Arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

The Republic of North Macedonia, as a candidate country for EU membership, has made continuous and significant progress in the harmonization of its education system with the educational policies and standards of the European Union.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is indicated in the Education Strategy 2018-2025 as one of the challenges, i.e. one of the measures of the Strategy is: Support in the process of establishment and operationalization of the system of validation results of non-formal and informal learning. The Strategy also stressed out that the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning in North Macedonia is in its embryonic phase, and establishment of a system for Macedonian Qualification Framework (MQF) management and inclusion of stakeholders is yet another open issue. A comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges was adopted with the development of the Roadmap for Further Development and Implementation of the MQF (2016).

The document produced by the Ministry of Education and Science and Adult Education Centre – Roadmap for implementing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, from 2016, states the following: It is increasingly widely recognized in the country that the validation of learning outcomes - knowledge, skills and competences - acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning.

In order to implement the measure "Establishing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning" from the Education Strategy 2018-2025, on 13.11.2018, the first meeting of the Working Group for Amending and Supplementing the Laws and Bylaws was held with the aim of setting up a national...
validation system for non-formal and informal learning - a process that will take effect in 2020. This group was established by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia, and consists of representatives of state institutions, public institutions, providers of programs for adult education and civil society organizations. This body will work intensively on establishing the legal regulation for validation of non-formal and informal learning and harmonization with the existing legislation. The functioning, coordination and operation of this body is supported by the Center for Lifelong Learning - Skopje, within the framework of the project implemented by this organization in the Republic of North Macedonia in partnership with the PI Adult Education Center, supported by DVV International from Bonn, with the financial assistance of the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany[2].

Overview of the legal and strategic documents containing references to VNFIL

The introduction of VNFIL in North Macedonia is directly related to the development of the Macedonian Qualifications Framework (Македонска рамка на квалификациите [3]) in the country, which is expected to bring benefits to citizens and support life-long learning. The introduction of the NQF as an inclusive framework that integrates all types of qualifications, certification of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, is a potential catalyst for the development of the VNFIL.

Republic of North Macedonia has adopted a Roadmap for Implementing a System for VNFIL in 2016, following the adoption of a Concept Paper for Non-Formal Adult Education and Informal Learning in 2015. A Guidance Note on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) processes and Specifications for the Methodology package were developed in 2017, which are also considering the different EU institutional frameworks, VNFIL procedures and instruments. Further on, a training session for potential VNFIL assessors was carried out in December 2017, based on a defined handbook for assessment.[3]

Validation of the non-formal education for adult and informal learning in Macedonia (Валидации на неформалното образование на возрасни и информалното учење во Македонија [4])

This document was adopted in 2016 by the Lifelong Learning Center of the Adult Education Center, with the simultaneous support of the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Association for Adult Education. The aim of this analysis is to contribute to the process of development of the validation of non-formal adult education and informal learning by analyzing the most common models and practices for validation of non-formal adult education and informal learning in Europe with an emphasis on their institutional frameworks, a) Quality assurance practices, and b) Validation procedures.[4]

Roadmap for implementing a System for VNFIL (Патоказ за спроведување на систем за признавање на неформалното и информалното учење [5])

The Roadmap concludes that at the national level, it is increasingly recognized that the validation of learning outcomes - knowledge, skills and competencies - acquired through informal and informal learning can play an important role in improving employability and mobility, as well as in increasing motivation for lifelong learning.[5]

Concept Paper for non-formal Adult Education and Informal Learning (Концепција за неформално образование на возрасните и за информално учење во Република Македонија [6])
The concept for informal education for adults and for informal learning in the Republic of North Macedonia was prepared on the initiative of the Center for Adult Education, supported by the European Training Foundation. Its ultimate goal is the integration of non-formal education into the education and training system and the provision of educational results certified within the National Qualifications Framework. This Concept Paper provides guidance for taking further steps within the informal adult education, as well as a vision for its further development.

**Law on Adult Education** (Закон за образование на возрасните [7])

A specific Law on Adult Education was enacted in 2008 with the aim of providing for the first time a more comprehensive legal framework to support lifelong learning. The law is prescribing that there are 3 types of adult education: formal, non-formal and informal. Non-formal education is defined under the Article 3 of the same Law, and it means organized learning processes designed to enable adults to work, for various social activities or personal development. In the same Article, the law also defines informal adult learning as an activity in which adults adopt attitudes and positive values, skills and knowledge of everyday experiences and other influences from their surroundings.

Article 23 of the Law states that adults can demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities they have acquired, regardless of the way this acquisition is done, by passing exams. The exams are organized and delivered by the adult education provider which delivers the program for gaining knowledge, skills and abilities, except the State Matura exam, School Matura exam and the Final exam in the secondary education.

**Law on National Qualifications Framework** ([8](#)) *(NQF) (2013)*

Article 3 of the Law on NQF states that one of the principles of the NQF is building a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Among the goals of the NQF, the Law stipulates: “To indicate the transfer and progression (horizontally and vertically) through and within all types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal)”.

**Adult Education Strategy 2016-2020** ([Стратегија за образование на возрасни 2016-2020](#)) ([9](#))

The Strategy emphasizes that the validation of prior learning acquired through non-formal and informal learning is necessary from the aspect of the contemporary trends in the field of education and from the aspect of the need for validation of all activities that young people and adults take in order to acquire education, especially in the informal and informal sectors.

**Strategy for Development of Vocational Education and Training in a Lifelong Learning Context 2013-2020** ([2013](#)) ([10](#))

The VET strategy is structured in 4 key priorities, in which development of VNFIL finds a visible place.

- Under the first priority (VET in the function of strengthening social cohesion and social inclusion): objective A7 focuses on “Establishing a system for VNFIL”. Key milestones: by 2015 (feasibility and options of a VNFIL system); by 2018 (key mechanisms and procedures in place) and by 2020 (generalization of implementation).
• Under the second priority (Attractive VET), the Strategy emphasizes the importance of VNFIL, in particular in objective B2: “Building diversified and flexible pathways for learning and professional guidance”.


Information and guidance

On February 2017, A Guidance Note on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Processes and Specification (Водич за процесите на валидацијата на неформално и инфомарно учење [14]) was developed and adopted by Adult Education Center and ETF Working Together Learning for Life.

According to the Guide, VNFIL processes and procedures are taking place in four stages:[1]

- Identification of the individual’s competences (i.e. learning outcomes) acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

- Documentation of the individual’s learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning together with supporting evidence;

- Assessment of the individual’s learning outcomes through an evaluation of the evidence presented, and

- Certification confirming the individual’s achievement of the learning outcomes in question.

In the Guidance is also stresses out that different information systems are needed in order to successfully and fully implement VNFIL, and the Adult Education Center will be responsible for collecting data for participation in the VNFIL with procedures that will be approved by the MoES. These data will need to include:

• Quantitative statistics on the number of people who entered the process, the progress through each phase, and the completion of the VNFIL process.

• Qualitative data on participation in the VNFIL in order to assess how effective the VNFIL process is, what is the access to the VNFIL services for candidates, the level of support they receive, the ease of progress through the phases, the costs, the satisfaction of the services received, etc.
Quality assurance

As above mentioned, in 2018, a Coordination Body and a Working Group have been established for further implementation of validation arrangements. However, the legal provisions for VNFIL are not in place yet. Still, A Guidance Note on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) processes and Specifications prescribe that external monitoring of accredited institutions for VNFIL will be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. Responsibilities can be shared with agencies that carry out specific activities, such as the State Examination Center or the State Education Inspectorate.

This will ensure that the accredited institutions for the VNFIL will provide reports that are necessary to monitor their continuous adherence to the accreditation criteria. It is expected that the accredited institutions report at least once a year on self-assessment of their activities in the field of the VNFIL. The reports will be reviewed and evaluated by the Adult Education Center in their support to the Ministry of Education and Science. If certain issues arise regarding the evaluation of the reports, they would be appropriately investigated[1].

Also, on-site monitoring and on-site visits are planned, in order to ensure that the institutions that implement the VNI fulfill their obligations. Other quality assurance institutions, such as the State Education Inspectorate, may also be involved in monitoring and on-site visits.

In a Roadmap for the Implementation of the Informal and Informal Learning System, developed by Adult Education Center, it is stated that because the integrity of the VNFIL system will depend on strictly quality assessment, the institutions that perform the assessment and certification should have clearly defined responsibilities for implementing appropriate internal rules for quality assurance, in order to ensure that the VNFIL assessments are based on an accurate understanding of the standards and appropriate conditions for evidence, and to ensure consistency in assessment decisions.[2]
