INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country factsheet 2023: Albania

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Context and stage of development

Albania is in the process of developing a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) with a focus on VET. VNFIL is used interchangeably with the term 'recognition of prior learning' (RPL) which is defined in Article 4 of Law No 15/2017 on education and vocational training in the Republic of Albania (the VET Act) as follows: 'the learning process by which an individual's learning outcomes are formally recognised as skills and competences, either through the award of a qualification in the form of a certificate, diploma or title or through the award of equivalence, credits, validation of acquired skills and/or competences'.

Implementing the VNFIL is a priority and, according to the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023-2030, it is expected to be operational by the first quarter of 2026. In the meantime, Albanian's VET system needs to undergo some fundamental improvements such as:

- consolidating the legal framework, governance and processes for implementing and funding VNFIL;

- designing regulations for the implementation of the four validation stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification;

- prioritising sectors, target groups and piloting of the VNFIL process;

- accrediting the VNFIL providers;

- implementing the VNFIL system;

- monitoring and evaluating the VNFIL system to improve it.

Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No 756 dated 9.12.2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning was adopted in 2021 and VNFIL is scheduled to be implemented for learning outcomes leading to vocational qualifications levels 2 to 5 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (which mirror the same levels on the European Qualifications Framework, EQF), excluding qualifications at level 5 issued by colleges and universities.

LLL and non-formal qualifications have to follow and fulfil specific criteria and procedures as stipulated in the respective legal framework, i.e. DCM No 427 dated 26.6.2019 *On approval of criteria and procedures for including the qualifications received through lifelong learning into the AQF levels for VET*. This process has already begun and, in parallel, the country's main bodies for instituting RPL/VNFIL, i.e. the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ) and National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), are elaborating their respective VNFIL action plans.

The pilot accreditation scheme for providers of VET (part of which included a self-assessment by the VET schools) ran successfully in 2018-19 and has led to the accreditation of the first six VET providers (five public and one private). The main national institutions are the NAVETQ and the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE). The process for the accreditation of VET institutions (public providers of formal learning) is now in motion and its overseer NAVETQ, will continue its implementation for other providers. However, this process does not yet include accreditation for VET providers as VNFIL providers/institutions.

One methodology for VNFIL was successfully implemented to test the ground before a feasible legal framework is developed and adopted. This was in the textile sector under the ILO-IPA 2010 project, in close cooperation with the Albanian government. The government also endorsed the project results.

Policy and regulatory framework

The concept of non-formal and informal learning was included for the first time in VET Law No 8872 dated 3.9.2002, and then in Law No 10247 dated 4.3.2010 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (the AQF Act, as amended to Law No 23/2018 of 10.5.2018 on the revised Albanian Qualifications Framework) and VET Law No 15/2017.

The importance of non-formal and informal learning was highlighted in the 2019-2022 plan to implement NESS and align it with the EU-wide VET monitoring process under the Osnabrück Declaration. The legislative framework is continually being updated and improved with the respective by-laws, policies and regulations.

Both essential VET laws, the Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework and DCM No 756 dated 9.12.2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning serve as the main policies and the legal framework for VNFIL in Albania and set the basis for developing the VNFIL's scope, objectives, functions and structure, as well as designating responsibilities to the RPL/VNFIL implementing institutions: MoFE, NAVETQ, NAES and VET providers.

Institutional setup and collaboration

Successfully implementing VNFIL goes hand in hand with establishing a clear and stable institutional and regulatory framework based on guiding principles and structure for the whole VET sector. This needs to outline the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders, set the overall standards for VET provision, assessment and certification, and strengthen the VET governance structure. Both national agencies that share the responsibility for VET in Albania (NAVETQ and NAES) have been granted new powers to help in establishing the VNFIL system.

A clear division of roles in applying the VNFIL has been set out in DCM No 756 in connection with:

- accrediting VET providers for VNFIL;

- setting up of responsible structures for VNFIL within the accredited VNFIL providers;

- selecting external experts (for public providers);

- designing a process of identifying, documenting, assessment, and certifying learning outcomes that give strategic importance to the implementing bodies regarding the implementation, cooperation, communication, and monitoring of VNFIL mechanisms currently under development.

The bodies implementing VNFIL and their roles are summarised as follows:

- the Ministry responsible for VET endorses the VNFIL procedures and regulations;

- NAVETQ sets out the evaluation and certification procedures and regulations for VNFIL implementation and is legally responsible for accrediting VET providers for VNFIL;

- NAES cooperates with NAVETQ in vetting the VET providers undergoing the accreditation process, facilitates the process and ensures necessary human resources for it;

- Accredited VET providers will have to provide information on completing a specific qualification when the NAES identifies the need for a VNFIL; they organise and keep documentation for each candidate, report on the process and implement the required VNFIL procedures;

- Only accredited VET providers will be carrying out VNFIL.

Coordination and cooperation between the institutions and the validation services they will provide (outreach and career guidance services, education and training provision, social service work and employment services) will be covered by the respective legislative frameworks. Currently, there are no start-ups, social impact enterprises or similar involved in full VNFIL services (i.e. related to all stages of the validation process: identification, documentation, assessment and certification) such as identification of skills, guidance or skills audits.

Beneficiaries and impact

VNFIL is one of the priority measures in the NESS 2023-2030 and will contribute to boosting the range of private VET courses on offer in Albania. This is thanks to the huge array of learning opportunities that the 12 public and 833 private licensed non-formal learning providers offer. Training ranges from soft skills to advanced vocational training, including by companies, unions, and youth and adult organisations through local and international internships, voluntary work and work abroad. The overseeing institutions (MoFE and NAES) have not yet capitalised on this array of private training courses due to a lack of human resources or framework for quality assurance in this area.

Validation arrangements are primarily intended for the following target groups: people who used to work in small family businesses, returning migrants, redundant workers and people who have dropped out of formal education.

Since VNFIL services are not yet operational beyond selected pilot schemes, statistics on beneficiaries are not yet available.

The initial stage of VNFIL is expected to be implemented for vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2-5 and not for qualifications awarded in other educational subsectors, in the labour market or by the third sector. Work has been initiated to consolidate the VNFIL legislation framework and the division of the roles between the bodies implementing VNFIL.

Challenges and opportunities

VNFIL is in its initial stage of development and there are challenges linked to:

- implementing an overarching legal framework for VET and VNFIL;

- ensuring there is a link from non-formal learning outcomes to qualifications included in the AQF;

- consolidating the VNFIL institutions' structure by ensuring that both human and financial resources are in place and that qualified practitioners are trained;

- improving VET providers' capacity for self-assessment;

- encouraging VET providers to undergo the accreditation process (currently seen as costly and with unacknowledged potential).

Closer and deeper collaboration among the national key stakeholders including consultation with social partners, civil society organisations, volunteer and youth organisations, companies and employers would be beneficial at this stage of development. What might also be beneficial is exploring more advanced VNFIL initiatives internationally, looking at how to adapt some components to the local context(s). This would help raise awareness nationally of the potential VNFIL offers for upskilling and reskilling pathways through shorter training time, better job placement and labour market mobility. It would also help in increasing the interest and trust of individuals and employers in the VNFIL process, as well as in expanding the scope of VNFIL to other sectors of education, the labour market and the third sector.