
What is validation in a volunteering context?

Definition of validation of competences:

- Validation is a process where demonstrated and/or documented evidence of a volunteer's competences or achievements are assessed against a commonly agreed set of criteria to assure their quality matches these criteria, and are then documented. Validation documents can include certificates, badges, social media endorsements among many others.

Why validate volunteers' competences?

- Volunteers' competences exist, whether they are validated or not. The validation process should be undertaken for a possible need. Reasons for validating exist on both a personal and a wider level.
MICRO LEVEL (volunteer): sense of achievement, usefulness in studies and finding employment
MACRO LEVEL (society at large): wider recognition of volunteering, smoother transitions within studies and in the labour market
- The volunteers' needs for validation should be a starting point. Validation is only useful when it is meaningful to the volunteer. There are many senior volunteers, for example, who do not need certificates to show to prospective employers. Their achievements mainly serve their sense of personal fulfilment, which is just as valuable. Many recent studies have proved that volunteering is associated with a greater sense of happiness, trust and well-being, which all benefit both the individual volunteer and the community.
- The actual 'validation of the validation' is action: the ability to get the things done that you claim you have the skills for. Certificates and other forms of validation exist to certify that someone can do something. They should include explanation of validation criteria to increase their transparency.

Who should validate a volunteer's competences?

- In principle, closeness between the validator and the learner is desirable, as validation from one's own organisation has the greatest meaning to the volunteer. The other point is that when the validator is close to the learner, validation is often based on authentically observed skills instead of it relying only on documentation.
- On the other hand, the validator needs to be credible also in the eyes of the outside world. It is likely that a small voluntary organization is unknown among employers.
- There are ways to overcome this problem: first, validation by a small organisation could be endorsed by a larger umbrella NGO, for example. This, however, requires common criteria. Another way is to raise awareness about the skills of volunteers.



- The credibility of the validating organisation is also enhanced if they have relevant expertise among their ranks (for example, an educator who can validate the competences of a volunteer trainer).
- Self-assessment and peer assessment should also be explored as credible methods of validation in the volunteering context.

What skills to validate?

- Volunteers learn many competences in their activities that can be validated. Some are practical. Think about, for example, the treasurer of a sports club. He or she has to be able to manage money and to keep the accounts according to law. The set of skills can be demonstrated quite easily.
- On the other hand, also soft skills accumulate in volunteering activity to a great extent. They are, however, harder to recognise and validate. They are an area of skills that are not taught at schools, but are important in many aspects: they are linked to interpersonal trust and also in great demand in the labour market.

Which criteria should be used?

- In the European context, there are common criteria that can be used to support the validation of volunteers' competences: the European Qualification framework (EQF), The European key competences for lifelong learning and so on. There are also many tools such as the Europass that can be used in the documentation of competences.
- The actual competences acquired by volunteers may not always correspond to a specific EQF level or they may exist simultaneously at multiple levels. In addition, for validation of prior learning in, for example, tertiary education institutions, the skills often have to correspond to the institution's often rigid curriculum. They rarely allow an individual learner's achievements to be the basis of accreditation.
- Therefore, the key competences for lifelong learning should be endorsed as the framework for validating volunteers' competences. As Recommendation [2006/962/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council states: "*Key competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.*"
- As concerns both the practical and soft skills or competences that volunteers acquire, they include elements of many of the key competence areas: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical or scientific competences, digital competences, learning to learn, social and civic competences, taking initiative and cultural competences. If we think about the example of the sports club treasurer, their numeracy skills can develop in managing accounts, as well as their digital competences if they use a computer. They have to communicate the financial results to the club's board and other stakeholders. They need to understand how the legal framework regulating non-profit organizations works, and they need to be able to take initiative on financial matters and so on.