

INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country factsheet 2023: Bosnia and
Herzegovina

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Context and stage of development

The policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is at an early stage of development in BiH. There are no established procedures, no regulations have been adopted and only a few pilot or ad-hoc initiatives have been documented.

Two concepts are being developed in two different education sectors – one related to VET qualifications (Qualifications Framework levels 2 to 5) and the other related to the use of VNFIL in higher education. Both concepts are based on the definition of VNFIL from the EU Recommendation on VNFIL and European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning published by Cedefop and both follow a four-step model: i) identification, ii) documentation, iii) assessment and iv) certification. There are no circumstances where VNFIL leads to a full qualification, but it does foresee the recognition of credits or (in some cases) certificates for government-recognised adult training courses.

The concept of VNFIL in higher education is at a more advanced stage. It seeks to acknowledge previously acquired knowledge, skills and competence for the purpose of acquiring a number of ECTS credits. Relevant procedures have been drafted, a legal model (Model Rulebook) has been created and the pilot phase should start soon at two universities.

There are only a few documented ad hoc initiatives in VET in which VNFIL is carried out based on an adult education programme, and leads to a certificate of a publicly valid adult education programme obtained (in the context of upskilling or retraining).

One of the three specific goals of the EU IPA 2019 project Technical assistance for VET education in BiH (the implementation of which should begin in 2023), is to develop and pilot the model for recognising non-formal education and learning i.e. to develop a document on principles and standards for the recognition of prior learning, non-formal education, informal learning and adult education, draft a manual for validation of non-formal education and learning, pilot the model, as well as to organise robust capacity building activities and a public campaign throughout BiH promoting the benefits of VNFIL.

Policy and regulatory framework

VNFIL is not incorporated into any education legislation, nor is it recognised by other sectors or associated policies, such as labour, employment or overall development strategies. The only document that acknowledges VNFIL and envisages procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal education and self-directed learning is the Enhancing the Quality and Pertinence of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Building on the Findings from Riga – 2021-2030 policy document, adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2021.

In VET in 2018, a concept was developed and presented in the Guidelines for VNFIL, which are an integral part of the comprehensive Manual for the improvement of vocational qualifications, a document developed through the EU IPA project "Development of Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning" and intended for the competent education authorities and VET providers to use when developing qualifications and for qualification management in general.

In higher education, two documents were recently created: Model rulebook on the recognition of non-formal education and informal learning for the purpose of continuing education and Guide to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning – Guidelines for students. Both will be piloted in the first half of 2023.

The prerequisites for the implementation of VNFIL in VET have not yet been laid down since the concept has been presented a generic fashion. There needs to first be agreement on the division of roles among the different parts of the education sector and the relevant legislation needs to be brought forward.

In higher education, arrangements are focused on students, enabling them to have prior non-formal and informal learning recognised as part of their studies. This process will take place at the colleges and universities that the students attend.

Institutional setup and collaboration

There are no arrangements in place yet for VNFIL. Considering the complex structure for administering qualifications in BiH, it is too early for the VET sector to discuss the roles of stakeholders. There needs to be first an institutional setting harmonised at the level of all competent education authorities for the role of stakeholders to become clearer. For higher education, according to the draft model, the entire process will take place within colleges and universities that will adopt the regulation and provide guidance and advice to applicants, helping them to create a portfolio providing evidence on prior learning. Thereafter follows the assessment and potentially an appeal procedure. At the moment, it is not expected that external stakeholders will be involved.

Beneficiaries and impact

For the only area that is ready to go into the implementation stage – the higher education sector – the target group is students already at college or university. Further development of VNFIL models in the sector and in the VET sector will extend VNFIL to other users, including disadvantaged groups.

Challenges and opportunities

Although Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have an established VNFIL system, it has expressed a strategic commitment to its development and implementation and efforts have intensified, especially by focusing on this area within the upcoming implementation of the EU IPA 2019 project.

Further development of the qualifications framework, especially a strengthening of the qualifications management structure and linking all parts of the qualifications framework into a functional whole, would support further development of VNFIL. Although the 2012 EU Recommendation calls for VNFIL to be linked with NQFs, there are countries that recognise prior learning on a wide scale without an NQF. Moreover, considering the complexity of education and training arrangements in BiH, it might actually be feasible for the various bodies, cantons and districts to go ahead and scale up relevant measures within their respective remits rather than waiting for the NQF to materialise before tackling the most challenging issue of qualification management – the approval of occupation and qualification standards, which are the reference points for VNFIL.

VNFIL and its benefits should be first recognised as a policy instrument in BiH's key education and training policies and perhaps linked to other policies (labour, economic development, etc.).

VNFIL systems being developed for VET and higher education need to be included in education laws at relevant levels, and the competent education authorities must clearly prescribe the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and establish transparent procedures for all stages of VNFIL. This includes clear standards and procedures, and a quality assurance system both for the VNFIL provider and across the system.

The competent education authorities should be trained on VNFIL as should anyone who will implement VNFIL procedures at the universities. For students or for anyone for whom VNFIL offers the chance of professional development, better opportunities for employment and career development, BiH needs promotional activities introducing these individuals to the possibilities and opportunities that may open up if they have their previously acquired knowledge, skills and competence officially validated.