



# **UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning**

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***To implement a high quality validation process: a  
challenge!***

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# Overview

- 1. Recalling UNESCO- Statements 1972, 1996, 2005, 2009**
- 2. The preparation of the UNESCO Guidelines**
- 3. Structure of the questionnaire sent to Member States**
- 4. Definition, concepts and terms used**
- 5. Results from the UIL consultation questions**
- 6. Structure of the guidelines**

## UNESCO- Statements 1972, 1996, 2005, 2009

- *If society involves all of one's life ... And all of society, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of, educational systems 'until we reach the stage of a **learning society** (UNESCO Learning to be, 1972)*
- **Learning throughout life** is a continuous process for each human being of adding to and adapting his or her knowledge and skills, and his or her judgement and capacities for action (UNESCO Delors 1996).
- 33C/Resolution 10 of the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of UNESCO General conference (2005)
- The Belém Framework mandated the UIL to work on **Guidelines** for developing structures and mechanisms for the **recognition of all forms of learning** (Belém Framework for Action 2009)



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## *The Belém Framework for Action,*

called on UNESCO to develop Guidelines on all learning outcomes, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning, so that these may be recognised and validated. Meanwhile, Member States committed themselves to developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition of all forms of learning by establishing equivalency frameworks.

## The preparation of the UNESCO Guidelines

- Organising consultation with Member States;
- 42 Member States providing relevant inputs to a set of consultation questions on the recognition policy and practices.
- Seeking advice of an Expert Group
- Reflecting insights from studies on RVA policy and practices.



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## Consultation questions

1. How are non-formal and informal learning recognised in a country's education and training system?
2. What significance is given to further education and training and progression pathways that take account of informal and non-formal learning, recognise competences, and accompany social and economic integration of individuals?
3. How are informally acquired competences recorded, documented and certified? What instruments and methods such as skills records, portfolios, assessment against standards or assessment are being used?



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## Consultation questions

4. Is a national qualifications framework being adopted as a way of systematising different learning venues, qualifications and certification?
5. What challenges and opportunities are there in translating informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences into formal education requirements via the recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences?
6. Who uses recognition programmes? How is it supporting the integration and empowerment of populations and individuals (low skilled and with low levels of education)?
7. What are the key recommendations on priorities, essential solutions and strategies towards recognising all learning?

## Results from the UIL consultation questions

- 1. Policy and legislative developments**
- 2. Contributions of RVA to educational, social and economic development.**
- 3. Features of best practice models – procedures, methods and instruments?**
- 4. National reference points – standards, qualifications and NQFs**
- 5. Opportunities and challenges**
- 6. Recommendations from the Member States**

## Clarification of key concepts

- UIL endorses the EU understanding of formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- **However**, the definitions of these terms do not suggest a rigid separation between them.



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## Clarification of key concepts

- Recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) refer to the establishment of arrangements to *make visible and value all learning outcomes* including knowledge, skills and competences, against clearly defined and quality assured standards of education and training.
- RVA therefore covers the subsequent dimensions of the *whole process*: identification, documentation, assessment and accreditation of learning outcomes from different settings.
- RVA underlies both the *integration* of non-formal, informal learning and formal learning as well as the *transfer* of knowledge derived from work, family and leisure activities to mainstream education systems. Ideally, such mechanisms should have equivalence with formal qualifications, and should lead progressively to them.



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## Clarification of key concepts

- In line with OECD, UNESCO also considers *recognition* as a broader term than the terms validation and accreditation, as it entails social recognition, i.e. meaning is derived from the way in which recognition (and certification) is viewed in a social context.
- The terms *validation* and *accreditation* cover the more technical procedures for making visible kinds of knowledge that are being kept outside the curriculum or standards development processes, more specifically in the labour market.



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## Clarification of key concepts

- In line with Cedefop, the term *validation* means a process of assessment and recognising a wide range of know-how skills and competences
- *Accreditation* of learning is a process by which individual are awarded credit towards qualifications based on outcomes from non-formal and informal learning. Accreditation is also as process by which the quality of an educational institution as a whole or of a specific education programme is evaluated in order to formally reocognise it as having met certain predetermined minimal criteria of standards.



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## Policy and legislative context

- A distinction is made between:
- Legislation and policies related to lifelong learning generally
- Legislation and policies that secure RVA



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## Policy and legislative context

Lifelong learning policies and legislation

Most EU countries Japan,  
Thailand, Republic of South Korea

Non-formal and informal learning an integrated part of  
education and training system, and education strategy  
papers

Ghana, Nigeria, Japan,  
Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan

Lifelong learning related to non-formal and informal  
education; life-wide; beyond education and training

Thailand



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## Policy and legislative specific to RVA

RVA legislation located in the learning system	European Council Resolution, Norway, Denmark, Czech Republic, France, Hungary , Lithuania, Poland, Chile, Australia, Australia, Germany, Finland, Republic of South Korea, Canada, Mexico Poland and Latvia
RVA subsumed under laws regulating qualifications (VET), NQFs and their regulatory bodies (NQA)	Australia, New Zealand, Mauritius, Portugal, Namibia, Scotland, the UK; South Africa; implementation is focussed on vocational and technical subsectors (Namibia)
No NQFs but regional commissions, professional regulatory bodies; RVA located in learning institutions	USA, Canada,

## Stakeholder interest and drivers of RVA – predominance of industry

Industry Training Boards; Industry training Organisations; Quality Training Frameworks;	Responsible for the implementation of RVA Shift to learning outcomes; shift to occupational sector frameworks ;
Industry	upskilling, skills gaps , HRM, enterprise bargaining requirements ; Building motivation of employees;
TVET sub-sector	Workforce development, competitiveness, social inclusion
Regulated professions	RVA at the interface between economic policies and the labour market
Professional organisations in the informal economy, working with ministries	Burkina Faso, Benin,
Trade unions	South Africa



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## Stakeholder interest in RVA – Public Authorities

<i>Education and training system</i>	RVA key tool for creating a diversified, open and flexible educational system
<i>Agencies</i> in each subsector of the education system	
<i>Non-formal basic education departments</i> ; open learning schools and colleges	Myanmar; Pakistan; Thailand, Access to basic education and equivalencies Emphasis on equivalence/credit transfer of non-formal education to formal); accelerated learning.
<i>Comprehensive adult continuing education and training</i>	The fourth pillar of the education and training system; less regulated; more pluralistic; competition of training providers;
Levels-based QFs	Shifted the conceptualisation of 'equivalence' such that it is based on a common scale of core competences/abilities/attributes .



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## Stakeholder interest and drivers of RVA – Shared responsibility

<p>A <i>legislative basis</i>, such as qualifications acts, establishes <i>new bodies/agencies</i> at different levels, according to the sectors of the education and training system.</p>	<p>These bodies operate in line with the broad national and regional policies for promoting a lifelong learning society</p>
<p>Division of responsibilities at the <i>national and provisional levels</i>.</p>	<p>regulation, provision, financing and support of learning activities vary widely</p>
<p>Diversification of RVA procedures between <i>state authorities</i> and <i>private stakeholders</i></p>	<p>discussing a common framework revolving around the inclusion of different levels of recognition, the roles of the different agents, the inclusion of quality assurance and the training of experts</p>



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## Variety of approaches to RVA's contribution to educational, economic and social development

### Educational context

- to pave pathways to further education and training and qualifications
- In some countries RVA is used for creating a open *diversified and less rigid education and training system (Africa)*
- Non-formal and informal learning has been used to obtain credits with possibilities to transfer to credentials of formal *basic education (Asia)*
- Further education and training a new site for translating non-formal and informal learning into formal *higher education requirements and qualifications (Europe)*



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## How countries use RVA in the context of workforce development and employability

- Trend towards recognising *vocational skills* and towards making a distinction between academic and vocational systems and overt attempts at shifting the control of vocational education away from providers to employers and industry (developing countries).
- Recognising the human capital in cultural (museums, libraries), volunteer work and community development sectors (Japan)
- Competence passport by the TVET agency used as a passport for employment and employability (the Philippines); foreign employers are looking for such documents.
- new standards as well as competence frameworks are focusing on industry and enterprise (Uzbekistan)
- competences demanded on the labour market are matched to competences profiles of employment-seeking persons (France, Austria, Brazil, Chile, France); obtaining trade certificate (Norway); externenprüfung (Germany) .
- labour competency frameworks established (Chile, Mexico); more flexibility in working life



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## How countries use RVA to promote social inclusion and social empowerment of marginalised

- equipping **greater numbers** with higher education degrees (Australia, New Zealand, EU countries)
- **moving beyond illiteracy** and towards further education (Ecuador )
- taking account of **unrecognised** lifelong and life-wide learning ( informal economy)
- aiming specifically at **closing the gap in education inequality** (social targeting of marginalised groups)



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## Best practice features of RVA processes

- Recognition systems show an increased understanding and use of *portfolio methods*
- *Quality guidelines* are developed
- *Benchmarks* are developed/used that allow the candidate to succeed, at least to some extent
- *A coherent system of credit transfers* are developed that serve as a measure of non-formal and informal learning
- A clear and easy to follow *staged process of assessment and accreditation* is developed and used.



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## Best practice features of RVA processes

- Professional guider and counselors are identified and trained to promote RVA and support candidates
- The cooperation between the individual, education and training, and industry and voluntary organisation is also of central importance to recognition
- Both formative assessment and summative accreditation is promoted and used.
- different methods and instruments are combined in creative and flexible ways – workplace assessment, portfolio, and traditional test methods
- Third party role in assessment.

## Challenges

- Many countries still lack of *national policies* which recognise the contribution and equal status of non-formal and informal learning, in comparison with formal learning
- High costs
- Lack of evidence-based data on outcomes
- Difficulties arise because of specificities of general and vocational and of sub-sectors, as well as with regard to linking skills standards and qualifications
- Difficulties in developing a learning outcomes-based NQF



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## Challenges

- Out-datedness of existing curricula and lack of responsiveness to the needs of learners and employers;
- How to equip the education and training institutions for them to initiate the RVA exercise and start offering opportunities to potential candidates on a continuous basis', in spite of the definite (Norway)
- How to determine equivalencies (Thailand).
- Low level of awareness, understanding and technical expertise



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## Challenges

- Educators, instructional managers, facilitators lack abilities to assess non-formal learning (Thailand)
- How to ensure a transition from system to user level (Denmark)
- Cultural barriers: Severe resistance by many tertiary institutions because of the traditionalist approach in education, theoretical knowledge will be compromised



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- **Challenges of recognising unrecognised learning**
- non-formal programmes that have more potential to be recognised within formal systems than is currently being exploited.
- Non-formal and informal parallel education and/or training programmes that have limited reference to formal education and training.
- Indigenous knowledge systems and informal learning; these could be made a part of non-formal education programmes

## Recommendations

- Need to gain high level commitment by policy makers and institutional leaders;
- Facilitate communication and collaboration among all stakeholders at national, regional or sub-regional level;
- Raise awareness to highlight the benefits of opportunities of RVA to learners, employees, people not in the education or employment, and employers,



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## Recommendations

- Link RVA to national curricula and qualifications as the currency of learning;
- Speed up the processes RVA for underprivileged people who lack educational opportunities.
- Strengthen existing educational and training institutions in their entirety;
- Develop learning outcomes-based NQF and curricula

## Recommendations from Member States

- Systematic evaluation and results-based monitoring of RVA
  - Develop RVA procedures, standards, assessment and evaluation instruments and techniques that can be trusted
  - Provide high quality RVA information and support for candidates
  - The need for professional skills and capability of staff in the area of RVA provision and the need to share successful case studies for use by RVA staff..



## Structure of the Guidelines

1. Note by the ADG Education
2. Introduction
3. Vision
4. Purposes
5. Principles
6. Suggestions on key areas of action at national level
7. UNESCO Commitments

## Vision

- The RVA of non-formal and informal learning is a key lever in making lifelong learning a reality. It makes visible and gives value to the hidden and unrecognised competences that individuals have obtained through various means and in different phases of their lives. Valuing and recognising these learning outcomes may significantly improve individuals' self-esteem and well-being, motivate them to further learning, and strengthen their labour market position. RVA may help to integrate broader sections of the population into an open and flexible education and training system and build inclusive societies.



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## Purposes

Propose principles and mechanisms that can assist Member States in developing or improving structures and procedures to recognise all forms of learning, particularly the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

- to **advocate** for the importance of recognising the value of non-formal and informal learning;
- to develop a **common understanding** of RVA and outline the major considerations in developing a national RVA system;
- to assist Member States in **developing tools, standards and mechanisms** to identify, document, validate and recognise the learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning; and
- to create an international framework and platform to facilitate and ensure continuous **dialogue on RVA** among Member States.

## Principles

- *Ensure equity in access to learning opportunities.* Every individual should have the right to access and engage in any form of learning suited to his/ her needs, and have their learning outcomes made visible and valued.
- *Promote the equal value of learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal learning.* Competences that every individual has accumulated through non-formal and informal learning should be treated on a par with those that are obtained through formal learning.
- *Improve flexibility and openness of formal education and training.* Education and training systems must consider diverse forms of learning and assessment, taking into account learners' needs and experiences.

## Principles

- *Assure quality for the entire RVA process. It is imperative that criteria and procedures for assessing and validating non-formal and informal learning are relevant, reliable, fair and transparent.*
- *Strengthen partnerships among all stakeholders. It is important to emphasise a shared responsibility from the design to the implementation and evaluation of the RVA system.*



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## **Suggestions on key areas of action at the national level**

1. Establishing RVA as a key component of a national lifelong learning strategy
2. Developing RVA systems that are accessible to all
3. Making RVA integral to education and training systems
4. Creating a coordinated national structure involving all stakeholders
5. Building the capacities of RVA personnel
6. Designing sustainable funding mechanisms

## UNESCO commitments

1. Collecting and disseminating information and successful practice in the development of RVA systems.
2. Facilitating policy dialogue, networking and sharing of experience between Member States through peer-learning activities and cooperation among key national stakeholders in different regions.
3. Deepening conceptual understandings and learning from different perspectives through collaborative international research activity in the field of RVA.
4. Responding to the request of Member States to provide technical assistance, capacity-building to key national stakeholders and practitioners.