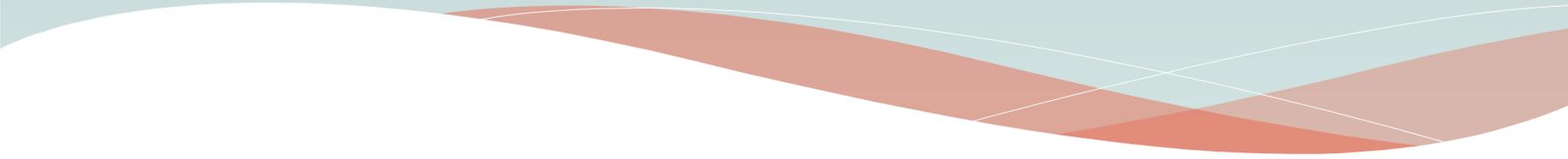# Mutual Recognition of Skills and Qualifications across Member States

Concepts and Tools

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Trinomics

Some 'theory': concepts of mutual recognition

Types of recognition

Focus & Purpose

* Definitions vary
* Focus on skills/ qualifications/ training?
* Recognition for **employment** or further study?

Types (for employment)

* **Public and formal** → recognition by a 'competent authority' → certificates, diplomas, etc.
* **Private and de facto** → recognition by stakeholders, e.g. employers, using certificates etc **and** other information

Recognition for entry to regulated and non-regulated occupations

Regulated occupations

* Need for formally validated qualifications to enter these occupations
* Depends on MS, but in general, higher skilled occupations tend to be regulated
* Performance during recruitment process important too (as in non-regulated occupations) to assess competences not covered by the qualifications

Non-regulated occupations

* Specific qualifications may not be necessary for entry
* Other information just as important as qualifications
* But some qualifications may be widely accepted as prerequisites (even if not required in regulated occupations)

Mutual recognition issues across Member States

Public, formal recognition

* Qualifications from one country not automatically recognised in another country
* Solutions proposed at EU level + by sectors (bilateral, multilateral)

Private, de facto recognition

* Solution by employers to the problem of lack of formal recognition
* Large industries/ multinationals → industry standards, global recruitment and training methods
* Individual employers → own methods

Obstacles to recognition

In the education, training and labour market

* **lack of equivalence** between general/academic and vocational education
* **different types and levels** of education and training
* weak **social dialogue**
* **weak motivation** on the part of employers (e.g. due to "poaching" of employees)
* qualifications **not** valued by employers as **reliable indicators of skills** for particular jobs
* perceptions of inherent difficulties in recognising **transversal skills** compared to technical ones in a reliable way

Related to existing mobility tools

* perceptions of **cost** involved in development and implementation
* lack of **awareness**
* **passive** implementation of tools rather than active encouragement of their use
* **lack of integration** of **European tools** (they have evolved over time and may lack coherence)

Other issues: types of mobility

Transnational mobility can be:

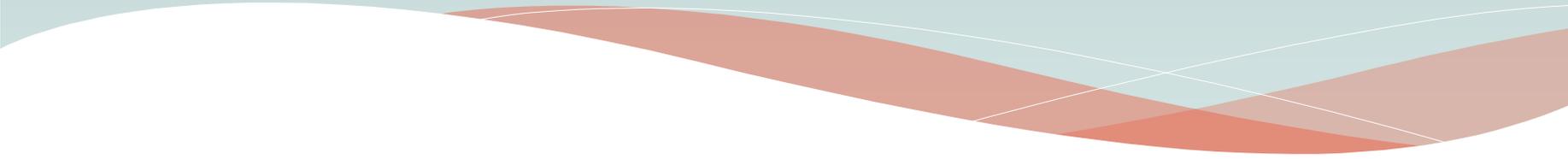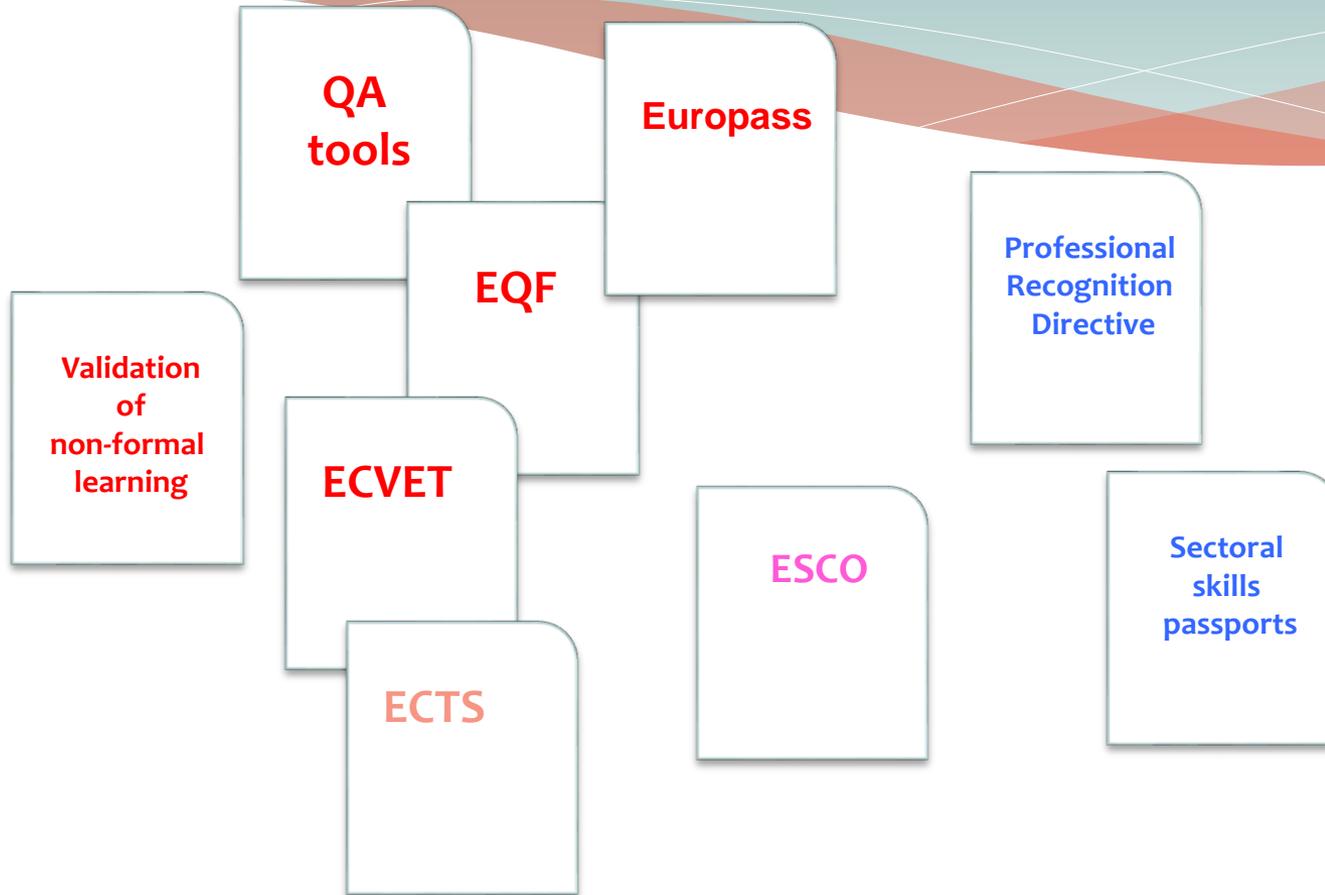| Permanent	Temporary (short/medium term)	Daily cross-border commuting
• Potential need for formal recognition (in the longer term)	• Formal or de facto recognition → depends on the occupation	• Potential need for both types of recognition procedure (in non-regulated de facto prevails)

→ Mobility affects recognition practices

Current European tools

Overview of European Tools

QA tools

Europass

EQF

Professional Recognition Directive

Validation of non-formal learning

ECVET

ESCO

Sectoral skills passports

ECTS

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

* A set of 8 common levels against which national qualifications frameworks can be referenced
* Based on learning outcomes – knowledge, skills and competences
* Possible to compare qualifications between pairs of countries on the Europa website (so far for 14 countries)
* Most ambiguity about Level 5 on the EQF → between the end of upper secondary education and training and higher education
* There is a European level EQF Advisory Group, involved in referencing, and also EQF National Coordination Points

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (in higher education) (ECTS) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

* 2 different credit systems introduced:
  * in higher education vs VET
* Both systems → common principles to award and transfer credits between programmes (and between countries)
* A great variation between MS and their application of ECVET principles in their qualification systems
* The take-up of these systems has been slow
* There are national ECVET Expert Groups + a EU level Network and Community of Practice

European quality assurance mechanisms

* Common quality assurance principles needed to develop and maintain trust → basis for mutual recognition
* Different European <u>voluntary</u> frameworks and guidelines introduced for higher education and VET:
    * **ESG** - European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ;
    * **EQAR** - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education;
    * **EQAVET** - European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training
* Advice and support provided through Reference Points for Quality Assurance in VET.

Systems to validate non-formal and informal learning

* Member States to have in place by 2018 arrangements for the validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning (Council Recommendation)

* Should lead to the award of all or part of a qualification.

* The requirement on Member States follows a number of years of generally slow progress in the introduction of such validation arrangements.

Europass

* Consists of **5 documents** + an **electronic portfolio** for documenting skills and competences
    1. Europass CV
    2. Europass Mobility document – a record of skills acquired in another country
    3. Diploma Supplement (higher education) and Certificate Supplement (VET) – provide additional info
    4. Language Passport – self-assessment tool for language skills and qualifications
    5. European Skills Passport – an electronic portfolio
    - Advice and support through National Europass Centres

Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications

* Introduced in 2005, the directive applies to regulated professions
* There are 2 procedures:
    * **Automatic recognition**: 7 designated professions including architects. Similar process for some categories of managerial and self-employed professionals listed in an annex of the Directive. Professionals with experience but no qualifications can also benefit from automatic recognition of their experience.
    * **General recognition :** a host MS must take into account, for professions that are regulated in the host Member State, the qualifications that pertain in other Member States and assess the extent to which they meet host Member State requirements (they cannot simply impose blanket restrictions). They can request somebody to undergo an adaptation period or aptitude test if they can show that the duration or nature of training already obtained is substantially different from that normally required to operate in a profession.
* There is a Committee on the recognition of professional qualifications and a group of coordinators for the implementation of the recognition of professional qualifications.

Database of regulated professions

* The European Commission maintains a database of regulated professions in the EU Member States so that citizens can more easily gain access to information about the qualifications required to practice and any other special conditions that apply.

European sectoral skills and qualification passports

* E.g. the European Skills passport in Agriculture and the European Qualifications and Skills Passport for the Hospitality sector.

* Mostly developed through the European sectoral social dialogue.

* However, they are not, to date, coordinated with each other or with other transparency instruments.

Existing international sectoral qualifications

* Development has been very fragmented
* Some EU-funded projects have used EQF descriptors
* Questions exist about the sustainability of outputs
* Officially recognised European standards bodies (CEN, CENELEC, ETSI) make reference to EQF but standards documents are not publicly available

The European Classification of Occupations, Skills, Competences and Qualifications (ESCO)

* Seeks to link occupations, skills/competences and qualifications.
* Still under development.
* Most progress made in occupations and skills/competences, identifying the skills/competences required in occupations at a very detailed level, and translating the terms into all European languages.
* Individuals might use it, with guidance, to identify the skills/competences they possess and to identify the occupations to which they might apply, thus helping in job search processes etc.
* Potentially, it could help mutual understanding of qualifications and their relationship to occupations. But work on the qualifications element is still in its early stages.

Essential elements needed for success of European tools

* Mutual trust
* Learning outcomes
* Involvement of all key stakeholders, governance arrangements
* Quality assurance
* Transparency of procedures to develop qualifications and curricula
* Coherence of the European tools
* Adequate supporting practices, especially information, advice and guidance for individuals

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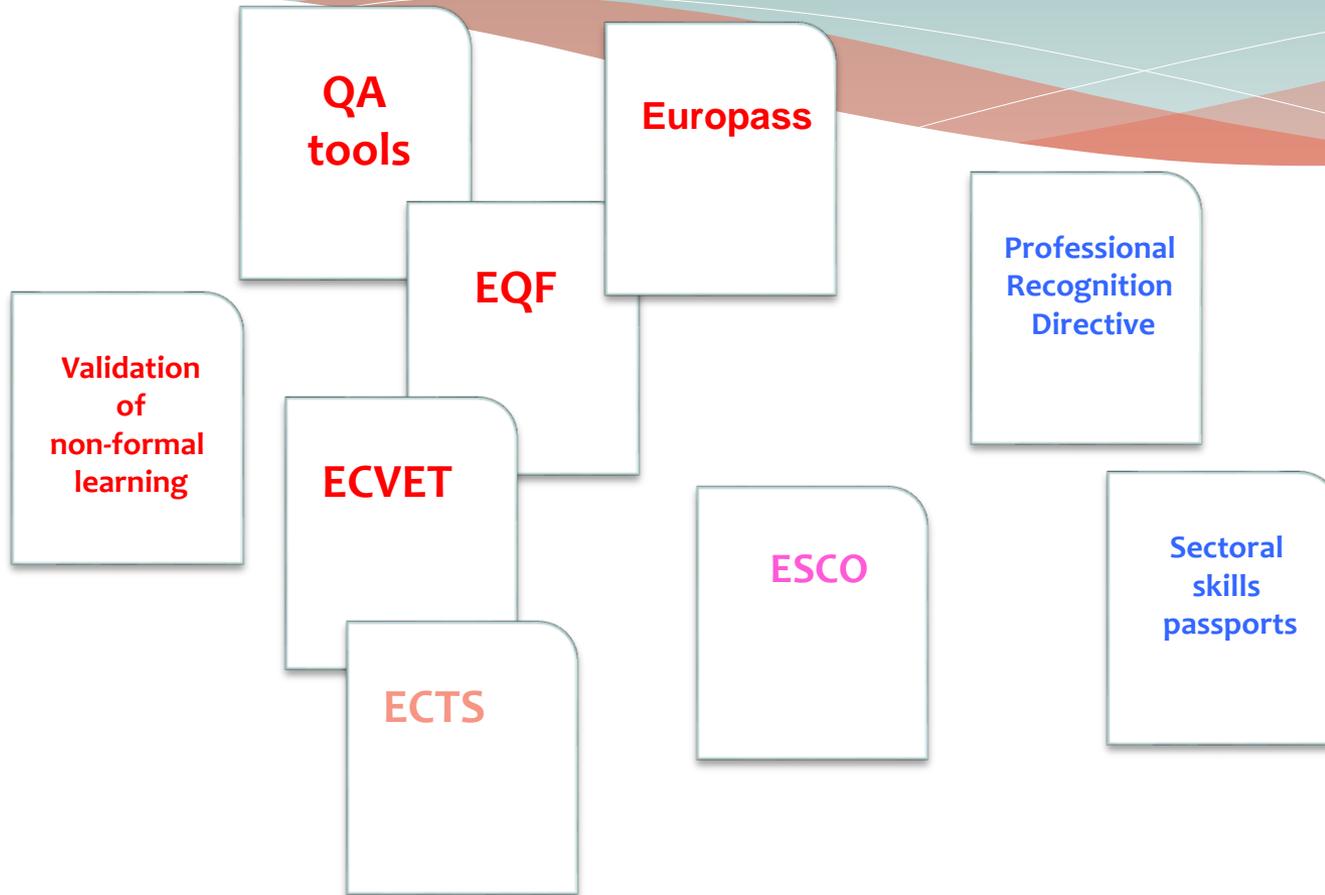
Some questions

* Do some types of skills and qualifications face more challenging and/or more obstacles than others?

* What role can, should the tools play in the work of the group?

Common recognition problems and EU solutions

Problem/ solution	European Qualifications Framework	ECTS	ECVET	Professional Qualifications Directive	ESCO	Europass framework	Common European quality assurance arrangements	Validation systems for non-formal learning, e.g. sector-specific
Weak recognition of qualifications between MS	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Lack of mutual understanding of differences/ similarities between occupations between MS				✓	✓			
Obstacles that inhibit the training undertaken/ skills acquired in one country being recognised in another			✓		✓	✓		
Poor transparency in quality standards underpinning qualifications that inhibits employers in one country trusting qualifications in another							✓	
Lack of common systems for the acknowledgement of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning								✓