

INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country factsheet 2023: Montenegro

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
CONTEXT AND STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT	4
POLICY AND REGULATION FRAMEWORK	5
INSTITUTIONAL SETUP AND COLLABORATION	6
BENEFICIARIES AND IMPACT	7
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	8

Context and stage of development

The validation of non-formal and informal learning (VN FIL) system in Montenegro has reached the operational stage though it is not yet fully implemented. Validation is most advanced in the field of key competences and vocational qualifications with 2 160 certificates issued 2019 to 2022.

The overall legal framework for VN FIL in Montenegro is in place. VN FIL is still in an early stage of implementation, with Vocational Education and Training (VET) being the most developed sector. Some of the secondary legislation specifying the implementation arrangements and funding is still outstanding.

VN FIL is implemented by a direct assessment of knowledge, skills and competencies. Licensed adult education (AE) providers conduct the assessments for accredited education programmes. The Examination Centre of Montenegro trains and accredits assessors¹. The certificates issued under the scheme are directly linked to the Montenegrin Qualifications Framework (MQF) and carry transferable credits. All other VN FIL methods are on a case-by-case basis and sporadic.

¹ The Examination Centre is a public institution the Government of Montenegro founded in 2005 (<https://iccg.co.me/>)

Policy and regulatory framework

The legal framework regulating VN FIL in Montenegro is provided for vocational qualifications of the MQF levels 1-5. VN FIL is regulated by the Law on the MQF (2010), the Law on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) (2008, amended in 2016), and the Law on Adult Education (2011, amended in 2017). The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can carry out assessments and award vocational qualifications at MQF levels 6-8 based on the special training programmes accredited by the Higher Education Council, in accordance with the Act on the Higher Education Institution.

Significant improvements have been made since the 2018 VN FIL Inventory on the transferability of qualifications and modules, flexibility in learning pathways and recognition of VN FIL in all newly developed national strategic and planning documents on education, employment and digitalisation. VN FIL is seen as advantageous for economic development and active labour market policies. There is emphasis on overcoming workforce skills shortages, demand-and-supply skill gaps especially in the fields of IT and green skills and other key economic challenges. To reach these goals, access to information and accessibility for less qualified members of the workforce are seen as key.

Where official vocational qualification certificates are issued in line with national legislation and rulebooks, they are recognised regardless of the context in which they were issued because they can only be issued by the licensed providers for approved/accredited programmes. Outcomes of validation processes other than certification, e.g. transferring between education and training and the labour market, are informal.

Montenegro is yet to set out the regulation and implementation arrangements or promote the scheme.

Institutional setup and collaboration

The Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for coordination, monitoring and quality assurance of validation process. The National Council for Education and its bodies are important stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The VET Centre is the national agency responsible for progressing and strengthening the vocational and AE system at MQF levels 1-5 and it provides validation-related guidance and advice.

Licensed AE providers conduct assessments for vocational qualifications at MQF levels 1-5. There are examinations catalogues for each vocational qualification based on the qualification standards and the education programme. An examination commission is formed by the education provider from the list of the licensed examiners, following a proposal of the Examination Centre.

It is the Examination Centre that trains and accredits VN FIL accessors, publishes public calls of interest for new accessors and shortlists them for each vocational qualification. It then submits the list of prospective assessors to the Education Ministry, which issues them five-year licences.

HEIs can carry out assessments and award vocational qualifications at MQF levels 6-8 for special Higher Education Council-accredited training programmes, in accordance with the Higher Education Institution Act.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare publishes the education programmes that lead to vocational qualifications in the Official Gazette.

The Qualifications Council consists of all relevant stakeholders and is responsible for managing and improving the MQF. There are also sectoral commissions with a number of relevant representatives from the sector.

The NQF Law specifies the need for a close partnership between the key national education bodies and licensed education providers to implement VN FIL effectively.

The Employment Agency plays an active role alongside licensed AE providers and employers in promoting and advancing AE, including validation through direct assessment.

Beneficiaries and impact

The main target group taking up VN FIL in Montenegro are individuals already in AE who wish to earn non-formal and informal vocational qualifications (full and partial) without completing a full education programme. Montenegro does not yet have a systematic monitoring system of the use and benefits of VN FIL.

The data currently available for the AE sector include statistics on adults obtaining certificates through a direct assessment procedure. Some 129 licensed AE providers are allowed to provide AE services and VN FIL. From 2019 to 2022, a total of 2 160 certificates were issued through the direct assessment procedure (VN FIL). In the same period, a total of 10 740 persons were enrolled on AE courses.

Under Article 11 of the NVQs Act (2016), the way in which examinations are run (form, duration, make-up of the examination panel) are adapted for candidates with special needs.

There are special Employment Agency programmes to support the unemployed, including the long-term unemployed and the people whose skills are no longer needed in the labour market.

Asylum seekers can enrol on courses leading to professional qualifications and other education programmes if they fulfil entry conditions.

Challenges and opportunities

Overall, the legal and strategic framework and the MQF in Montenegro mean that it is possible to establish a functional system for VN FIL; these key documents contain a clear strategic commitment to VN FIL. In terms of implementation, VN FIL is hampered by a lack of regulations and guidelines describing the stages and procedures, as well as funds and supporting mechanisms for all stakeholders involved. Nevertheless, a substantial number of VN FIL certificates have been issued since 2019, especially taking into consideration Montenegro's size.

To make the system operational, Montenegro needs secondary legislation and guidelines covering VN FIL processes and national funding. This would lay the ground for clear efficient procedures and quality assurance mechanisms to be drawn up. Funding mechanisms, data collection and strategic cooperation agreements also need further attention.

There are key opportunities for stronger inclusion of VN FIL in the upcoming period in areas related to economic development, migration, and the employment action plan.

Current examples of good practice from the VET Centre and the VET sector in general and the active labour market measures the Employment Agency is taking could (alongside other regional and European examples) serve as a good starting point.