referenced to EQF
- NQF not yet referenced to EQF
- NQF referencing on-going



Validation of prior (non- formal and informal) learning



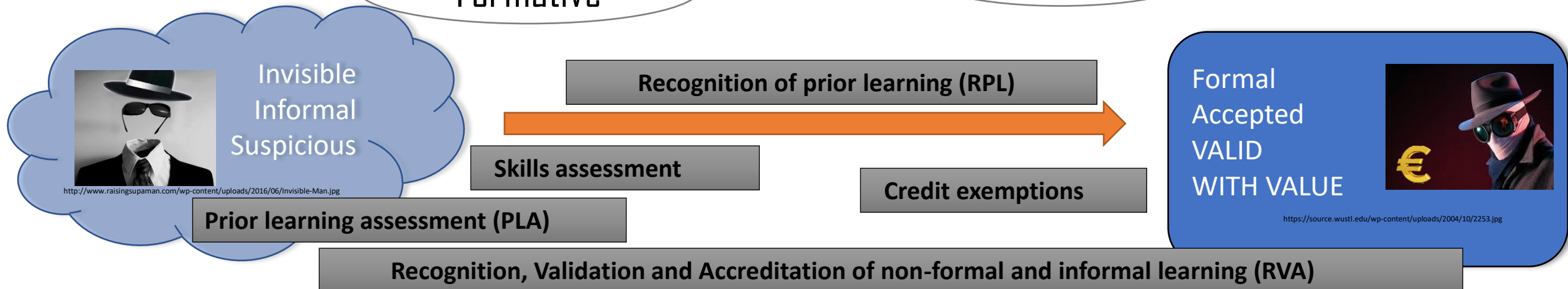
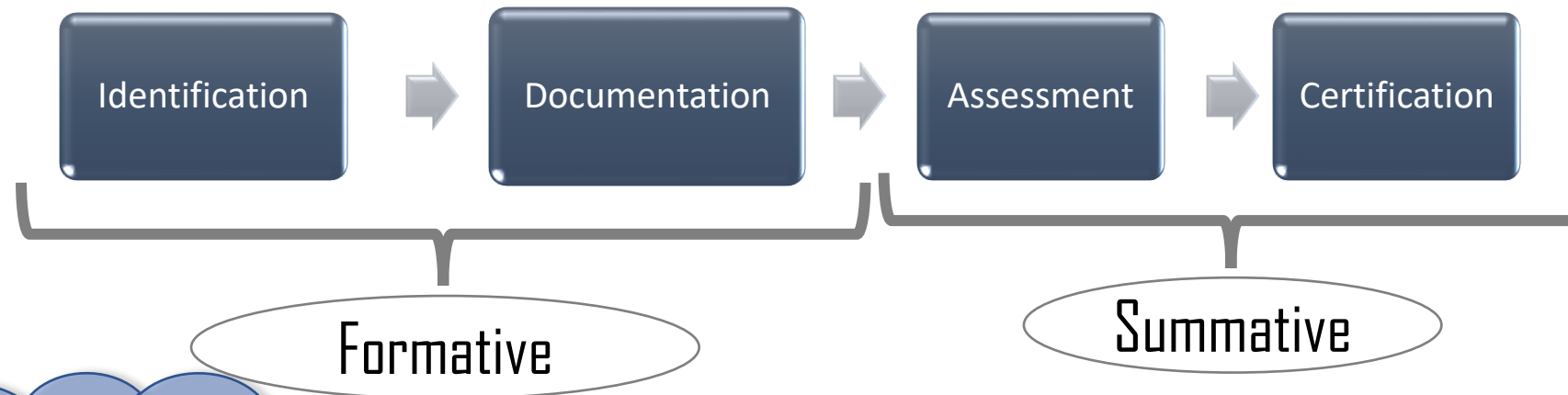
VALIDATION – a question of VALUES

All learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place, is valuable for the individual and for society.

Formal learning needs to be supplemented by validation of non-formal and informal learning.

VALIDATION of non-formal and informal learning and its objectives

Validation means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard



What is the purpose of the guidelines and how do they add value?



- Builds on the principles outlined by the 2012 Recommendation
- Identifies relevant factors for the design, development, promotion and implementation of validation
- Written for everybody involved in developing, implementing and operating validation
- Addresses common challenges at different levels and contexts and act as a source of inspiration and reflection for peer learning
- Work at a strategic and technical level
- Works together with the European Inventory

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3093>



Any solution must be fit for purpose and reflect the context in question. The Guidelines point to available options, and the implications of these, when establishing and operating validation arrangements

Validation arrangements in place

- **Validation increasing importance**

EU countries consolidating validation arrangements legal provision

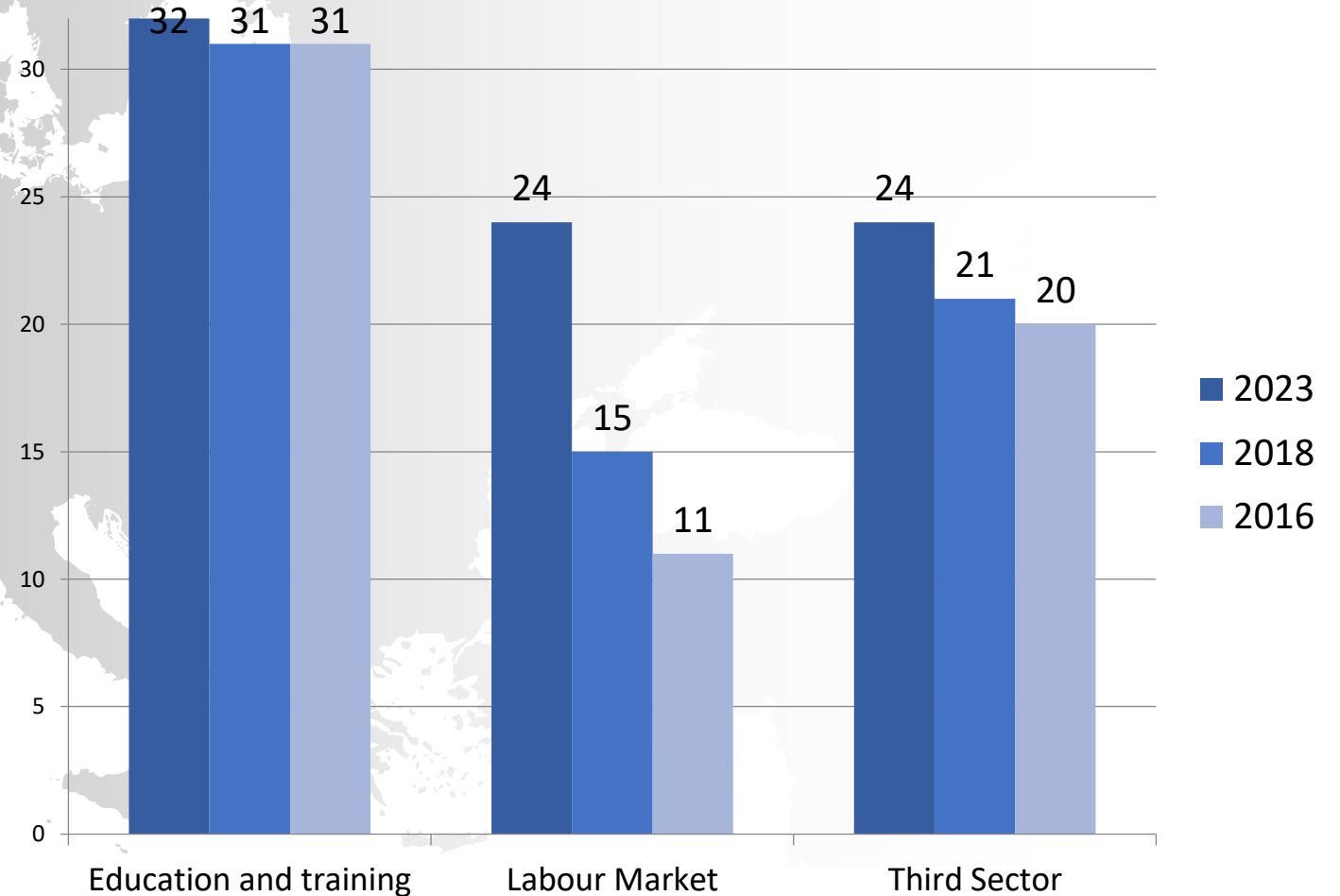
- **Labour market relevance**

Increasing number of initiatives connected to labour market actors

- **Third sector less connected**

Third sector initiatives more project based and less systematic

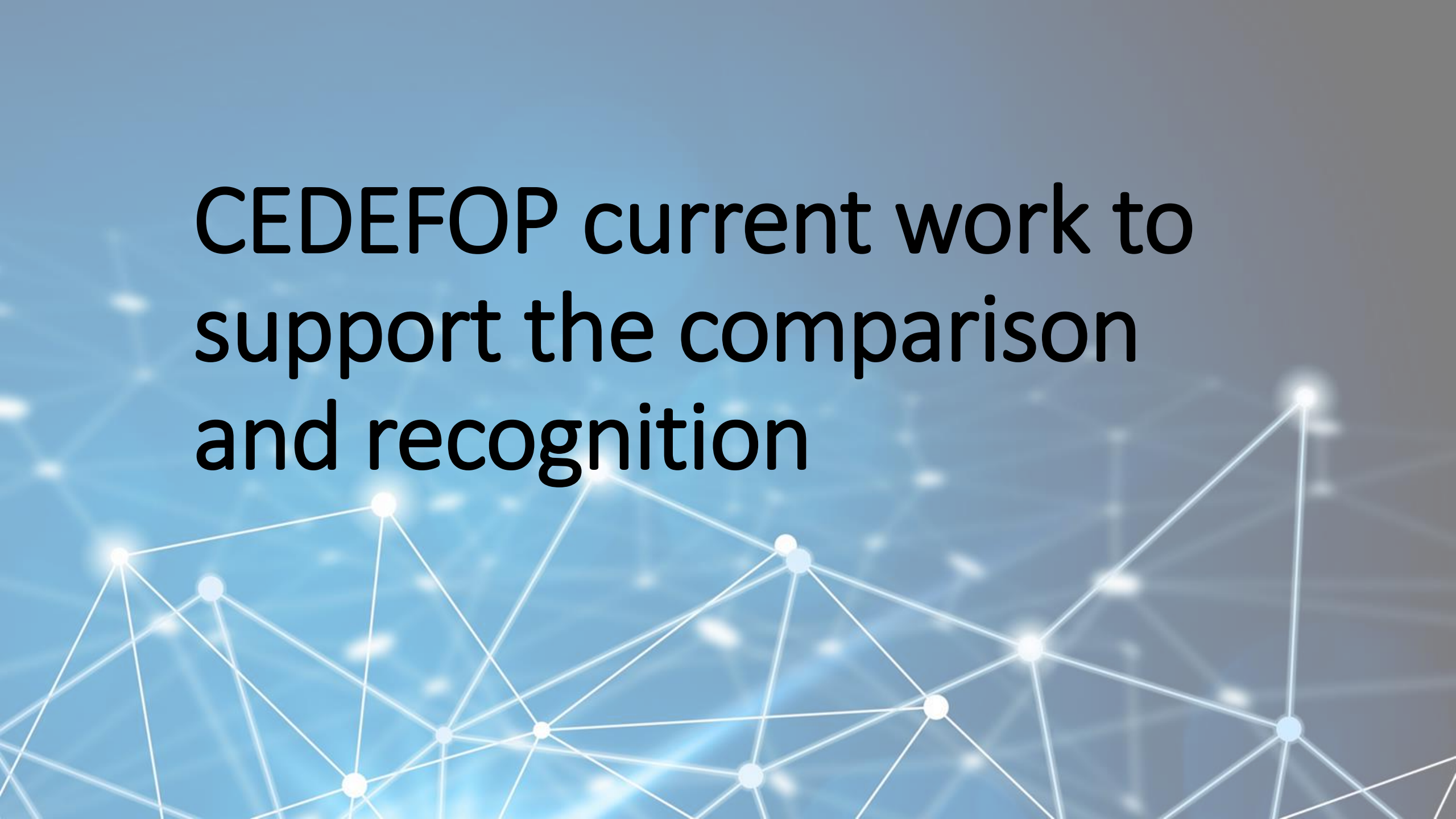
Number of countries that report having validation arrangement in place by year



Source: European inventory, 2016, 2018, 2023

Note: 32 countries under study

**CEDEFOP current work to
support the comparison
and recognition**

A network diagram with glowing nodes and connecting lines on a blue background. The nodes are represented by small circles of varying sizes and colors (white, light blue, and dark blue), connected by thin white lines. The background is a gradient of blue, with a darker shade on the right side. The overall aesthetic is modern and technological.

Supporting comparison and recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/comparing-vet-qualifications>

Why is it important?

- Societies and labour markets must **make best possible use of already existing skills and qualifications**. N.B. future skills challenges
- Individuals need to **build on and combine** outcomes of education and training over time and across institutional and national borders for **study and employment** purposes.
- **Lifelong learning and employment** opportunities for individuals are **strengthened**.
- **Adds to mutual trust** on qualification systems between countries

Lessons from the Cedefop pilot studies on comparing VET qualifications

“Comparing VET qualifications” 2018 - 2021

The studies operated within a broader context of research by Cedefop: future of VET, learning outcomes, terminology

- **Comparison is possible** and supports mutual learning
- Generic **challenges** relate mainly to the quality of the reference point, learning outcomes descriptions of qualifications , the issue of expressing the level of proficiency of learning outcomes, and to including the context features in comparison.
- The **analysis of the content** is labour intensive
- The comparison requires robust **reference points**
- Is it possible to “**automate**” the analysis to widen use?

Comparing and recognising (VET) qualifications – internal project (fall 2023 – 2025)

- 1) Identify multifaceted challenges: technical, mutual-trust related and political.
- 2) Analyse the institutional and political context facilitating or preventing comparison of qualifications.
- 3) Analyse the objectives and conceptual basis of existing approaches
- 4) Analyse the practical feasibility of existing methods and transparency and recognition tools, their strengths and weaknesses.
- 5) Analyse progress made recently in AI and language models and how these developments can be utilised.
- 6) Clarify the scope of a practically oriented comparison methodology or a tool
- 7) Clarify how such a practically oriented approach/tool could be institutionally embedded at national and European level.

Summing up longer term and recent developments

The background features a complex network of white lines connecting various nodes. Some nodes are highlighted with bright, glowing white circles, while others are smaller and less prominent. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a light blue gradient background.

Observations: longer term and recent developments

- Systematic work on global level to decrease political, technical (procedural) and (mutual) trust related barriers for recognition.
- At the same time: the increasing diversity of qualifications and the experience (incl. non-formal and informal) becoming important.
- Restructuring of own education and training systems
- Growing importance of flexibilization, permeability, transparency, quality assurance
- Understanding of each other's qualifications/learning outcomes: look similarities rather than differences (mutual learning; information; concept of substantial differences)
- From nostrification (very detailed comparison) to acceptance (of existing differences)
- Balancing between the importance of input basis and learning outcomes basis
- Growing importance of links between different policy areas, most notably quality assurance and qualifications frameworks, labour market policies
- Many benefits of functioning recognition services are becoming more visible

Thank you

For further information:

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Comparing qualifications: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/comparing-vet-qualifications>

EQF: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

NQFs: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/national-qualifications-framework-nqf>

Validation: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>

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