INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country factsheet 2023: Serbia

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Context and stage of development

Serbia has adopted the term 'recognition of prior learning' (RPL), which can be equated with the term 'validation of non-formal and informal learning' (VNFIL). VNFIL is defined as an adult education activity that is conducted by assessing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes acquired through non-formal and informal pathways of learning, which enables further education and/or labour mobility.

The VNFIL procedures are currently being implemented in the sectors of vocational and adult education at the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th levels of the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia (NQFS). The system for VNFIL in the country is in the initial phase, with piloted procedures resulting in a developed regulatory framework, forming a solid basis for the forthcoming extension of VNFIL service provision.

VNFIL is linked to the NQFS, which represents the foundation for the application of the lifelong learning (LLL) concept and the basis for the implementation of the VNFIL processes, governing the field of qualifications.

Through the VNFIL procedure, learning outcomes and competences can be assessed under the qualifications framework, meaning that the knowledge and skills acquired through work and life experience can be assessed and recognised via certification or approval.

As of spring 2023, four schools are accredited as VNFIL providers, six schools are in the process of accreditation, and a study on the possibilities for implementing VNFIL in ten accredited Publicly Recognised Organisers of Adult Education (AEPRO) that are not schools is planned within the forthcoming EU IPA 2020 project *Increased offer and diversification of accredited informal training courses and adult training service providers* which started its inception phase in June 2023.

Policy and Regulatory Framework

The legislation in the Republic of Serbia provides a broad platform for the development and implementation of the VNFIL system. The Law on the NQFS and Law on Adult Education provide details on VNFIL as an adult education activity in the context of LLL.

The rulebooks regulate the recognition procedure, standards, instruments, and organisation of recognition, planning of the assessment of prior learning, portfolio evaluation, organisation of competency assessment exams, evidence of success and issuance of certificates, terms of accreditation of service providers, monitoring and quality control of VNFIL processes.

Currently only secondary schools are accredited for providing VNFIL, meaning that the education sector is the main source of service providers. However, the intention is to expand VNFIL service provision to other sectors, which will be tested with the support of the forthcoming EU IPA 2020 project (see above). Although the participation of labour market actors was not addressed during the first pilot, the strategic commitment goes in the direction supporting the further development of the VNFIL system through cross-sectoral measures. The preparation of draft amendments to the relevant laws and bylaws, participation of employment services and an increase in the number of service providers are foreseen.

Institutional setup and collaboration

The main stakeholders for the implementation of the VNFIL are:

- The Ministry relevant for education affairs - approves the status of AEPRO for schools, prescribes standards for self-evaluation and external quality control of AEPRO, adopts the qualification standards;

- The Ministry relevant for employment affairs - participates with its representatives in the Sector Councils which are professional and advisory bodies formed as partnerships whose basic function is to define the needs for qualifications in the labour market in the Republic of Serbia;

- The Institute for Improvement of Education with its Centre for VET- determines the list of qualifications (by qualification types and levels) that can be acquired through the VNFIL, evaluates instruments and standards for VNFIL, provides training for counsellors and evaluators;

- The Qualification Agency - gives approval to organisations other than schools (such as centres for education, companies or professional associations) to acquire AEPRO status, performs external quality control of AEPRO;

- National Employment Service;

- Schools/AEPRO as VNFIL service providers.

The coordination of the main stakeholders in their service provision is regulated by laws.

For the time being, the coordination of the employment service and providers of adult education, training, and career guidance exists but has not yet developed provisions on the VNFIL services. The focus is on extending the pilot activities and providing stronger integration at the implementation level between AEPRO and social partners from the employment and labour market side.

Beneficiaries and impact

The main target group for VNFIL during the pilot phase were low-skilled persons, based on the unemployment records and the analysis of labour market needs carried out by the National Employment Service.

Other disadvantaged groups have not yet been targeted by the VNFIL services, but there are other activities undertaken by active labour market measures and adult education that are addressing this group.

Considering that the VNFIL system in Serbia is still in the developmental phase, statistical data on the number of service providers of the VNFIL procedure and the qualifications offered for recognition has not yet been collected.

Challenges and opportunities

Potential barriers to the effective implementation of the VNFIL system could involve:

- lack of trained assessors who perform recognition/validation according to the modernised qualification standard that cover modern work technologies;

- the discrepancy in the knowledge of teachers/assessors from AEPRO/schools and candidates who come from the labour market and have experience in performing specific jobs;

- the fact that only schools can be accredited as AEPRO for VNFIL procedures;

- general lack of knowledge about the opportunities and advantages of VNFIL;

- lack of information about VNFIL among employers and representatives of the labour market;

- lack of coordination between schools/AEPRO and local employers/economy;

- the users' anxiety toward school and assessment, possible previous negative experience with education system;

- the fact that a quality VNFIL can be an expensive process, bureaucratisation and complexity of the VNFIL procedures.

Opportunities could include:

- support by EU IPA 2020 and other donors in expanding the VNFIL procedures in 10 accredited AEPRO that are not schools, and support to 80 AEPRO in the selection of 800 persons for participation in VNFIL programmes;

- raising knowledge and capacities of evaluators in performing assessments according to modernised qualifications standard and in line with modern work technologies;

- testing capacities of other service providers in performing VNFIL procedures;

- organising information sessions to inform potential candidates, employers and representatives of the labour market about the VNFIL procedure;

- fostering local cooperation and network creation between schools/AEPRO with local employment services and local self-governments;

- possibility to include a motivation/coaching module in the training for VNFIL practitioners to strengthen the support for the users throughout the validation process and prevent dropping out;

- enhancing the documentation phase of the validation process and making a better use of the portfolio of evidence for the assessment of competencies, to enable recognition based on documentation;

- further testing and improving the recognition procedures.