

**POLICY BRIEF**

# **Policy brief on statistics about VPL**



Nordic Network for  
Adult Learning

# INTRODUCTION

This policy document has been developed by the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) to emphasize the importance of being able **to follow up and quantify the validation activities conducted in the Nordic countries**, as well as **to enable research and impact studies** that can provide a basis for political priorities.

## THE SURVEY

The initiative to examine the existence of statistics in the Nordics regarding VPL or VNFIL (validation of non-formal and informal learning) according to the EU's definition was taken by NVL's expert group for VPL in 2022.

A form with an Excel matrix has been sent out to all Nordic countries including the self-governing areas of the Faroe Islands, Åland islands and Greenland. All countries have responded and reported on their national arrangements, though the preconditions vary on how to deliver and interpret the requested data.

The data has been divided into two parts, relating to the context and purpose of validation, and what type of statistics has been produced and who is responsible for this.



# THE RESULTS

According to the survey, the individual's main purposes for VPL can be said to be three:

- Access to education at the right level
- Shortening of education through exemptions
- Access to the labour market through employment.

In most Nordic countries, VPL for the labour market purposes is closely **linked with formal vocational training**, and then it is not a separate track. Sweden stands out in this regard, where the social partners are often the principals of VPL models outside of the formal education, which is also noticeable in the increasing number of "non-formal" qualifications in the Swedish reference framework for qualifications, SeQF.

**Formal learning** – from the equivalent of upper secondary education (EQF 4) to higher education (EQF 6) – is generally the focus of VPL throughout the Nordics, though validation is not always used for both admission and exemptions. It also appears that VPL within higher education has not reached as far as for example within upper secondary education. This leads to the assumption that the recommendation on VNFIL, that all European Union countries should have arrangements for validation established by the end of 2018, has still not been fully accomplished.

In the case of **adult basic education** (EQF 2–3), the picture is more difficult to interpret, as validation is often integrated into a flora of interventions for socio-economically vulnerable groups. The aim is often to counteract exclusion and the interventions are designed to lead to entry into the labour market or further studies. Greenland is a good example of this where great efforts are being made, but it can be a challenge to discern what is formal validation in the EU definition sense.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The NVL expert group for VPL recommends all Nordic countries, including the self-governing areas, to:

- **Follow up on VPL for all the primary purposes** – for access to education at the right level, for exemptions to shorten education and for labour market matching to enable individuals to apply for jobs that match their actual skills.
- **Follow up VPL within formal education as well as the validation that takes place in other contexts** – including secondary education, vocational education, university education, labour market measures, liberal adult education, industry sector validation, etc.
- **Follow up on VPL at the individual level** that enables impact studies and comparisons with employment statistics, socio-economic background factors, social costs and private finances.
- **Appoint the authority responsible for statistics** and assign it the task of being responsible for the collection of the above-mentioned statistics and making statistics available for research and impact studies.

## EU's recommendations on VPL

The European Union has developed the following recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2012:

With a view to offering individuals the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned outside formal education and training, the member states should have in place arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which enable individuals to:

- have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, including, where applicable, through open educational resources;
- obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences.

→ Read more about the recommendations [here](#).



### About NVL's expert group for VPL

The expert group for validation of prior learning (VPL) represent central organisations involved in the development of validation in all Nordic countries as well as Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. The network has existed since 2005 when the Nordic Council of Ministers put focus on recognition and validation of prior learning (VPL) as one of the priorities within the Nordic adult education cooperation.

# THE EXISTENCE OF STATISTICS

When it comes to statistics and follow-up, the picture becomes more differentiated. Iceland has e.g. statistics that can be broken down at the individual level, which can be linked to other statistics to make impact studies, with the exception of higher education where VPL has not yet been fully established. In comparison, Åland islands has no statistics at all on VPL, but as a result of the Nordic review, the Åland Statistics Institute (ÅSUB) has been assigned task to prepare statistics collection.

There is a newly awakened interest in statistics and follow-up of the VPL area within the Nordic region, where Sweden with its new legislation can be an example, but there is a long way to go to have a functioning system that delivers high-quality data for follow-up and effect studies. In most countries, however, there is an authority or body with designated statistical responsibility.

A possible factor driving the development could be the EU's 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the EU's skills agenda for a competitive and resilient labour market. The member countries face major challenges, both when it comes to strengthening the position of the individual and making use of their educating smarter and more cost-effectively. VPL is an important tool for this development, but we still struggle to calculate the societal costs and benefits in order to be able to take well-informed decisions.

It is usually said that, what we measure and follow up, tends to grow and develop. On the other hand, what we do not measure and follow up, can remain invisible. This could be a partial explanation for the incomplete implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning five years after the EU recommendation should have been operationalized.

**By starting to produce statistics and providing a basis for evaluation and impact studies, the implementation of VPL can also likely be speeded up and investments be made, where they are most beneficial.** Plenty of success stories indicate great gains from validation for individuals, companies and society.

Now is the **time to produce facts** that hold up to scientific scrutiny and that lead to political priorities and decisions.

