Validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in Poland

In Poland, as in other European countries, the need for a systemic approach to the validation and certification of competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learning is recognized. Intensive work on changes in this area of education concerns not only the development of a system for endorsing, recognizing, and transferring learning outcomes but also the organization and standardization of the terminology used. The initiative of the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) 2030 aims to increase efficiency in recognizing, validating, and certifying learning outcomes, regardless of how they were obtained. The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System, introduced in 2016, lays the foundation for this process, introducing tools such as the eight-level Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Integrated Qualifications Register (IQR), which are intended to ensure the quality of awarded qualifications, recognize the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and enable the comparison of qualifications obtained in Poland with qualifications in other European Union countries.

The basic principle of the validation process is to check whether an individual has the knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with the description of a given qualification, with an emphasis on the independence of the validation process from the learning process. Validation helps both learners, by allowing them to verify information about the skills necessary to obtain a given qualification and obtain a certificate recognizable in EU countries, and employers, by enabling them to reliably confirm the skills of employees or job candidates. The validation process includes the identification of achievements, documentation of achievements, verification, and certification. In Poland, there is not yet a single coherent system for confirming learning outcomes in non-formal education and informal learning, but existing solutions are applied in various industries and associated with different practices and validation procedures. Some of these solutions have been functioning for years, others are innovative or in the pilot phase. These actions are undertaken, among others, as part of the "Chance - new opportunities for adults" program.

The Integrated Qualifications System is intended to ensure not only the quality of awarded qualifications but also the recognition of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, the accumulation and recognition of achievements, information about qualifications available in Poland, and the comparison of qualifications obtained in the country with qualifications in other European Union countries. The Polish Qualifications Framework, describing levels of qualifications in terms of knowledge, skills, and social competencies, allows for the comparison of qualifications obtained in Poland with European qualifications frameworks, which is key to increasing educational and professional mobility.