

VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING



Country Factsheet 2021 Azerbaijan



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Context and Stage of Development

The validation process in Azerbaijan is called 'assessment and recognition' and it is offered in the vocational education sector.

The assessment and recognition process is linked to the 'National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan' (AzNQF) approved on 18 July 2018 and covers AzNQF levels 3 (Diploma and Certificate), 4 (Certificate) and 5 (Certificate).

Validation leads to the award of full or partial qualifications. Applicants who successfully complete assessment of all modules of a qualification are awarded a diploma which is equivalent to that granted to the graduates of formal vocational education programmes. This gives the right to continue vocational education or start labour activity in the specialty. Applicants can also gain recognition for individual modules of technical vocational education and higher technical vocational education. In such cases a certificate is awarded.

The process is operational, beneficiaries have been certified and the number of applicants is steadily growing.

Policy and Regulatory Framework

Only 33.5% of the employed population in Azerbaijan have vocational, secondary specialised or higher education. To meet the country's demand for qualified workforce, the "Strategic Roadmap for development of Vocational Education and Training in Azerbaijan Republic" identifies the recognition of competencies acquired through informal and non-formal learning as a key factor facilitating vocational education.

Informal and non-formal learning was introduced as in the Law on Education adopted in 2009. The Law defined these concepts but did not include any further information about validation of non-formal and informal learning until 2018. The latest additions to the Law provided for the possibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning in vocational education through examination.

In August 2020 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the rules for carrying out examination and issuing of the document confirming professional qualification to recognise the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning (the Rules).



Institutional Setup and Collaboration

In accordance with the Rules, assessment and recognition is carried out by the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA), a body under the Ministry of Education. Therefore, the main stakeholders are the Ministry of Education and the Education Quality Assurance Agency. The other stakeholders are:

- the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population (MLSP) (as a member of the Assessment Commission for assessment and recognition in accordance with Article 5.2 of the Rules);
- employers (as members of the Assessment Commission);
- the State Agency for Vocational Education under the Ministry of Education.

EQAA is the supervisory body and the sole provider of validation. The validation processes is supported with rules, guides and methodologies, such as: the statute of the Assessment Commission, the statute of the appeals commission, guidance for assessment and assessment methodologies.

Candidates for validation are assessed by the Assessment Commission which is comprised of a representative of EQAA (as chairman), one member from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and a representative of employers from a relevant sector. The Commission may appoint additional experts.



Beneficiaries and Impact

Implementation of the validation services started in 2020. By September 2021 the EQAA published 14 qualifications available for validation. 279 persons applied for assessment and recognition. 118 of them passed the initial review process. 11 persons were awarded diplomas and 16 persons were awarded certificates. The demand is increasing.

Validation services are currently limited to the capital city Baku, but the EQAA is planning to widen the coverage. Pilot activities on the regional level were supported in 2020 by the EU funded project 'Support for the establishment of the Regional Industrial VET Competence Centre in Ganja' for the qualification 'Drywall installer and repairer'.

Validation service is available for disadvantaged groups. With the sponsorship of the private sector (Pasha Holding company) and in collaboration with the State Employment Agency (SEA), the assessment and recognition processes were organised as a pilot project for confectioners from vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. The applicants were subsequently supplied with equipment by the SEA to start their own businesses. In total, 16 persons from vulnerable groups participated in assessment and recognition in a Confectioner qualification. 9 of them were awarded a diploma and 4 of them were awarded certificates.

Challenges and Opportunities

The EQAA should evaluate the reasons for the low success rates of candidates. Such a low success rate in the initial rollout could discourage the use of services.

The qualification standards and curricula for some VET occupations are outdated and include machinery, tools and equipment that are obsolete in the modern industry. There is a need to update them.

Registration is currently available exclusively online, which could create difficulties for applicants who do not have access to computer or are computer illiterate.

Considering the number of unqualified employees in the labour market it is necessary to expand the range of qualifications available for VNFIL. The most demanded occupations should be defined in consultation with the MLSPP and prioritised for validation.

There is an opportunity to increase the coverage outside of the capital. The EQAA is working on extension of the procedures to regional centers such as Lankaran, Ganja, Guba, Shaki, Barda and Shamakhi.

Funding for the assessment processes relies on fees which might create a barrier for candidates and limit the opportunities for expansion of validation. Additional funding from the Unemployment Insurance Fund could be considered.

To expand the services EQAA's VNFIL department has to be strengthened with additional personnel.

VNFIL is a new process in Azerbaijan, and the EQAA intends to raise awareness about the procedure particularly among persons who work in the informal economy. The Agency prepared information materials which are published on social media and plans to launch promotional campaigns on radio and television. Considering the limited number of specialists in the EQAA's VNFIL department, the promotion and information activities could be additionally supported by guidance services of the SEA and the offices of the Agency for Sustainable and Operative Social Provision (DOST). The EQAA could deliver regular training sessions for SEA and DOST specialists to inform them about the advantages of assessment and recognition, the available qualifications and the processes.