



UPGRADING VALIDATION

Assistance For Introducing / Strengthening
Validation In The Voluntary Sector



PART 1

HOW TO BENEFIT FROM SUCCESS

COLOPHON

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1. FOREWORD

This brochure is the first in a series of 4 publications to encourage and support organizations in the voluntary sector to make validation part of their policy: support their volunteers to become aware of the benefits of volunteering for their personal and/or professional development, and how to take steps towards formal validation of the skills and competences they develop by volunteering.

The brochure is based on experiences with three successful validation tools, successful in the sense of the number of volunteers who are using it: Passeport Bénévole (France), VoluntPass (Romania), and the Europass Certificate for Volunteers (The Netherlands). We have looked at these tools from three perspectives: local (The Netherlands), regional (Romania), and national (France).

The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) contributed by reflecting and giving feedback from the European perspective. CEV is a member of (a.o.) the EQF Advisory Group and the Europass Advisory Group.

By analysing the success factors of these three, we provide organizations with recommendations for their own validation policy.

2. INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is widely acknowledged as an outstanding source of learning, and an important contributor to personal and professional development.

Volunteering is an element of social innovation that can mobilize people's creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources.

At the societal level, it can be a tool for the empowerment of people, especially for disadvantaged groups in society. At the individual level, volunteering can be a means for citizens to acquire important soft and transversal skills, to play a useful role, and to connect or reconnect with society.

Volunteering is understood to be a driving force behind social cohesion and personal development. The European Council encouraged the 'promotion of the role of volunteering as a form of non-formal and informal learning contributing to obtaining new skills and competences and improved employability in each and every age and social group'.

Since the "Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning" we have seen many projects dealing with validation in the voluntary sector. However, it seems that, so far, this doesn't lead to the structural use of validation

tools and -methods. Apparently, something more is necessary to make validation an integrated part of volunteering.

We expect that this brochure will make it easier for volunteering organizations to make "validation of skills and competences" part of their volunteer policy. The brochure can also be used by volunteer organizations as a "mirror" to look at their validation system/arrangement and to see options to improve this. This gives an impulse to the awareness of the value and importance of a validation policy in the organization.

The target groups of this brochure are:

- volunteering organizations
- volunteer centers, or other structures that support volunteering organizations.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE SELECTED TOOLS

In this chapter all tools are introduced shortly. What is the tool based on, how does it work, and why has it been made? Also, the strengths and weaknesses are mentioned.

3.1 PASSEPORT BÉNÉVOLE - FRANCE

In France the Passeport Bénévole from France Bénévolat is used as an approach and a tool to enhance the value of experiential skills. The passport will follow the volunteer throughout his/her volunteering career to demonstrate how he/she is developing through his/her experience. In its implementation by organizations it is also a tool for the recognition of voluntary commitment.

The Passeport Bénévole shows the roles the volunteer undertakes and the trainings that he has participated in, and is meant to accredit the skills and competences developed through volunteering.

The Passeport Bénévole consists of a set of records containing:

- Details about the individual;
- Details on the volunteering assignment (description, skills developed, any special notes);
- Details of any certificates awarded by the organization (including a description of the achievement, skills developed, any special notes);
- A schedule of all the volunteering roles undertaken by the individual;

- A record of any training, qualifications or continuing professional development undertaken by the volunteer.

The need for a tool to validate voluntary work has three main reasons.

1. The 'exorbitant' weight, in France, of diplomas.
2. A 2002 law on the 'Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE)' which makes it possible to obtain all or part of a diploma on proof of skills acquired in a professional or voluntary activity.
3. A low awareness and representation that volunteering organizations are qualifying, or even highly qualifying, places.

STRENGTHS

- The Passeport Bénévole was first designed for job seekers, but it soon appeared to be of interest to everyone, vulnerable and non-vulnerable alike. So, target groups are also young people who are totally excluded (NEETs), people with disabilities, migrants, and people in detention.
- The design of the Passeport Bénévole is based on the Quebec Port Folio, an already existing tool. That similarity helps for a smooth implementation.
- It was presented to large associative networks that are members of France Bénévolat (80), who accepted its idea and principle.
- Many texts and internal and external supports made the difference between 'valorisation' and 'validation' understandable.
- The tool is easy to use for the volunteer (with help of the organization).
- The tool can be a first step in the recognition of skills and competences.

- The implementation of the volunteer passport has been made rather easy thanks to articles, power points and a website (www.passeport-benevole.org) and presentations which were given to organizations familiar with the tool.
- This tool helps volunteers to better identify skills and to verbalize them. It gives volunteers a good feeling about themselves.

The Passeport Bénévole shows the roles the volunteer undertakes and the trainings that he has participated in, and is meant to accredit the skills and competences developed through volunteering.

WEAKNESSES

- The law on Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) is very innovative, but still not enough understood and not enough implemented, both by companies and organizations but it is growing rather quickly. It took time to get the Passeport Bénévole accepted in the procedures and jury of VAE, and it was difficult to get it accepted by the large French public structures.
- It is difficult to get acceptance that the Passeport Bénévole in fact is not a “certificate of competence”, but a tool that recognises competences, that can contribute to giving a certificate to a volunteer.
- It is necessary that organizations recognise themselves as places of qualification and skills development and that employers also see organizations as a place for qualification and skill development.
- For the director of the organization who acts as a tutor and evaluator, it might be difficult to be fully neutral when evaluating the volunteer.
- The success very much depends on the organizations that have to take up

the issue of recognition of their volunteers. They have to be aware of the importance of recognition for their volunteers.



3.2 VOLUNTPASS – ROMANIA

In Romania the VoluntPass is used as a tool developed by Volum Federation. VoluntPass is used for validation of competences of volunteers, of 15 years of age and older, who have been engaged in project activities of at least 120 working hours within one organization. Validating competences of volunteers is important, in this way volunteer's competences are recognised by society while they truly are equipped with competences for life. It is mandatory for organizations to issue the volunteering certificate if a volunteer fulfils the conditions and asks for it.

VoluntPass is based on:

- Identification number of the volunteering contracts as a proof of the belongingness;
- Job description to point out the responsibilities;
- Timesheets as proof for the time invested (minimum 120 hours required);
- Volunteer's activity report for identifying the elements of the activity;
- Occupational framework for identifying general and specific competences;
- National qualification framework to establish the level of qualifications;
- Constant evaluations with the coordinator to guide the learning and reflection process.

Why VoluntPass?

There was an explicit need to make a more stable framework of recognition and validation of competences acquired through volunteering. Volunteers of all ages need to be able to prove their professional experience and competences.

The volunteering certificate is also necessary to increase the employment rate of the volunteers and their self-confidence.

STRENGTHS

- VoluntPass uses the National Qualifications Framework as a reference, so the document can reflect any volunteering experience and show proofs on it, so the competences can be valuable in other contexts.
- The fact that volunteers receive the VoluntPass brings self-confidence, as well as trust of others.
- Volunteers want to receive the VoluntPass certificate, and are therefore motivated to fulfil their 120 hours (and develop competences and later on show the certificate as a proof on the job market).
- Once the volunteers start the reflection process and understand how the validation works, they become more and more aware of its positive impact on their personal and professional development.

Validating competences of volunteers is important, in this way volunteer's competences are recognised by society while they truly are equipped with competences for life.

- VoluntPass is attractive in a society which still values papers/diplomas quite a lot.
- VoluntPass is open to everyone, vulnerable or not.
- Some organizations involved of a third party, a specialist who could review the issuing process, this makes the validation process more objective.

WEAKNESSES

- The VoluntPass is issued in a subjective manner, being done by the coordinator of the volunteer.
- For the coordinator it might be difficult to be fully neutral when issuing VoluntPasses for volunteers in the same activities.
- The tool needs to be promoted more. Not enough organizations are using it or know about it.
- Organizations and coordinators need to be trained on how to use the certificate, how to support volunteers in assessing their learning and gathering proofs, how to facilitate the process of understanding competences acquired and how to formulate the learning outcomes. There is a need for expertise of volunteers' managers in assessment and recognition of competences.
- Organizations need to motivate the volunteers to be involved in long term volunteering activities. For volunteers who aren't motivated, the coordinators need to initiate the process. The volunteers are somehow not informed, or choose not to deepen their knowledge.
- It is challenging to link the competences gained with a particular occupational standard from the National Qualifications Framework.
- It's challenging for organizations to put in place a structure that can support the process of validation: constant monitoring of the volunteers' participation, regular meetings, supervision, support and reflection opportunities.
- Extended research within users (volunteers and organizations) is necessary to testify VoluntPass success.

3.3 EUROPASS CERTIFICATE FOR VOLUNTEERS – THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, the Europass Certificate for Volunteers is used to help volunteers explain what they have learned during a period of voluntary activities. It gives a clear and objective description of the work carried out. It can show employees evidence of experience, can be a stepping stone to a paid job, and it helps volunteers gain awareness about their own competences.

The Europass Certificate for Volunteers doesn't have standard questions to answer; it is an open certificate, in which competences can be filled in linked to a certain theme (i.e. computer skills, social skills etc.). Vrijwilligerscentrale Nijmegen first used it to record competences of volunteers with a greater distance to the labour market, because of (a history in) psychological disorders and/or drug addiction, but the target group has been extended to anyone who wants to record their competences in a certificate to make use of during his/her career.

The Europass Certificate for Volunteers consists of:

- Details about the individual;
- Details about the organization;
- The period of volunteering work;
- The type of volunteering work/activities;
- A description of the skills and competences gained.

The employer appoints the experience gained by the volunteer and highlights his or her qualities. The document is signed by a sending partner (volunteer agency) and a hosting partner (where the voluntary work takes place).

Why Europass Certificate for Volunteers?

The need for this specific tool came from a local volunteering centre. They wanted to use the Europass Mobility document (an already existing tool for validating competences) with their volunteers.

The main goal for validating volunteering is that a lot of volunteers can use the certificate in their career; the recognition of work experience and basic skills can be essential. Furthermore, organizations see it as a great way of thanking/appreciating their volunteers.

STRENGTHS

- It can be used by everyone, it is freely available and free of charge, and it is recognised/licensed by the European Commission.
- The Europass Certificate for Volunteers is a great way to record competences which cannot be shown through diplomas or previous work experience. The certificate helps to explain to possible new employers what he/she has been doing in voluntary work and what he/she has learned.
- It's a great tool for young people, who haven't had the opportunity to build

Europass can show employees evidence of experience, can be a steppingstone to a paid job, and it helps volunteers gain awareness about their own competences.

- an extensive cv with multiple work experiences; it can be a useful addition to their school diplomas.
- It is a great tool for refugees, they mostly have to start over when arriving in a new country. Diplomas from their home country have to be validated first to make them comparable to Dutch diplomas.
- It gives more self-confidence to the volunteers.
- A conversation between the Voluntary Centre (as a third party), the coordinator and the volunteer make sure that everyone agrees with what is stated on the certificate.
- There is a questionnaire available to help coordinators fill in the Europass Certificate for Volunteers.

WEAKNESSES

- The reputation of the Europass Certificate for Volunteers is not what it should be. Many organizations and/or volunteers are not aware of its existence. It needs to be more visible to both the volunteer and the organizations that work with volunteers.
- Organizations are not yet convinced of the added value of the Europass Certificate for Volunteers.
- It can be challenging for the organization (where the volunteer is active) to complete the fields in the Europass Certificate for Volunteers, because the certificate doesn't have standard questions to answer. Guiding questions will help organizations in that struggle.
- The name 'Europass' doesn't signal what it is exactly. For example, some expect it to be some kind of plastic pass for volunteers which can be used to obtain things, trips or discount.

- It is necessary that the organizations have someone who sees the added value of the Europass Certificate for Volunteers for their volunteers, and is prepared to make an effort to make it successful within their organization. Subsequently, this employee needs some hours which can be spent on the Europass Certificate for Volunteers (i.e. the organizations needs money to employ the employee).
- Insufficient funds.
- Not everyone who received a Europass Certificate for Volunteers has also used it for example for getting a job, starting your own company, going a different course. Employers are not interested in volunteering and don't recognize the Europass Certificate for Volunteers.
- More financial support from the local government is necessary, therefore they have to believe that it has significant value for volunteers to get their competences recognized.



4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Volunteers need support to get their competences validated. Most of them are willing to follow the whole process, but don't take the initiative. The hosting organization has to be leading. Certificates/recognition/validation gives volunteers more self-confidence and trust from others.

A special moment where you receive the certificate makes you feel special, but it also motivates others to finish their process.

In this chapter we give recommendations in three categories: hosting organizations, the tool itself, and government. We think these recommendations are important in every country and for every validation tool. The recommendations are based on the questionnaires and best practices of the three countries.

HOSTING ORGANISATIONS

- Need to be convinced that the validation of their volunteers is fundamental and indispensable, they have to believe in the benefits of validating volunteering work.
- Need to be convinced that the validation of skills and competences acquired by their volunteers is fundamental and indispensable, they have to believe in the benefits of validating learning outcomes from volunteering.
- Need to be aware that they are places of skills development and play an important role in helping volunteers to validate their skills.

- Need to be willing to spend time and effort in validation (follow a training, motivate volunteers, paying attention to the process, constant evaluation, work monitoring etc.)
- Have to be leading in the process of validation of competences of the volunteers.

THE TOOL ITSELF

- It is useful to choose a design for your tool that is comparable to something that is already common.
- The tool needs visibility for both volunteers and employees (they need to know that the tool exists, a good name also helps).
- The tool should adapt to European Qualification Framework/National Qualification Framework, i.e. it should lead to validation levels that correspond to the levels of those frameworks.
- The tool should be free of charge or very cheap, and not too time consuming.
- The tool should motivate potential volunteers to get involved, and current volunteers to stay dedicated and committed to their activities.
- The tool should be available for everyone, people of all ages, with or without disadvantages, vulnerable or not.

GOVERNMENT

- Financial support from the (local) government is necessary to carry out the process.

- It is good to have laws on validation but for the tool itself a bottom-up approach makes sure that organizations can work with the tool and are more involved. The organizations have to promote the tool they made/chose to the government.
- Certificates can have a lot of value in a country, but then the certificates have to be common to everyone, volunteers/employers and the government need to see the added value.



5. NEXT STEPS

This brochure is the first in a series of 4.

The first 3 are on basic level, for organisations that do not have a validation arrangement for their volunteers, or want to improve that arrangement.

Number 4 is on advanced level, for organisations that are already offering a validation arrangement to their volunteers, but want to improve the transferability from volunteers skills and competences to the labour market, with a special focus on the benefits for disadvantaged groups in society.

We expect that these 4 publications:

- Will make it easier for volunteering organisations to include "validation of skills and competences" in their volunteer policy;
- Will make it easier for volunteers to become aware of the value of validation as part of their volunteer work, to benefit from this for their position on the labour market and/or in society, and for their personal development;
- Will make it easier for volunteer centres, or other support structures, to encourage volunteering organisations to offer validation arrangements to their volunteers.

THE NEXT EDITIONS WILL BE:

STEP BY STEP ROADMAP FOR VALIDATION

– TO BE PUBLISHED IN JANUARY 2021

The step by step roadmap will show the way for the volunteer to get his/her skills and competences validated, from the moment of choosing of, and applying for, a volunteer job, until the moment of certification of his skills and competences, and using this certification for education, employability, personal growth, integration in society, or taking next steps in the voluntary sector.

VALIDATION SUPPORT MANUAL FOR VOLUNTEER CENTRES

– TO BE PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2021

The manual provides guidance to the organization to introduce and implement validation in their volunteering policy, and gives suggestions for workshops, peer learning activities, and other educational methods that support the volunteers in their validation process.

DRAFT VOCABULARY AND CATEGORIES FOR THE MOST RELEVANT SOFT/TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

– TO BE PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2021

A guide to help volunteer organizations to connect better the different soft and transversal skills that are identified as the most important for the labour market, and life-long learning in general, to the varied learning outcomes from different volunteer roles.

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