INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country report 2023
Bosnia and Herzegovina

CONTENTS

1 Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) comprises two entities (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska) as well as a self-governing district (the Brčko District of BiH). The Federation of BiH consists of 10 cantons[1]. Republika Srpska, the 10 cantons in the Federation of BiH and the Brčko District of BiH (hereinafter referred to as the 'competent education authorities'", 12 in total) have full and undivided constitutional responsibility for education. The competent education authorities have their own ministries of education and set laws for all levels of education (preschool, primary, general secondary, vocational secondary, higher and adult education). They adopt education strategies, establish and finance state-funded schools, colleges and universities, approve private education providers and enact legislation on the work of the education sector. All resources (human and budgetary) for the implementation of the education policy of the day are held by the competent education authorities. At the national level, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MoCA) coordinates education policy, including international liaison and there are three agencies that support the implementation of the education policies: i) the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA); ii) the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education (APOSO); and iii) the Centre for Information on and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (CIP).

A typical education policy cycle

According to current practice in education reform, the education policy cycle is usually initiated by the MoCA, most often based on the current international (EU) trends. Education policy is developed by a group composed of representatives of all the competent education authorities, agencies, the MoCA and other experts. The process is often supported by EU-funded projects. The result of the process is an agreed education policy formulated as a framework document (framework law, framework strategy, etc.) which is then put to the Conference of Ministers of Education comprising all ministers of education, and afterwards is adopted at nationally. The competent education authorities then take over the implementation of the education policy, passing their own regulations based on the framework document (drafting a new law/strategy or adapting the existing one, drafting regulatory documents, developing new curriculums, etc.), and ensure other prerequisites for the implementation (institutional framework, training, resources, etc.) are in place.

This education policy cycle often results in different impetus and different ways of implementing the education policy, since the competent education authorities may vary in their priorities and approaches in implementing reforms. The system is complex and challenging, and it is often the case that diverging visions and views on the division of responsibilities appear as early as the policy drafting stage, and as a result the process slows down or even stops.

The policy on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is still in the early stages of development in BiH. Although the Baseline of the Qualifications Framework in BiH (Council of Ministers (CoM), 2011) document established that 'learning outcomes are acquired formally, non-formally, and informally' in 2011, the models for VNFIL are still being developed. 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 – 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 (EU, 2012) and European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015) and both follow a four-step

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[1] Una-Sana Canton, Posavina Canton, Tuzla Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton, Central Bosnia Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, West Herzegovina Canton, Bosnian-Podrinj Canton Goražde, Sarajevo Canton and Canton 10 (Herceg-Bosnia Canton)

model: i) identification, ii) documentation, iii) assessment and iv) certification. The concept of VNFIL in higher education is at a more advanced stage of development. There are only a few documented one-off initiatives in VET in which VNFIL is carried out for adult education courses leading to a government-recognised adult education course certificate (in the context of upskilling or retraining).

There were no examples of initiatives on the labour market or in the third sector. Although representatives of the labour market are included in the initiatives and policy dialogue, the development of VNFIL concepts is confined to the education sector, mostly in adult education. The key stakeholders are the education experts in the ministries of education and their agencies who are involved in developing the VNFIL model, as well as the vocational and higher education teachers who act as advisers, mentors or assessors.

2 National perspective

2.1. Overarching approach to validation

There is no national legislation, no legislation from the competent education authorities, and no structured policy on VNFIL at any level. VNFIL is only mentioned in two documents.

One of the 10 laws on adult education in BiH, the Sarajevo Canton Law on Adult Education prescribes in Article 41 (Sarajevo Canton, 2015)[2] a provision for VNFIL, in line with the definition from the EU VNFIL Recommendation and based on the four-step model, but this provision entails further development of the VNFIL concept and the establishment of an institutional framework, something that has not happened since 2015. A representative of the Ministry of Education of Sarajevo Canton stated that currently the VNFIL policy was not a priority of the Ministry and that it would be worked on within the further development of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Qualifications Framework (BHQF), together with other competent education authorities.

Another example is the Recommendations on the Recognition of Specific Learning Paths document (CIP, 2022)[3], which was adopted in 2022 by the Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents in the Field of Higher Education (BiH ENIC/NARIC centre). With these recommendations, the competent authorities for academic recognition and/or recognition of specific types of learning in BiH are encouraged to recognise specific types of learning. According to this document, 'specific types of learning' refers to any situation in which a person has acquired particular learning outcomes and/or knowledge, skills and competence in a non-standard way. The Recommendations provided the definition of VNFIL; 'Evaluation of non-formal education and informal learning is a form of recognition of the entire range of knowledge, skills and competency of an individual, regardless of whether acquired within the formal education system or outside it. If these forms of learning are evaluated (recognised, documented, assessed and/or certified), it is possible to make them more visible and useful for further research or work.' Although the document is generic, the set of recommendations given to the bodies for academic recognition (in principle, these are the higher education colleges and universities) covers all relevant aspects of VNFIL and other forms of recognition of specific types of learning. This document was the basis for the VNFIL procedures for higher education colleges and universities, developed as part of the EU-funded Education for Employment project. The procedures have been drafted and pilot schemes at two higher education institutions should begin soon.

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 acknowledging VNFIL 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, which outlines the strategic objectives for VET development in BiH. This strategic document stipulates that by 2030 there should be regular procedures in place for recognising non-formal and informal education and self-directed learning, as well as for defining the responsibilities in the recognition process.

According to the MoCA representative, the EU-funded IPA 2019 VET project (which will begin in 2023 and last for three years), will have a strong focus on VNFIL. The project will create a model and standards, organise training for VNFIL practitioners and put in place a pilot to test the model. There will also be a public campaign to make VNFIL more accessible to people, especially those in vulnerable categories.

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[2] Available at: https://mo.ks.gov.ba/sites/mo.ks.gov.ba/files/zakon_o_obrazovanju_odraslih_40_15.pdf
[3] Available at:
http://www.cip.gov.ba/images/pdf/Ostali_propisi/Recommendations_on_Recognition_of_Specific_Learning_Paths_69_22_eng.pdf

2.2. Validation in education and training

There are two initiatives for the development of VNFIL policies, one related to VET (QF levels 2 to 5) and the other to higher education (QF levels 6 to 8). In addition to these two initiatives, we found evidence of two ad-hoc initiatives. To date, there is no systematic approach to VNFIL, nor is there any established practice according to which VNFIL procedures could be carried out on a regular basis.

The initiative related to VET was launched through the EU-funded project Development of the Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (QFLLL). The guidelines for VNFIL were set out and formed an integral part of the comprehensive Manual for Enhancement of VET Qualifications (EU-funded QFLLL Project, 2018). The guidelines present the concept of VNFIL according to the 2015 European guidelines (Cedefop, 2015), describe the four-step model and give examples. The Manual was created by a forum of representatives from all the competent education authorities and was adopted by the project steering committee in 2018. Since then, no new initiatives have been launched to further develop the VNFIL concept, either by the competent education authorities or through a mechanism to coordinate education policies. As already stated, the new EU-funded IPA 2019 VET project will aim to further develop VNFIL.

The initiative as it relates to higher education has been implemented within the EU-funded Education for Employment project. It has been focused on the recognition of previously acquired knowledge, skills and competence for the purpose of acquiring a certain number of ECTS (part of the course, one whole or several related modules within the course that the student is studying). Procedures have been developed, a legislative model has been created and the pilot phase should begin soon at two universities. A working group composed of representatives from all the competent education authorities, CIP, MoCA and colleges and universities has developed the Model Rulebook on recognition of non-formal education and informal learning for the purpose of continuing education and Guide to the recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning - Guidelines for students. The Model Rulebook should be considered and adopted by all colleges and universities. It provides a solid legal basis for conducting VNFIL procedures at colleges and universities, leading to the award of a certain number of ECTS credits. The Guidelines for students is a practical manual on how to prepare a portfolio and a CV. The documents also contain relevant templates. The concept is based on the four-step model (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) throughout. Two pilot university faculties have already been selected and the pilot schemes, including training of faculty staff, will start in the first half of 2023. Once the pilot scheme is complete, the documents will be finalised and distributed to all higher education colleges and universities for their consideration and to be put into practice. CIP will take ownership of running further training at colleges and universities.

Ad-hoc VNFIL initiatives

Although there is no VNFIL legislation in Republika Srpska, the Institute for Adult Education under the Ministry of Education has run two one-off validation procedures for informally acquired knowledge, skills and competence. These were for two groups, each of 20 medical technicians and came at the request of the Banja Luka University Clinical Centre. The ad-hoc procedure was created to align with government-recognised adult education courses for training transfusion medicine and radiology technicians. The Institute established two panels of experts who assessed the achievements of the technicians. There was then an examination, which consisted of a written test, an oral exam and a practical part. For the candidates who passed, the Institute issued certificates for government-recognised adult education courses. The costs of the procedure were covered by the employer.

This experience will be used when developing VNFIL policies in Republika Srpska. The lesson learned is that implementing VNFIL requires bringing in additional personnel.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Una-Sana Canton is considering the possibility of developing VNFIL procedures. The Ministry decided to try out several pilot schemes to evaluate the different parts of the procedure and the level of interest from schools/colleges and candidates. The Ministry contacted the canton's unemployment service, the University of Bihać and the canton's Chamber of Crafts, all of which are also registered adult education providers. They were encouraged, with the support of the Ministry, to organise an ad-hoc validation procedure of prior informal or non-formal learning for several prospective candidates. The lessons learned from this pilot would be the basis for deciding whether to proceed further with developing the procedures, and to assess the complexity, duration and cost of the procedures and other specifics.

2.3. Validation in the labour market

At this stage of VNFIL policy development, labour market representatives are not included in dialogue around policy. Since the Public Employment Services have insight into the qualifications and skills unemployed people have as they create their portfolios and often provide non-formal education through retraining or upskilling, they can be a significant partner not only in the development, but also in the implementation of VNFIL policies. The German Corporation for International Cooperation-funded project Promoting Adult Education in BiH that ran from 2010 to 2016, led to the Competence Pass, a tool for career and professional development that encapsulates an individual's knowledge, skills and qualities, and has facilitated the job search for thousands of people, supported by advice services from the 74 advisers from the agencies of the Ministries of Labour and Employment that were trained through the Project.

The number of professional training courses companies offer to their employees is increasing. However, VNFIL policy itself is still in its infancy and there have been no public campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of gaining certification for existing knowledge, skills and competence. Therefore, representatives of the labour market, trade unions and professional associations are not advocating for regulations that would make it easier for people to have their prior learning recognised and validated.

2.4. Validation in the third sector

The third sector contributes significantly to the increase of skills through various non-formal forms of training, especially in soft skills. However, since the VNFIL system is yet to get off the ground, there are no initiatives that would validate such skills and competency, nor is the third sector included in the dialogue on VNFIL policy.

3 Links to national qualifications framework (NQF)

Though many parts of the QF in BiH have been developed, the BHQF is not in full use. It was first set out in the Baseline of the Qualifications Framework in BiH (CoM, 2011) document. This document defined eight levels to the QF, matching those in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), as well as giving generic descriptors for each of the levels. It also specified that learning outcomes can be acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The Action Plan for the development and implementation of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-2020 was adopted by CoM in 2015[4]. Many parts of the Action Plan have been implemented, especially under the aegis of two EU-funded projects – Development of the QF for general education and Development of the QF for LLL. However, the whole Action Plan was not fully implemented, nor was there any evaluation as to the extent of implementation in order revise the Plan and plan new initiatives to make the BHQF fully functional.

There is an electronic register of qualifications database[5] where data on qualifications borne out of the aforementioned projects has been recorded. Since then, there have been no new entries.

There is not adequate legislation to support the QF or manage qualifications in BiH. There are no standards and procedures for inclusion of qualifications on the BHQF or on who prepares the qualifications, who is entitled to propose them, who approves them and what is the procedure for validating the qualifications and determining the qualification level. Additionally, there are no arrangements for quality assurance (QA) on qualifications. None of the institutions responsible for QA in education (general, VET, higher education) has procedures in place related to the QF (e.g. course accreditation, alignment of courses with qualification standards or similar).

The complex structure of the education sector in BiH presents a particular challenge in establishing a qualifications management model. Since the competent education authorities have complete and undivided jurisdiction over education, this should also include the approval of new qualifications. As there are 12 competent education authorities, this could lead to the creation, validation and approval of 12 standards for the same qualification (e.g. baker, skilled worker in the tourist industry, Bachelor of electrical engineering, etc.). In addition to being expensive and inefficient, this could also open up issues of cross-referencing (of the same 12 qualifications). The policy makers in BiH are looking for a model that would simplify the situation and focus more on the content of qualifications. An agreement on a simpler qualifications management model would pave the way for legislation followed by the establishment of the missing processes and the integration of all existing elements into a functional qualifications framework, as well as its referencing with the EQF.

The BHQF fosters the use of learning outcomes for qualifications and every part of the curriculum (modules, courses, subjects). The concept of learning outcomes (LOs) was introduced into the education sector in BiH over 20 years ago and it is common knowledge to most teachers. However, about half of all course content is not based on LOs.

Structuring courses into modules was introduced into VET courses in the early 2000s, aiming to create better connections between theoretical and practical learning. Every subject was divided into two or more modules, and qualifications consist of a large number of modules. However, such modules may, not lead to partial qualifications. A new concept of modularisation, aiming to group functional parts of the curriculum (units of LOs) into modules that could lead to partial qualifications was developed through the EU-funded project Development of QF for LLL in 2018 but is still not in use. No modules in higher education has ever been established in practice.

The credit system (ECTS) has been used in higher education for over 15 years. All higher education qualifications are based on ECTS credits. The VNFIL procedures that are currently being developed for higher education will lead to ECTS credits. A full qualification could be obtained by accumulating

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[4] Official Gazette of BiH, number: 28/15
[5] Available at: https://eqf.ba/lista-standarda/pregled-standarda-kvalifikacije-u-strucnom-obrazovanju-i-obuci/

formal learning and ECTS credits acquired through VNFIL. Therefore, the purpose of VNFIL in this model is exclusively to build up ECTS credits and it will not lead to an actual qualification. Although certain colleges have achieved the status of adult education providers and offer non-formal courses, and although there is interest in establishing courses based on micro-credentials, there are no recorded cases or any regulations for micro-credentials. The model for a credits system for VET, based on ECVET credits, was developed within the EU-funded project Development of QF for LLL but is not in use.

4 Standards and reference points

The VNFIL models currently being developed do not use occupation and qualification standards and are currently based solely on course content. The reason is that the qualifications themselves are not fully standardised and are not based on occupation and qualification standards, although a certain number of occupation standards and (a slightly smaller number of) qualification standards have been written as the result of various projects. Currently, the occupation standards database contains 24 occupation standards for VET (QF levels 2 to 5) and two occupation standards for higher education (QF levels 6 to 8). The database of qualification standards contains 23 standards for VET and five standards for higher education qualifications. In addition to these, there are other standards that have come out of other projects (financed by the German Corporation for International Cooperation, USAID and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation). Common to all these standards is that they were all created according to similar (but not exactly identical) methodology with representatives of the labour market and experts in education being involved. They contain all the essential parts that this type of standard should contain (key tasks, knowledge, skills, competence, LOs, units of LOs, etc.). However, these standards were only endorsed by the steering bodies of the various projects (mainly involving representatives from the competent educational authorities) and were not officially approved by the education authorities or other bodies responsible for approving standards. It is not mandatory to use them when developing new course content, nor is compliance with them assessed when approving new curriculums. Consequently, we cannot expect that they will be used to establish VNFIL until the issue of how to manage qualifications in the BHQF is settled, as discussed in the previous chapter.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in the validation arrangements and their coordination

Since VNFIL policy in BiH is still in the development phase, only education experts from the public sector (mainly the civil servants in charge of the adult education policies) have been involved in the process thus far. The competent educational authorities (Ministries of Education) and the agencies in charge of education (teaching institutes, the Institute for Adult Education, CIP and APOSO) have led on developing VNFIL policies. MoCA is in charge of coordination. To date, representatives of the relevant bodies have considered concepts, produced models for VNFIL and drafted legislation.

In higher education, the colleges and universities themselves have been included in the process. In addition, representatives of the labour and employment sector, especially the Public Employment Services, as well as representatives of the business sector are expected to be included in developing the policies after the model has been piloted. Once the policies are ready and the legislative framework is in place, the roles of all the organisations within the process will need to be specified.

6 VNFIL service providers

The current level of development of the VNFIL concept in VET does not ensure the possibility of identifying potential service providers. It can be assumed that the competent education authorities, through some procedures (e.g. licensing, accreditation, etc.), will grant VNFIL-provider status to adult education providers, especially vocational secondary schools. However, this cannot be confirmed at the moment. In order for service providers to be named, the government needs to establish the standards and procedures for assessing whether these standards are met (external evaluation). It is important to have a QA system that is evaluated at regular intervals (self-evaluation/external evaluation), however, in this early stage of elaborating VNFIL policy, there are no plans for this yet.

Within higher education, the VNFIL model's progress has reached a point where it can be ascertained that VNFIL processes will be conducted solely within the colleges and universities themselves. For now, there are no plans to grant VNFIL-provider status to higher education institutions, probably because they function on the principle that they are academically independent. However, given the number of private universities, it would be good to establish such a procedure (at least under the umbrella of the established QA in higher education system, which is based on regular accreditation and self-evaluation).

The capacities of both VET/adult education providers and universities together should be sufficient. The ratio of the number of students per teacher in both secondary and higher education is decreasing year by year, so the availability of human resources should not be an issue. Training will be required for the teaching and administrative staff of the future VNFIL providers, as well as information campaigns to inform students and other interested parties about the benefits of VNFIL.

Since both models are in the early development stage, there is nothing documented that any teaching institutions recognise the potential of VNFIL potential as a strategic goal. There are no examples of good practice.

7 Information and guidance

7.1. Information, outreach and promotion

Two sets of VNFIL guidelines have so far been developed (as described under 2.2). However, they have not been widely distributed and they are still not in use, since there is no VNFIL policy set up yet. For the same reason, there have not been any promotional or awareness-raising activities. All the above will be implemented under an upcoming EU-funded IPA 2019 project. Responsibility for information, outreach and promotion will lie with the competent educational authorities.

7.2. Advice and guidance[6]

Since no system for VNFIL has not been established, there has not been any opportunity to launch VNFIL procedures. As a result, no advice or guidance is being given. The conceptual model for VNFIL in VET includes guidance as a component in the process, with the idea being that the competent educational authorities would organise pre-entry career advice sessions for individuals. For VNFIL in higher education, it is recommended that every college and university designate a VNFIL advisor to conduct these sessions, equipping applicants with the necessary information on how their acquired competency can be recognised and credited with ECTS, and how they can be enrolled onto a higher education course.

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[6] Lifelong/career guidance includes 'a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competence and interests, to make education, training and occupation decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competence are learned and/or used.' Guidance is in fact an umbrella term that encompasses counselling as well being provided with information, coaching, teaching, assessment and advocacy (See, The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2014). Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: Glossary, http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no.-2-llg-glossary/ and Council of the European Union, (2008). Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf).

8 Validation practitioners

8.1. Profile of validation practitioners

Since the VNFIL policy has not been developed, there is no legislative framework, no agreement on the division of roles within the system and it is difficult to define the roles of practitioners (as in practice VNFIL does not exist at all). Nationally, responsibility for VNFIL policy will certainly rest with the Ministry of Education, the sector in charge of adult education. This will include monitoring trends, changing legislation, promotional campaigns and the like. Assessors, according to tradition, will be vocational teachers for VNFIL in VET, and university lecturers for VNFIL in higher education. They will assess whether LOs have been achieved at panel. If the system were to become available in schools (as VNFIL providers), administrative tasks would be performed by professional services of schools and student registry officers in colleges and universities.

8.2. Qualification requirements

Mandatory requirements (in terms of qualifications, experience and training) for practitioners involved in validation have not yet been developed.

8.3. Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Since VNFIL is just at the initial phase, it is not part of initial teacher training at universities. A training programme is currently being developed for a structured pilot scheme at two faculties. The EU-funded project 'Education for Employment' will be implementing the scheme. Under the annual work plan for 2023, the CIP plans to conduct training in line with the VNFIL model created for higher education at all colleges and universities. It will take the form of one-day workshops for the staff of student services and a certain number of lecturers. There are no other means of support or training. More comprehensive training for all relevant roles in the education sector is planned through the upcoming EU-funded IPA 2019 project that should start in 2023 and last for three years.

9 Quality assurance

There is no official VNFIL policy, no regulations in place and no procedures have been implemented, hence no quality assurance systems have been established. However, starting from the assumption that in countries where the public perceives a high degree of corruption and irregularity in education VNFIL policy need to be carefully introduced and procedures should be evidence-based and as transparent as possible, the VNFIL arrangements in BiH are ging to have to be based on clear legal provisions and standards and procedures for approving VNFIL providers will need to be clear, transparent, and applied consistently at all levels. A QA system based on self-evaluation and periodic external evaluation is important not only to enhance quality and improve work in the field of VNFIL, but also to make it accountable.

For the described system designed for higher education, the VNFIL system will be based on legislation, on the guide which has been drafted, on the necessary templates for creating applicants' portfolios and CVs as well as on the templates of decisions of the assessing panel, and on the possibility of appeal which has been provided. All higher education institutions have internal quality systems that cover their entire activities, which are focused on enhancement and accountability, so it can be assumed that VNFIL will be incorporated into these systems.

10 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

10.1. Funding

Since the VNFIL system has not been established, there is no funding model for it either. Active labour market policy (ALMP) generally provides funds for adult education at various levels in BiH. According to the same principle, VNFIL could be funded in this way, once the models have been developed and the institutional framework and procedures are in place.

All the VNFIL models (policy level) elaborated so far have been financed with EU funds through IPA technical assistance projects. Further development of the VNFIL policy to include VET is also expected to be funded through the EU-funded IPA 2019 project.

10.2. Distribution of costs

In the model prepared for higher education, the plan is to charge fees to applicants (students) for the costs of the procedure. Universities and colleges should regulate the financing with their internal decisions. At the moment, it is difficult to predict what would be the basis for these calculations (lump sum, number of ECTS validated, duration, etc.), and it is possible that the different colleges and universities will make different decisions and establish different practices. The only rationale for such an approach (to charge students) is that the validation panel represents additional work for the teacher. It is important to remember that potential VNFIL applicants are exclusively students of that college or university and that having to pay for VNFIL could be a barrier to them. Since the model had not yet been piloted, no further details on validation methods are available.

10.3. Evidence of benefits to individuals

There has been no analysis yet to evaluate the benefits of validation to individuals.

10.4. Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

10.4.1. Validation trends

Since validation arrangements are still being developed, there are no existing data on validation trends.

10.4.2. Validation users

No statistics are available at this stage.

10.4.3. Validation and disadvantaged groups

Since validation arrangements are still being developed, VNFIL is not available for disadvantaged groups, and there is no existing data on proportions of participants from these groups.

11 Validation methods

VNFIL has not been implemented, there is none occurring in practice and there are no regulations, so we can only speak about validation methods hypothetically. In one ad-hoc case where the Institute for Adult Education of Republika Srpska validated the informal learning its medical technicians acquired through working in the Departments of Transfusion Medicine and Radiology and awarded them with certificates of non-formal education (government-recognised adult education programme), the validation method was an exam consisting in three parts: written test (multiple choice answers), oral exam (interview) and practical work.

Another example comes from higher education. Here the VNFIL model has been developed and piloting should begin soon. As mentioned earlier, 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. According to the draft of the Model Rulebook, there are different (combined) evaluation methods. The application is submitted by the candidate along with a CV and a portfolio in line with the templates. In the application, the applicant indicates the LOs from the study programme for which validation is requested, and provides information on previous learning that may include the following documentation: certificates of non-formal learning, a self-assessment of the achievements acquired through informal or non-certified non-formal learning, a job description from work experience with recommendations from employer(s). When creating a portfolio and CV, the candidate has the support of an advisor at their college or university and a mentor. The panel is appointed by the Faculty Council and consists of three permanent members and associate members. The permanent members of the panel are the vice dean for teaching, the faculty secretary (head of administration) and the faculty ECTS coordinator. Associated members nominated for each case will be chosen from the heads of departments, heads of chapters and university lecturers in the subject. The panel then considers the request and determines whether it can be accepted immediately (if there is certified non-formal learning with LOs match LOs on that particular course) or whether the skills should be assessed in one of the following ways, as applicable:

- by interview or conversation;

- by written paper or project;

- by practical demonstration;

- by oral or written exam.

The possible outcomes are validation, partial validation or refusal. Since the model had not yet been piloted, no further details on validation methods are available.

12 Use of ICT in validation

There are no examples of digitalisation of VNFIL, since even the pilot VNFIL procedures have not been implemented. Most of the competent education authorities have IT systems at varying levels of digital development. The most significant advances in digitalisation at an education authority have been achieved by the Canton of Sarajevo which has created a sophisticated EMIS (education management information system). This system handles certificates and diplomas for all schools and processes external evaluations at the end of primary school and Matura (external school-leaver examinations). This system is crucial for the digitalisation of VNFIL procedures once they commence. However, when VNFIL will actually start remains uncertain due to the absence of legal and institutional prerequisites.

Since the VNFIL model is to be developed over the next few years, digital trends in education should be borne in mind and there should be a digital infrastructure to support VNFIL procedures from the very beginning. This could include online registration, e-portfolio forms, online process tracking, online advice, links to qualifications databases and units of LOs, as well as creating databases of certificates.

13 The position of validation in society

The VNFIL model is a recent development and the practice of VNFIL does not exist in any sector in BiH, though significant progress is expected in the coming years. Since there is nothing in practice and no key stakeholders, people are not familiar with the benefits that individuals and society could gain from VNFIL, and it is not recognized in any of the strategies where it could be relevant (development strategies, work and employment strategies, sectoral strategies and similar).

For now, the development of the VNFIL policies is exclusively handled by the experts from the education sector, especially those focused on adult education. There are initiatives to include representatives from the labour market, especially Public Employment Services and representatives of relevant industries, in the model. More individuals and stakeholders can be expected to become involved after the planned public campaign, and especially once a sufficient number of cases have been completed and some good practice has been established.

14 Recommendations

BiH does not have an established VNFIL system, and the initiatives to develop one are recent and still in the early stages. However, in the past 10 years of continuous education reforms, there has been a recognition of the importance of VNFIL in education for employment, as well as the value of the knowledge, skills and competence that citizens have but which have not been recognised and validated within the qualifications system by education authorities and other stakeholders. There is a strategic commitment to developing VNFIL and efforts have been intensified, especially by focusing on this area within the upcoming implementation of the IPA 2019 project.

Since the very idea of recognising prior non-formal and informal learning has its origin in the qualifications framework, progress on VNFIL is intrinsically linked to the developing a BHQF, and the lack of such a framework is the biggest barrier to the full development of VNFIL. That is why **further development of the QF,** especially a strengthening of the qualifications management structure and linking all parts of the QF into a functional whole, would support further development of the VNFIL system.

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 the education and training arrangements in BiH, it might actually be feasible for the entities, cantons and districts to go ahead and scale up relevant activities 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 point for VNFIL.

The VNFIL systems that are being developed for VET and higher education need to be **included in education laws at the relevant levels** and the competent education authorities need to ascribe clear roles and responsibilities to stakeholders and establish transparent procedures for all stages of VNFIL. This includes setting out **clear standards and procedures, with quality systems for VNFIL providers and system wide**.

In the implementation of any reform, it is important to provide training to everyone who is expected to apply the new procedures. **Training on VNFIL** should target not only the competent education authorities, any new employees or new institutions (or departments), but also all those who will implement the VNFIL procedures at schools, colleges and universities. For students and people 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.

When developing the model, digital trends in education should be taken into account, and there should be a **digital structure that will support VNFIL** procedures enabled from the very beginning. This could include online registration, e-portfolio forms, online process tracking, online advice, links to qualifications databases and units of LOs, as well as creating databases of certificates.

When developing the VNFIL arrangements, special attention should be paid to **funding**. The logic by which it is the applicant who pays for the VNFIL procedure could represent a barrier to access. It might discourage applicants, especially at the beginning, from applying for their skills to be recognised. On a system level the costs are not significant and on a socio-economic level the benefits undoubtedly outweigh the costs – there should be some form of government support. The ALMP could also be considered as a source, as this is where the training of the unemployed is already financed from. Part of these funds could be allocated as subsidies for VNFIL.

Special arrangements should be considered for **disadvantaged groups**, such as the long-term unemployed, migrants, refugees, people with few or no qualifications, etc., to help them find work more easily and support their inclusion in society. Special programmes can be designed to facilitate their access to VNFIL, and this is where the non-governmental sector can be useful.

As in every policy cycle, it is necessary to establish a **system of data collection, monitoring and evaluation** for VNFIL. This could include a data exchange system and regular reports along with systemic evaluations.

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Name	Organisation	Position	Yes/No*
Bojan Bajić	Ministry of Education of Republika Srpska, Institute for Adult Education	Head of Department for Education	Yes
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Daria Duilović	Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Head of the Department for Coordination of Education Policy	Yes
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Lamija Husić	Ministry of Upbringing and Education of Sarajevo Canton	Assistant Minister - Head of the Sector for Secondary Vocational Education and Adult Education	Yes
Zlatko Ibrišimović	Pedagogical Institute of Tuzla Canton	Expert advisor for VET and adult education	Yes

Name	Organisation	Position	Yes/No*
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* Interviewees agree/disagree to their name, organisation and/or position being used in this country report.

16 ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
APOSO	Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BHQF	Qualification Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina
CIP	Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in the Field of Higher Education
CoM	Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
ENIC/NARIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region/National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
HEA	Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (EU)
LLL	Lifelong learning
MoCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
QA	Quality Assurance

QF	Qualifications framework
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning