

# VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD

**Cross-country analysis on Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan,  
Moldova and Ukraine**



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# PREFACE

This report was produced under the ETF's Qualifications Modernisation Project. It includes analysis of data collected between June and September 2021 in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova and Ukraine.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inspired by EU developments, EU Neighbourhood Countries have initiated systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). Since 2018, the ETF has been monitoring the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the countries in the western Balkans and Turkey that are part of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). However, developments in VNFIL systems go beyond European countries.

The countries are engaging with validation for many reasons. VNFIL is a central part of education systems developing to become lifelong learning systems. There are many contexts in which VNFIL can play an important role; this includes upskilling and reskilling (particularly in the context of green and digital transitions), active labour market measures, access to higher education and vocational training, the reintegration of migrants, and the completion of primary and secondary education.

The ETF intends to monitor VNFIL developments in all partner countries as one of the key instruments to support lifelong learning and upskilling pathways. In 2021, the ETF conducted reviews in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova and Ukraine. This report summarises the key findings of the reviews and provides recommendations based on the results of the study, which can be used by all partner countries to reflect on their VNFIL systems.

## Key findings:

- **Developments in terms of legislation and policies concerning VNFIL in all five countries are relatively recent and have accelerated over the past 5 years.** There are further pieces of legislation developed and pending adoption, indicating a commitment to widen the use of validation.
- **Some countries are building validation arrangements on the existing systems that needed to be revised and/or expanded.** This was the case in Georgia, Jordan and Ukraine. There are also some validation-like arrangements, such as extramural exams, that are a long-standing tradition in some countries, particularly in eastern Europe; or certification and licensing procedures for the labour market that have become part of the new arrangements.
- **Most new initiatives concentrate on validation to obtain vocational qualifications.** The VNFIL systems in VET differ greatly in terms of implementation, legislation and practice in the five partner countries. Except for extramural exams, the only evidence of VNFIL developments in higher education sectors have been found in Ukraine.
- **In recent years, the countries have focused on opening up and broadening physical access to validation services.** This objective has materialised to some extent with various degrees of coverage. The validation systems are not yet comprehensive in terms of the education and labour market sectors they cover, the types and levels of qualifications they include, or geographical accessibility.
- **Pilots benefited from selected qualifications produced by qualification reform projects, but it is now difficult to scale up the validation services due to a lack of relevant qualification standards.** The number of quality-assured qualifications introduced into qualification registers is often insufficient, or the qualification standards are not detailed enough or present the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in language that is still detached from the realities of the labour market.
- **Considerable attention has been given to putting in place accreditation or authorisation mechanisms for validation centres and assuring a credible assessment process to build**

**trust in the mechanism.** Some investments in the initial capacity building of validation practitioners have been made and additional procedures have been developed to support the use of the service.

- **Insufficient attention has been paid to identifying who could benefit from validation and why.** The visibility of validation in society is low, information is insufficient and collaboration between stakeholders is not yet in place. There seems to be no coordinated effort to target different groups of stakeholders and explain how the results of validation could be used for different purposes. A key challenge at this initial stage of system implementation seems to be that the profiles of potential candidates have not yet been identified.
- **There is no sustainable funding mechanism envisaged for validation.** Funding often relies either on fees or on projects supported by the international community. Vulnerable groups are not sufficiently supported to participate in validation. Validation providers do not see a business case in expanding the services and do not have sufficient incentives to offer flexible learning pathways.
- **Following the pilot activities, the uptake of services has been below expectations.** There is also a risk that low success rates will undermine future demand. This calls for a better understanding of the demand for validation, closer attention to the perspective of the beneficiary, better targeting, and more effort in preparing candidates and pre- and post-validation support.

### Key recommendations for the further development of validation systems:

- **Identify who can benefit from validation.** Raising awareness of the potential use of validation and clarifying the needs of various stakeholders will support the development of a 'business case' for validation providers and the user-centred design of the services.
- **Ensure possibilities for accessing further learning and qualifications and link them closely with validation services.** Validation should become an integral part of education and a necessary element supporting flexible learning pathways. It should foster access or re-entry to further education programmes, and should support the obtention of both partial and full qualifications.
- **Include validation as a tool to implement policies beyond the education sector.** Validation should be linked to active labour market programmes and offered as one of the services for unemployed people in combination with an offer of upskilling. In the context of migration, validation could be used in secondment and in the host country prior to migration, during the time abroad or upon return. In addition, VNFIL should be used to support economic development and address skill shortages, upskilling and reskilling, and in getting people into decent jobs in the formal sector. Including smaller qualifications from outside the formal education sector, but relevant for the labour market in the qualification frameworks, may facilitate scaling-up of validation services
- **Ensure empowering legislation that facilitates the implementation of validation either by mandates or by incentives.** It is important that the benefits of the VNFIL system are made clear, possibilities marketed, and novel ways of financing the VNFIL procedures designed in cooperation with the policymakers and provider institutions.
- **Raise awareness at the early stages of VNFIL development.** If potential VNFIL providers do not know that the system exists or what its benefits could be, there is no implementation.
- **Ensure continuous training of VNFIL practitioners, in addition to integrating VNFIL in formal teacher training targeting assessors, guidance counsellors and administrative coordinators.** It is important that all practitioners have the same view and understanding of the entire VNFIL process and the standards against which assessment is carried out.

- **Provide practical guidelines to ensure quality.** The guidelines should define the roles, responsibilities and key competences of different players, as well as clear and sufficiently detailed procedures for the validation providers.
- **Develop a fit-for-purpose quality assurance system,** which should include the system level and governance of VNFIL, and the actual validation process, including clear standards and the competence base of the practitioners. Feedback on user experience should also be collected.
- **Share good practices and organise peer-learning activities.** Existing well-functioning practices should be further strengthened, shared and disseminated.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1. Introduction

The ETF sees validation as an important component of modern skills development systems, facilitating lifelong learning. ETF partner countries are facing difficulties in building internationally competitive economies. Many are struggling with qualification deficits, skills mismatches and demographic challenges. Policies and mechanisms for VNFIL have been developed with the goal of improving the use of existing skills and competences and facilitating access to further skills acquisition. VNFIL is gaining in importance as a tool for improving the portability of skills and competencies, and as a mechanism that can support upskilling and reskilling, but implementation in the partner countries has been somewhat slow and problematic. Countries find it difficult to move from policies and laws to actual operationalisation, and even if they manage to start with different pilots or focus on specific occupations, they have difficulties in upscaling and expanding practice.

The ETF has been monitoring validation systems in partner countries through the biannual NQF inventory, and has contributed to the European Inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning for the countries that are part of the EQF. However, this is only the first step towards getting a more comprehensive overview of developments beyond the EQF countries, as the ETF considers VNFIL an essential part of lifelong learning systems. To better inform further policy and operational decisions in the partner countries, the ETF has collected information about the stage of development and characteristics of VNFIL systems in five partner countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova and Ukraine. The study covers the overall national context, policy objectives, governance, validation methods, profiles of practitioners, quality assurance mechanisms, information and guidance, and funding mechanisms. It has also collected good practice cases. In addition, it included the identification of the main groups of beneficiaries and statistical data if available, international donor support, and future trends. The study aims at identifying barriers in the implementation of VNFIL and provides recommendations for future actions.

This cross-country report is an analytical summary of the main features, potential barriers, and recommendations for future VNFIL developments in the five ETF partner countries. The report was compiled with the help and expertise of country experts, an ETF expert and an external expert.

Cedefop<sup>1</sup>, in cooperation with the European Commission and since 2018 with ETF, has been collecting data about national developments in the field of VNFIL by producing a series of publications

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<sup>1</sup> European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>



entitled “European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning’. The first national reports from the EU Member States were published in 2004 and have been produced every few years ever since. In addition to the EU Member States, the reports include the non-EU Member States of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and – until Brexit – the UK, separated into (i) England and Northern Ireland, (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland. More recently, in 2018, the reports also included Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Turkey, which were compiled by the ETF and the national experts of the ETF partner countries.

The inventories are a rich source of information and can strengthen the dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation systems and procedures in the participating countries. The key objective is to support the countries so that more individuals can flexibly acquire new skills and make their existing skills and competences visible, which will support their career development and further learning and improve their quality of life in general.

### 1.1.1. Concept

The concept of validation of non-formal and informal learning refers to a process that enables individuals to have their prior learning gained in non-formal or informal contexts to be validated. Non-formal contexts are those that provided structured learning outside the formal education and training systems. This includes open educational resources or training schemes in the workplace, and volunteering. Informal learning takes place every day in the context of work, social activities or self-study. Through validation, individuals should be able to obtain a full or partial qualification regardless of the learning context. The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>2</sup> defines four distinct elements in the validation process:

- (a) *IDENTIFICATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;*
- (b) *DOCUMENTATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;*
- (c) *ASSESSMENT of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;*
- (d) *CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.*

The Council Recommendation also emphasises the importance of guidance and information services linked with validation and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, who are particularly likely to benefit from validation. Additionally, quality assurance measures are important in ensuring that assessment methods and tools remain transparent, reliable and credible. Competence development among the staff involved in validation arrangements is recommended to maintain high-quality validation procedures.

Furthermore, the main principles are that the validation arrangements are linked with the National Qualifications Framework and that the qualifications or partial qualifications gained through validation

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<sup>2</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN)

use the same or equivalent standards as those used in formal qualifications and are based on learning outcomes.

### 1.1.2. Terminology

According to the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>3</sup>, the term ‘validation’ means ‘a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard’. A validation process allows individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences identified, documented, assessed and certified. In principle, the individual may take advantage of any or all of the different elements of validation.

In this study, the country experts were free to adhere to terminology used in their own contexts as long as the terminology was explained and used consistently in their reporting. Some countries opted to use the term ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning’ (VNFIL), partly due to inconsistent or unconsolidated terminology in their own contexts, or just to opt for common, generally understood terminology. Georgia has opted for the term ‘recognition of non-formal education (RNFE)’ and Jordan uses the term ‘recognition of prior learning (RPL)’. Other countries refer to their validation systems with the acronym VNFIL and translate the terminology used, e.g. in legislation or other formal documents, word for word.

There are some discrepancies in the use of the terms ‘non-formal’ and ‘informal’. For example, in Georgia the term non-formal includes both non-formal and informal learning, whereas in some countries there is no definitive term for the word ‘learning’, so ‘informal learning’ is referred to as ‘informal education’, which is contradictory in terms of meaning in English.

### 1.1.3. Method and composition

At the beginning of the process, five country experts were selected to write a country report for each of the target countries. To support the country experts in their work, the ETF, supported by an international expert, provided the outlines of the process and further advice.

The country experts were provided with a reporting template with specified headings and subheadings. Each heading contained guiding questions through which the country experts were provided with different aspects of the topic at hand that they were expected to consider in their reports, if appropriate. The content of template reflected the previous inventories in order to achieve comparability between countries. In addition to the chapters included in the European Inventory, the country experts were asked to include a chapter on recommendations for further consideration in their countries. Additionally, guidelines for writing and the production process of the reports were provided.

The country experts collected data for their reports through desk research and interviews with various relevant authorities and stakeholders in their respective countries. The data was collected between June and September 2021.

This cross-country analysis was carried out by the ETF with the support of an international expert. The aims of the analysis are to provide a synthesis of the state of the art in validation in the five ETF partner countries and to develop recommendations for the further development of the validation systems.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## 1.2. Background

### 1.2.1. Human capital development issues in the EU Neighbourhood

The ETF partner countries are struggling with a slow pace of reform of the education systems, resulting in qualification deficits, skills mismatches and a lack of lifelong learning opportunities for adults, while in many countries, particularly in the Eastern Partnership, the younger population is in decline. The [2021 ETF Torino Process Assessment on the Eastern Partnership](#) highlights that the shrinking pool of skills will require better use of the skills of young people and adults on the labour market.

Many people in the partner countries remain unemployed and inactive. Many who are employed are in vulnerable jobs or in jobs for which they are overqualified. There is a lack of good-quality jobs and low investment in value-added sectors, which could create more attractive jobs and more opportunities for training. In order to attract foreign investment, countries need to raise the skills levels of their populations.

### 1.2.2. Influence of EU policies

The [Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning \(2012/C 398/01\)](#) encouraged Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. The validation arrangements should follow a number of principles, such as:

- link to national qualifications frameworks;
- full or partial qualifications obtained through the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences should comply with agreed standards that are either the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes;
- availability of information on the benefits of and opportunities of validation, and on the procedures applied;
- consideration of disadvantaged groups, which are particularly likely to benefit from validation;
- transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools;
- provision for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process;
- synergies between validation arrangements and credit systems applicable in the formal education and training system;
- promotion of transparency tools to make it easier to document learning outcomes; and
- giving individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment the opportunity to undergo a 'skills audit' aimed at identifying their knowledge, skills and competences.

**The 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults** aimed at helping low-skilled adults develop new skills through learning opportunities. The Recommendation invited Member States to ensure that adults with low levels of skills and qualifications had access to 'upskilling pathways' to develop their skills (including basic skills such as numeracy, literacy and digital skills), and potentially to progress towards a qualification. These pathways should offer people support through:

- skills assessment;<sup>4</sup>
- a tailor-made learning offer; and
- skills validation and recognition.

**The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning** (2017/C 189/03) refers to the validation of non-formal and informal learning and states, as one of the criteria for referencing the national qualifications framework to the EQF, the criterion on validation arrangements: the national qualifications frameworks and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

Close to one fifth of adult Europeans still struggle with reading, writing, calculation and using digital tools. About 22% of adult Europeans have obtained lower secondary education level at most. Without certified skills and with low-level qualifications, they are at high risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. **The 2020 European Skills Agenda** includes actions around four building blocks: (1) a call for collective action; (2) actions to ensure people have the right skills for jobs; (3) tools and initiatives to support people in lifelong learning pathways; and (4) a framework to unlock investments in skills. The actions supporting people in developing skills for life encompass validation and include:

- the Upskilling Pathways initiative, supporting adults in improving literacy, numeracy and digital skills. The pathways offer support through skills assessment, a tailor-made training offer, and skills validation and recognition;
- individual learning accounts (ILAs), which are proposed as a tool to overcome the low participation of adults in training. ILAs are intended to support all working-age adults in accessing training, irrespective of their labour force status, and to increase people's motivation to seek training. Validation services could be funded through ILAs as well;
- the Europass platform, which helps people to identify skills and present them in digital format to employers. It also informs people about training and job opportunities;
- micro-credentials, which can provide attractive learning opportunities. Validation arrangements should be adapted to allow for the award of micro-credentials.

**The Talent Partnerships** announced in the new Pact on Migration and Asylum aim at enhancing the legal pathways to the EU, while engaging partner countries strategically on migration management. They will provide a comprehensive policy framework, funding support and capacity building assistance to boost mutually beneficial international mobility. The cooperation will cover areas such as labour market or skills intelligence, vocational education and training, and integration of returning migrants. The operational pillar aims at better matching skills and the needs of EU and partner countries.

The ETF partner countries have introduced education and qualification system reforms inspired by EU policies. In the Eastern Partnership countries (EaP), the Association Agreements, which a number of the ETF's partner countries have concluded with the EU, include cooperation in education and training

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<sup>4</sup> Skills assessments (in other terminologies: skills audits, portfolios or assessments) are aimed at helping individuals identify their knowledge, skills and competences for self-development, further learning, labour market integration or career development. The individual will typically not undergo an assessment process and obtain a qualification; rather, the most common output of the process is a portfolio with advice on potential further steps. Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, McGuire, D., Regan, K., Ulicna, D., et al., Skills audits : tools to identify talent : final report, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/993047>

in the context of EQF developments. While the countries are not part of the EQF, they may compare their NQF to the EQF in the future. Ukraine is the first pilot for comparing the NQF with the EQF.

Supporting youth is a priority within the Eastern Partnership. These youth activities are also exploring how validation could be used to recognise skills obtained through volunteering and other forms of non-formal and informal learning.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 2.1. Analysing validation

Validation can serve various and diverse objectives. People might choose to have their skills validated with education-related objectives in mind, for example to access – or progress faster through – formal education programmes, or to complete basic or secondary education. The rationale for validation might also be related to the labour market goals and aim at accessing jobs for which certification is required or can be beneficial, to advance in the current work sector, or to change profession. Employers might be interested in certifying or reskilling their workforce to access new markets. Individuals might also be interested in validating their skills purely for personal development. Following the analytical framework of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, this study analyses validation services from the perspective of organisations engaged in their delivery in three sectors: in education sector, the labour market and the third sector.

In the formal education system, validation arrangements can be made available in general education, adult education, VET (initial and continuous) and higher education. In such cases, the education standards will typically be used as a reference for assessment.

Validation in the labour market refers here to either VNFIL procedures that are taking place independently in the labour market using standards that are separate from the formal qualification system (such as occupational standards, non-formal qualifications or professional standards), or to other types of significant involvement of the labour market players, such as participation in sectoral associations in qualification design, supporting the assessment in terms of expertise, or providing an authentic environment where candidates can demonstrate their skills. In addition, the role of labour market stakeholders and authorities, such as public employment services, is in focus.

Third-sector (civil society) organisations can play an important role as providers of skills built through civic engagement or non-formal training. These skills are often highly sought after in the labour market. In addition, the third sector is implementing initiatives that support individuals in identifying and documenting their skills, such as Youthpass, which documents skills acquired through volunteer work in the youth sector.

Educational institutions might be involved in providing validation services for the labour market (this concerns VET in particular, but also higher-level qualifications). Alternatively, individuals might wish to use the results of validation carried out in the labour market to pursue further learning in the formal education sector. The challenge is to ensure that validation becomes an integral element of all education and training systems (formal and non-formal) and that individuals can transfer their confirmed learning outcomes between different sectors. This is difficult due to the differing reference standards and quality assurance mechanisms used for validation by the three sectors.

## 2.2. Emerging national VNFIL systems

**Developments in terms of legislation and policy concerning VNFIL in all five countries are relatively recent and have accelerated over the past 5 years.** There are also several pieces of legislation pending concerning specific sectors (cf. Ukraine and Moldova). In Georgia and Jordan, the first laws came into effect in 2007 and 2009 respectively, and covered VNFIL in the VET sector and occupational licencing. In Georgia, however, implementation was halted due to misgivings concerning the quality of the procedures. In Jordan the system was implemented, but the labour market had trust issues towards the system due to a lack of information on the applied standards and assessment procedures. Furthermore, the government withdrew the licencing obligation from most sectors.

In Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, there is legislation stipulating the VNFIL possibility in specific sectors of education and/or the labour market. In Azerbaijan the legislation concerns solely the VET sector, and in Jordan the NQF regulation stipulates VNFIL in all 10 of the JNQF levels, with more specific procedural descriptions concerning the VET sector. However, according to the JNQF, the VNFIL system is not yet operational as the required criteria, procedures and instructions for applying RPL have not yet been developed and issued. It must be noted, though, that in Jordan, occupational tests have been carried out in relatively high numbers, even though the numbers have declined in recent years partly due to COVID-19 and some legislative amendments regarding licencing requirements for certain occupations. Jordan has awarded over 18 000 certificates to Jordanians and to Syrian refugees on the basis of an occupational test.

Despite relatively extensive legislation in the five countries, VNFIL implementation in all countries studied is low. Below are some identified factors that may hinder implementation to some extent.

### Reported in all countries:

- 1 Legislation does not stipulate that VNFIL must be an integral part in education or labour market procedures. Laws and regulations provide VNFIL as an option, but not a mandated procedure in any circumstances.
- 2 There is insufficient public funding or other sustainable funding mechanisms for VNFIL, both for potential VNFIL providers and for potential candidates, which does not incentivise implementation or applying to the validation procedure.
- 3 The profiles of beneficiaries have not been clearly identified.
- 4 Awareness of VNFIL and its benefits/opportunities for different stakeholders is low in society.
- 5 Competence development of practitioners (e.g. assessors and guidance counsellors) is not systematic or is non-existent.

### Reported by several countries:

- 6 Laws, regulations or other policies do not describe the roles and responsibilities of players and stakeholders clearly, which leads to stagnation in development and implementation.
- 7 Heavy and costly accreditation procedures create a barrier for many potential VNFIL providers.
- 8 The number of state-approved qualification standards that can be applied in VNFIL is low.
- 9 Geographical accessibility to VNFIL services is a hinderance.



### Reported by some countries:

- 10 There is a lack of trust in the results of VNFIL.
- 11 Legislation does not cover e.g. adult education, or there are no guidelines for VNFIL concerning the labour market and/or the non-formal sector.

Upskilling appears to be the major reasoning behind VNFIL policymaking in most countries, but since most of the validation practices concern the formal education and training system, the adult population –especially adults in more fragile positions, such as unemployed people, migrants and refugees – do not necessarily benefit from the opportunities that validation could provide for them. In Azerbaijan, validation is planned to be included in consultation with citizens seeking career guidance or vocational training. In Georgia, many of the people taking part in the extramural (Externat) exams are either migrants or Georgian returnees. In Jordan, mainly migrants have had access to occupational tests to receive the occupational licence and formalise their employment status. In Moldova, access to validation services has been opened up to a large number of candidates through funding by international organisations, and the national employment agency plans to start identifying and steering unemployed people to these services. In Ukraine, the validation procedures have so far mainly concerned unemployed adults through the State Employment Service, but only for one occupation: cook.

#### 2.2.1. VNFIL in the education sector

**The VNFIL systems in VET differ quite a lot in terms of implementation, legislation and practice in the five partner countries.** In Azerbaijan, Jordan and Moldova the VNFIL activities focus on the VET sector, even though Jordan and Moldova have primary legislation allowing VNFIL procedures in other sectors as well.

In Ukraine, since 2014 there it has been possible to use validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET, in the form of entrance or access control to shorten programmes. Some training providers have developed procedures for this. However, the extent to which this practice is implemented is unknown, as there is no central monitoring. A completely new system is currently being established with the Ukrainian National Qualifications Authority, which is in charge of accrediting validation providers, but no certifications have yet carried out at the time of writing.

Georgia has relatively mature legislation concerning VNFIL and VET, dating back to 2007. However, the implementation of the procedures was paused due to malpractice and low uptake. Although there have been further developments in the quality assurance process and legislation, there have been no beneficiaries of VNFIL in the VET sector in Georgia to date. However, the first providers have applied for accreditation to offer VNFIL services.

In Jordan, according to NQF provisions, VNFIL could be carried out in all education sectors with a special emphasis and detailed procedural descriptions in the VET sector. However, in Jordan the NQF by-laws came into force right before the COVID-19 pandemic spread, and further regulations and guidelines concerning VNFIL are yet to be introduced. It should be noted, however, that in Jordan, VNFIL activities to gain occupational licences have been carried out for over 20 years.

Azerbaijan is the only one of the five countries whose legislation regarding VNFIL concentrates solely on VET, even if in practice VET is the education sector where most of the legislative focus appears to be in most of the countries.

Some of the countries reported that there were few qualifications available for VNFIL. In Azerbaijan, VNFIL is offered for 14 VET qualifications (but there were VNFIL applications for only 7 qualifications). Moldova reported that there were a rather limited number of qualifications in which approved qualification standards exist, which is a prerequisite for VNFIL.

It appears that one of the reasons why implementation in VNFIL practices is quite weak, is that many countries require separate accreditation systems for VET providers concerning VNFIL. This has also led to accessibility constraints, since most of the accredited centres are situated in the capital region or in a few big cities.

**Extramural (Externat) exams in general education have a long-standing tradition in the former Soviet Union.** Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine continue to provide the opportunity for individuals to attain various different levels of general education through extramural exams. Strictly speaking, the extramural exams are not VNFIL in practice, since there is no process of identification, documentation, assessment and certification. The extramural exams are usually based on national standardised testing, and often the focus is to gain a certification that allows access to further education. In Georgia the numbers of individuals taking the Externat Exams have been especially high, which appears to be a strain on the general education system to some extent, rather than providing flexible study paths.

**Higher education and VNFIL is not emphasised in any of the five ETF partner countries.** In terms of legislation, VNFIL would be possible in Jordan and Ukraine. In Georgia, the recognition processes in higher education concern the recognition of previous higher education studies rather than non-formal and informal learning. In Moldova, specific legislation governing higher education and VNFIL is being drafted. In Ukraine, VNFIL is recommended as a favourable element in the accreditation procedure. Furthermore, a draft regulation on VNFIL in higher education has been developed, stipulating the validation procedures in higher education and describing the terms and the typical validation process.

### 2.2.2. VNFIL in the labour market

VNFIL procedures carried out independently in the labour market are being implemented in Jordan and Ukraine. In these countries, the standards that have been used in VNFIL are not formal qualification standards, but rather occupational standards. In Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova the labour market has an important role in terms of providing expertise from industry practitioners in qualification design, in assessment procedures and in work-based learning opportunities, among other things.

In Jordan, the occupational licencing system is established. It addresses employed people who do not hold formal qualifications but have gained skills and competences in the labour market. People who receive the licence through validation are expected to be better able to practise their occupation and gain access to further skills development opportunities. This system has significantly helped migrants and refugees, as over 18 000 licences have been awarded.

In Ukraine, VNFIL in the labour market is the only relatively well established VNFIL procedure. It was developed by the State Employment Service (SES), whose role is central in the provision of VNFIL services. There are three assessment centres in Ukraine that perform the VNFIL procedures. However, the only professional qualification that can be validated is 'cook' at levels 3 to 6. Over several years, the skills of approximately 600 candidates have been validated for the professional qualification of cook. Due to new legislation from 2021 this is expected to change, with more professional qualifications able to be validated. The SES has developed a clear and systematic procedures for VNFIL, including guidance and advisory services through employment centres.



In Azerbaijan, VNFIL is available for disadvantaged groups and with the sponsorship of the private sector. Together with the State Employment Agency (SEA), the assessment and recognition processes were organised as a pilot project for a small number of confectioners with disabilities.

### **Collaboration with the State Employment Agency, Azerbaijan**

The State Employment Agency (SEA) supports entrepreneurs within a self-employment scheme. The main purpose of this scheme is to move from traditional 'passive' policy measures (benefits and assistance) to 'active' policy measures to strengthen social protection and improve the living standards of socially vulnerable families, especially low-income families in need of social assistance. Within this scheme, the SEA, together with the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA), carried out VNFIL for persons with disabilities. Five persons with disabilities participated in VNFIL, of whom three successfully completed the procedures, receiving two diplomas and a certificate. Furthermore, for VNFIL the applicants were supplied with equipment by the SEA to start their own businesses.

This successful social programme received positive feedback from both Agencies, and there is a plan to continue the programme in the future.

Source: Ilkin Nazarov, *Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Country Report Azerbaijan, ETF 2021* (unpublished)

In Moldova, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) finances VNFIL services in terms of professional qualifications for migrants. IOM and some other international organisations also provide expertise to VET centres that organise VNFIL services. At the same time, the National Employment Agency (NEA) provides guidance and support services for unemployed people. The NEA also provides work-based learning opportunities for unemployed people, and identifies those who could benefit from VNFIL services in the validation centres and guides them accordingly.

### **2.2.3. VNFIL in the third sector**

As the VNFIL as a system is quite new and under development in the target countries, there are little or no direct VNFIL activities in the third sector. The third sector is seen as a legitimate and important stakeholder in the countries, but as the VNFIL procedures are being implemented mainly in the formal education sector and the labour market, there are no proper initiatives in the third sector as of yet. For example, it has been reported that it would be possible for third-sector organisations to apply for accreditation for VNFIL provision in Georgia and Moldova, but the procedures for small organisations are too time-consuming and costly.

However, it has also been reported that third-sector organisations play an important indirect role in VNFIL, as some of the organisations provide career guidance services and provide information on different learning opportunities, including VNFIL, if appropriate. In addition, in the prospective volunteers are provided with counselling and testing services in the voluntary sector, but actual VNFIL procedures are not systematically carried out. Some third-sector organisations in the Eastern Partnership registered as organisations issuing Youthpass, which describes the competences

developed by participating in the youth projects, and an ongoing EU action involved supporting the further implementation of this tool<sup>5</sup>.

### 2.3. Qualification system reforms – a triggering factor or a major bottleneck?

Influenced by the EQF, the partner countries have introduced national qualifications frameworks with the expectation of improving the transparency, relevance and portability of their qualifications, and of opening access to flexible learning pathways. In most of the countries, the NQFs were designed with eight levels, allowing for an easier comparison of qualifications to the EQF. They have increasingly oriented their human capital development policies towards lifelong learning, quality and inclusion. Similarly to the EU Member States, they have linked the implementation of validation systems to the implementation of NQFs. It is assumed that the new quality-assured qualifications included in the national qualification registers accommodate alternative mechanisms of awarding qualifications, including through validation.

In Azerbaijan, the governance arrangements for the NQF have not been fully settled and the procedures for allocating qualifications by level are still being developed. The Azerbaijani NQF is in the late adoption stage. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have reached the activation stage of NQF development. Jordan is working on a clear implementation strategy, and the procedures for developing, validating and registering qualifications have not yet been adopted (ETF, 2021a-e).

**The qualification reforms triggered investments in the validation system, but the bottlenecks in the implementation of the NQFs now have a negative impact on the process of rolling out the validation.** The number of quality-assured qualifications introduced to qualification registers is often insufficient (this problem has been reported in Moldova, for example), and the qualification standards are not detailed enough or present the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in a language that is still detached from the realities of the labour market (as reported in Azerbaijan).

The assessment systems are generally weak, and additional arrangements have to be put in place to ensure valid and reliable validation procedures. In Azerbaijan, where the new NQF has not yet been activated, the agency in charge of validation develops special assessment-item databases for each of the qualifications subject to validation. In the absence of new qualification standards, some countries develop assessment instruments based on occupational standards.

The weakness of vocational education systems, which have historically served as a second-choice track for underperforming students, led to the emergence of parallel, independent qualification or assessment systems that were needed by employers to ensure the supply of truly competent labour. This distinction between 'vocational' and 'professional' qualifications is sometimes cemented by the national qualifications framework, which has accommodated different qualification types but has not yet made an effort to build links and bridges between them. The status of continuous vocational courses or adult education courses in the NQF is often unclear. Only some NQFs accommodate non-formal qualifications and allow non-state players to propose and award qualifications under the NQF.

**While modernised qualification standards technically enable modular training provision, training providers rarely offer flexible learning pathways.** Preparing such an offer is a financial, organisational and educational challenge.

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<sup>5</sup> EU4Youth Phase III Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship programme.

Challenges related to the slow implementation of qualification system reforms, which have a negative impact on the broadening of validation services, have been reported in all countries studied.

## 2.4. System design – is there a business case for providers?

Those in charge of planning the further development of validation services should carefully consider the perspective of the institutions mandated to deliver those services. With the exception of Azerbaijan, where the Education Quality Assurance Agency is the overseeing body and sole provider of assessment services, the common requirement is that only institutions that deliver the accredited training programmes can apply for the status of validation provider. Granting such a status must follow a separate authorisation process, which is sometimes considered burdensome. While this process shows attention to the quality of the future validation service, it might also discourage providers from applying.

In Moldova, the VET Centres of Excellence are the typical validation service providers. In Georgia, private providers have been accredited under the newly revised system, while Ukraine has adopted procedures that will allow more stakeholders to apply for the status of validation provider, as until now only three centres have been operating in connection to the State Employment Service. In Jordan, the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) has been the government institution mandated to implement occupational assessment tests and to issue licences to practise to workers, including those who have acquired their competencies and skills through non-formal and informal learning. Later, the National Employment and Training Company (NET) was also authorised to conduct RPL assessment tests for groups of Jordanian and Syrian workers targeted by the projects of international donors.

Except for some initial training and general guidance documentation, no further support is offered to validation service providers.

**Validation service providers do not have financial incentives to offer validation services.** In vocational education, fees are the main source of funding validation services. This is the case in the VET sector in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In Jordan, the fees charged do not cover the full cost related to the assessment procedure, and the validation service providers, whose main mandate is to provide training, use their regular budgets without earmarked lines for validation. The report on Moldova highlights that training providers charge fees to fund validation services but the fact that they are not permitted to generate profit does not incentivise them to scale up their service provision. In Ukraine the accreditation fee for providers is substantial, and the report suggests that this might create barriers for some providers. Institutions providing validation services do not receive special public grants and do not typically enter into agreements to ‘sell’ their services to other public agencies. A notable exception was reported in Jordan, where the municipality of Amman covered the cost of occupational tests and licences to practice for its employees.

**The traditional vocational education funding model does not incentivise a shortening of the education track and the establishing of modular complementary courses.** Such courses should be linked directly to validation and be offered to those candidates who do not succeed, or only partially succeed, in the validation process.

## 2.5. Standards and what can be validated

In Azerbaijan, validation is based on the assessment criteria of learning outcomes in modules defined by educational programmes (curricula) in relevant specialties. These include the correct expression of opinions, coverage of the topic, correct sequences, manual ability and the ability to use relevant methods, materials, tools and equipment. These standards are used in formal education. Some of the

qualification standards and curricula are outdated, including equipment or tools that are no longer used at the workplace, which sometimes makes it difficult to develop assessment instruments. The education programmes and learning outcomes that form the basis of the validation assessment are published on the EQAA's website to inform potential candidates.

In March 2019, the 'State standard for vocational education' was adopted. The standard defines expected learning outcomes in terms of learners' knowledge, skills and competences. It specifies learning content and requirements for trainers, training infrastructure and teaching material. The standard ensures a modular structure for the curriculum. It also includes eight key competences for lifelong learning adapted to local circumstances. Full or partial qualifications can be validated in Azerbaijan.

Similarly in Georgia, RNFE is based on national standards for vocational education that are the basis of formal education. The National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is responsible for developing vocational education standards through its sector skills councils. Recognition at general education level is based on the national curriculum for general education. RNFE is carried out for qualifications registered in the Georgian NQF (GeoNQF). The electronic system for RNFE has GeoNQF levels, framework and fields of study built into it, automatically directing users to the qualifications included in the framework. Full or partial qualifications can be validated and certified.

In the VET sector in Jordan, occupational standards are used for RPL. They are based on the Arab Standards Classification of Occupations (ASCO). They include job profiles and specify tasks usually performed by job holders. Tests used for RPL are designed based on the results of a DACUM (Developing A Curriculum) process, which presents the job-related competencies in the categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes. RPL uses the same instruments as formal education programmes.

In Moldova, qualification standards are used for validation and their limited number hinders the full roll-out of validation services. They have to be based on occupational standards, and the sector bodies in charge of their development face capacity limitations. In VET, as of August 2021, there were approximately 40 qualifications registered in the Moldovan NQF. The results of validation assessment might certify full or partial qualifications.

In Ukraine, the NQA will authorise qualification centres to assess and recognise the learning outcomes of individuals based on occupational standards, and to award professional qualifications that have a strong labour market function. Qualification centres will be able to confirm partial or full qualifications (ETF, 2021e).

## 2.6. Quality assurance

Validation as a new procedure has to gain credibility as a legitimate route to qualification. The key to trust in the mechanism lies in ensuring that the VNFIL assessment is fair, valid and reliable. This will depend on the standards used as a basis for assessment, appropriate methods and tools, and the competencies of assessors. There is still a lot of prejudice surrounding validation, with it being thought of as a shortcut allowing people to bypass the educational track. In addition, the level of social trust in ETF partner countries is low and some of them still struggle with corruption. Mechanisms put in place to ensure that the procedure is transparent reflect these issues and focus strongly on safeguards, compliance and standardisation.

**Quality assurance mechanisms for VNFIL are in place and build strongly on the quality assurance mechanisms within the respective education sub-systems.** The countries have made an effort to ensure that standards used in validation are linked to the accredited training programmes

or qualifications within the NQF, if that NQF has reached an operational stage. The learning outcomes that are subject to assessment follow the ones described in the accredited educational and qualification standards.

**Within general education sectors, quality assurance of VNFIL is integrated into the overall education quality assurance system.** Extramural exams in Georgia are integrated into the quality assurance mechanisms of the general education sector under the oversight of the relevant inspection bodies of the Ministry of Education and Science. The assessment instruments for secondary general education level are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, while the learning outcomes and assessment methods used follow the national curriculum. There are additional rules regarding compliance, candidates' discipline and transparency of the extramural exams. The exams can be observed by Ministry staff.

**Among the countries studied, there is only one example of an emerging approach to validation quality assurance in the higher education sector.** The Ukrainian procedure for recognising the learning outcomes of non-formal and informal education requires providers to develop procedures ensuring confidentiality and ethical standards, establish validity requirements and quality assurance mechanisms for validation, and ensure conditions allowing validation for persons with special educational needs. Providers are required to develop and implement validation quality assurance within their internal quality assurance systems.

**Special authorisation to provide validation services is commonly required in VET.** With the exception of Azerbaijan – where the EQAA is the main body responsible for validation policies, oversight and the provision of validation services – a special type of authorisation for VNFIL is used in the VET sector. In some cases, accreditation has two levels, where the status of VNFIL provider can be granted only to the institutions that have the status of already accredited training providers and fulfil additional validation-related conditions. As mentioned in the chapter above, these procedures are in some cases considered burdensome by potential providers.

In vocational education in Georgia, validation providers must be licenced by the NCEQE's VET Quality Assurance Department is required. Only institutions that have been granted programme accreditation can apply for the status of validation service provider in the respective qualifications. They are required to present a developed VNFIL regulation, have an information system in place regarding validation costs, and provide guidance services by a certified consultant. Internal and external quality assurance standards and procedures are used. Some stakeholders consider the rules for authorising VNFIL providers very strict and argue that the right to grant accreditation for VNFIL services should be exercised by a collegial body rather than a department within the NCEQE. Unlike in the case of guidance consultants, the existing regulations do not require assessors (members of the validation commission) to undergo special training, certification or further professional development.

**Guidance is rarely covered by quality assurance measures.** Assessment is not the only aspect of validation arrangements that should be quality-assured. Information and guidance through the process, including post-assessment advice, are equally important. Their importance is not yet commonly considered, although it is being gradually recognised. Georgia and Moldova have included the roles of guidance counsellors, and they are also considered a Ukrainian draft regulation on validation in higher education. In Georgia, guidance counsellors must undergo certification by the NCEQE. Particular attention has been paid to guidance services that focus on the identification and documentation stages of the process. The NCEQE is entitled to monitor the implementation of validation and to potentially revoke authorisation. The validation processes are managed and reported through a digital platform, which greatly facilitates monitoring by the NCEQE, especially for activities carried out by guidance consultants.

In the VET sector in Moldova, only institutions that are accredited as providers of education programmes are authorised to carry out validation, and only for qualifications covered by the programme accreditation. The National Agency for Quality Assurance oversees external quality assurance and carries out accreditation and monitoring functions. Qualification and educational standards are used as a basis for assessment.

In Jordan, national policies, mechanisms and criteria regarding quality assurance of qualifications have not yet been developed. In the VET sector, instructions issued in 2012 on occupational assessment tests and licences to practice cover requirements regarding the assessment supervising committee, the process of assessment, its documentation, the skills standards used, the right to appeal and the involvement of an oversight body. The Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) is currently the institution responsible for supervising and licencing providers. Industry experience is one of the requirements of assessors.

In Ukraine, within the system of qualification centres, the recently adopted Regulation on accreditation of qualification centres (September 2021, #986) requires that providers: (1) have their own website that includes information about the assessment procedures and requirements for the assessment of learning outcomes; and (2) ensure compliance with the accreditation criteria and requirements for the activities of qualification centres defined by law.

**Efforts have been made to ensure that the VNFIL assessment can be trusted and is fair.** The VNFIL assessment mechanisms put in place are more reliable than some of the assessment practices within the typical vocational education programme. The most common feature is a collegial body of assessors – the examination commission. In the VET sector, industry experience is a common requirement of assessors, which is extremely important for understanding the perspectives of candidates, who learn their skills from experience.

In Azerbaijan, where, as mentioned before, the EQAA is the supervisory body and sole provider of VNFIL, the quality of 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. Good practice has been established during the VNFIL pilot for two occupations through the creation of an assessment item bank. The EQAA continues this practice. For each qualification, a minimum of two experts – one of whom has experience in the industry – are hired and trained to develop assessment items. Two types of assessment instruments are developed: a multiple-choice question bank for a knowledge test, and a set of practical assignments for assessing skills and competences.

The Ukrainian Guideline on assessment of non-formal vocational training (2016), which covers assessment criteria and instruments, recommends standardising the assessment tools by developing a set of control and assessment materials (SCAM). SCAM should be approved in agreement with all relevant stakeholders at national level: the MoE, the MoES, the Joint Representative Body of Employers, and trade unions.

Validation assessments have a strong focus on practical skills, although the traditional division into the practical and theoretical parts is commonly upheld. Alternative assessment methods that could be more suitable for candidates whose past experience with the educational system was unsuccessful, are not commonly used.

All countries studied included the right to appeal against the results of the assessment. In Moldova, candidate can even appeal against the result of the initial screening that determines the access to and scope of the assessment (full or partial qualification).



## MOST COMMON VNFIL QUALITY ASSURANCE ELEMENTS

Inclusion of VNFIL in the quality assurance mechanisms of the respective education sector

Authorisation for VNFIL service providers subject to accreditation for delivering study programmes

Use of educational or professional standards

Reinforced rules for transparent assessment through collegial teams of assessors

Requirements for assessors to have professional experience in the respective industry

Use of assessment guidelines

Right to appeal

Source: authors based on national inventories on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**Guidelines have been developed to support the quality of validation services, but there is a need to cover more topics.** Guides mainly support the assessment part of the validation process, but there is a need to cover the specific elements of the validation arrangements in more detail, in particular the information, guidance and advice procedures. Quality codes for providers are not yet in place.

Georgia and Moldova have comprehensive guides on validation. In Moldova, the officially endorsed Practical Guide thoroughly informs validation service providers of the relevant aspects of VNFIL, including key principles, steps leading to the introduction of validation services in an educational institution, capacities required, and the functions of personnel engaged in validation. A separate chapter on standards and learning outcomes is included. The Guide includes process charts and document templates. It describes categories of instruments for monitoring and evaluating the VNFIL mechanisms covering the quality of the procedures of assessment and certification and reporting obligations.

**Feedback loops are not commonly considered.** Considering that the validation systems are only now becoming operational, it is not surprising that within the quality assurance mechanisms, the main focus has been given to assessment as the core element that can secure trust in the system. However, in the future, more focus will be needed on elements that not only support compliance, but also facilitate further improvement of the services. In this respect, there is a need to work on monitoring and for feedback loops covering not only the assessment part but also elements such as information, candidate preparation, accessibility of staff and quality of advice. The Moldovan Practical Guide, which is available in various formats, includes a feedback questionnaire.

**The further professional development of validation practitioners requires more attention.** No mechanism for further development for personnel involved in validation has so far been considered. This might be related to the fact that continuous professional development of staff, in particular teachers, is included in the overall quality assurance system at education and VET institutions that

also offer validation services. However, there might be specific training needs related to validation that could facilitate improvements in the quality of validation services. As much as the initial training of validation practitioners is commonly implemented, none of the reports detected any processes or plans to support their further professional development.

### Training of assessors and assessment developers, Azerbaijan

In 2019 and 2020, the EU-funded project 'Support to implementation of NQF in Azerbaijan' conducted training workshops for VNFIL assessors and assessment developers. The training initially covered the development of multiple-choice questions. As a result, the assessors developed a multiple-choice question assessment item bank for two qualifications (Barber and Cook), with 250 questions for each qualification. In the second phase, the assessment developers were trained to develop practical assignments for VNFIL. The project provided templates for practical assignments, which included guidelines for candidates and assessors. The assessment developers formulated assignments covering all modules of the two qualifications.

In the final phase, the assessors were trained at an assessment centre in Târgoviște, Romania. The centre was one of the frontrunners in VNFIL assessment in Romania.

The assessment items developed by the project were used by the EQAA for conducting validation for the Barber qualification.

Source: Ilkin Nazarov, *Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Country report Azerbaijan, ETF 2021 (unpublished)*.

## 2.7. Personnel

Validation-related duties are not typically a full-time job for validation practitioners. The personnel who provide VNFIL services are typically drawn from regular administrative and teaching staff at schools or training centres. In almost all the countries studied, assessors are required to have industry experience in the respective sector (typically at least 5 years) and hold a qualification in the field subject to assessment. The profiles of practitioners are described with various levels of detail.

### 2.7.1. Typical roles

**Collegial assessment bodies are common.** Most of the countries studied envisage collegial assessment bodies, typically called **assessment commissions**, whose **members** include teachers and administrative staff at educational institutions, personnel at supervisory bodies (ministries and agencies), and industry practitioners. In some cases (Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine), additional provisions are made allowing for the recruitment of **additional experts** where needed. This is to ensure that the assessors have adequate industry experience and that the assessment is credible. Assessment commissions are used in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. They typically comprise at least three members. In Ukraine, the commission's chairman is an industry representative, and the additional assessors are teachers of highest categories in the respective occupation. The work of the commission and the implementation of the overall validation process are supported by a **secretary**.



Such solutions generate relatively high costs, but they also demonstrate an effort to build trust in validation arrangements and are perhaps necessary in the initial years of VNFIL system development, taking into account the contexts of the countries studied, in particular the weakness of the assessment part within education systems.

**The role of a guidance counsellor is not always considered.** The role of a guidance counsellor has been clearly defined in Georgia and Moldova, while the draft Ukrainian regulation on validation in the higher education sector also envisages such a role.

### 2.7.2. Profile of practitioners and qualification requirements

**Special validation-related qualifications are not typically required.** The only cases of a validation-specific qualification requirement were identified in Georgia, where guidance consultants must undergo an accredited training programme, and in Moldova, where a qualification of assessor is required.

In Azerbaijan, the members of the Assessment Commission include a staff member of the EQAA as chair; one member from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population (MLSP), typically the Head of the Vocational Training and Professional Orientation Department at the State Employment Agency; and a representative of employers from a sector related to the qualification. The Commission may appoint additional experts based on needs. An important role is also envisaged for **assessment item developers**. The EQAA maintains a registry of experts who fulfil the requirements set out in the VNFIL regulations: at least 5 years of industry experience and a qualification at vocational diploma level, up-to-date skills in the relevant specialism, and a range of additional skills such as communication and collaboration. There is no special function of guidance counsellor. Guidance functions are performed by personnel of the EQAA, which administers the whole process.

In Georgia, in the general education sector, the practitioners involved in implementing the Externat exams include: the **Registrar**, **Exam Commission members** (including a representative of school administration, a subject teacher or a subject faculty representative), **counsellors** (who provide subject-specific guidance to applicants and facilitate access to library and learning resources), **Exam Instrument Developers**, **observers** from the MoES, and an **Appeal Council**. The roles of validation practitioners in Georgian VET are illustrated in the table below. They are rather general and, except for RFNE Consultant (guidance counsellor), do not include specific qualification requirements.

**TABLE 1: PROFILE OF VNFIL PRACTITIONERS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, GEORGIA (RNFE)**

Position	Tasks	Requirements
<b>Administrator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administers the application process</li> <li>Carries out outreach activities</li> </ul>	Not specified
<b>RNFE Consultant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assists with candidate registration</li> <li>Provides counselling for RNFE procedures, stages, timelines and potential results</li> <li>Has counselling meetings with each candidate</li> <li>Supports candidates in identifying competencies</li> <li>Assists in identifying documents</li> <li>Drafts minutes of counselling meetings</li> <li>Develops applicant portfolios to be submitted to the Validation Commission</li> <li>May participate in the validation process without voting rights.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher education or VET diploma</li> <li>Special certification from ENCEQE</li> <li>Knowledge of MS Office software</li> <li>Team-oriented and effective communication skills</li> <li>Data collection, analytical and argumentation skills</li> </ul>
<b>Validation Commission member</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assesses applicant portfolios</li> <li>Validates competencies acquired in informal or non-formal settings</li> </ul>	Subject teachers, field practitioners, representatives of college administration
<b>Internal Quality Assurance Specialist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contributes to developing internal quality assurance systems</li> <li>Monitors the quality of RNFE processes.</li> </ul>	Not specified
<b>External Quality Assurance Specialist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considers applications from potential RNFE providers and grants authorisation</li> <li>Develops monitoring procedures and monitors RNFE providers' compliance with established standards</li> <li>Monitors and assesses the work of RNFE consultants</li> </ul>	Personnel in VET Quality Assurance Department

Source: Thea Siprashvili, Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Country report Georgia, ETF 2021 (unpublished).

In Jordan, the skills assessment is conducted as an additional task by the trainers at the vocational training institutions concerned. There are no specific qualification requirements for assessors, but the testing and certification manual produced in 2014 suggests the following criteria for their selection:

- at least 5 consecutive years of recent experience in the specialism being assessed;
- a licence to practise at an occupational level at least the same as that of the test;
- core work skills (Arabic language, computer skills, etc.);
- physically able to implement the test;
- completion of a Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) training course on conducting skills tests.

Currently, most of the trainers working at vocational training institutions are required to have at minimum, the community college diploma qualification.

In Moldova, a very detailed description of the key roles and tasks of validation practitioners has been developed, covering the mandate of **the Secretariat and the Evaluation and Certification Committee** and the roles of **the Committee's Chair, and members** and **the Counsellor**. The Evaluation and Certification Committee consists of at least three members and is appointed by the head of the VET institution (validation centre). The members of the Committee are either the staff of the Validation Centre; specialists delegated by the relevant ministries, sectoral committees or the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Moldova; or other persons who meet the criteria of 'professionalism'. They are required to hold a qualification of at least ISCED level VI in the respective specialism, and have at least 5 years' professional experience in the relevant field and the qualification of assessor issued by an accredited educational institution. In the case of validation for a qualification involving distinct areas of competence, a broader committee is created, whose members cover the entire occupational spectrum. There is also a possibility to appoint more than one committee.

In Ukraine, the Chairman of the Assessment Commission in a qualification centre is typically a private-sector representative with relevant professional education and work experience of more than 10 years. The members of the Commission must hold a qualification in the specialism relevant to the field in which the validation is carried out, and at a level higher than the qualification subject to assessment. In the higher education sector, the recent draft regulation on the procedure for validation provides for two types of position: **the Authorised Expert of the Validation Commission** and the **Authorised Consultant**. Authorised Experts are scientific and education staff with at least 5 years of teaching experience and trained in assessment processes and validation and quality assurance. The Authorised Consultants must fulfil the following criteria:

- ability to link the learning outcomes to higher education standards;
- ability to involve external experts to address particularly complex issues related to the identification of learning outcomes;
- knowledge of the validation process;
- knowledge of the education system and the National Qualifications Framework;
- knowledge of labour market requirements;
- strict adherence to ethical standards and rules.

### 2.7.3. Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

While some initial training on VNFIL procedures and methods is offered, the study has not found evidence of clear provisions or practice on VNFIL-specific training supporting further professional development for validation personnel. Further development of competencies among personnel at

educational institutions is typically included in the internal and external education quality assurance measures. This, and the fact that validation arrangements are new, might be the reasons why continuous training on validation has not been considered.

**Initial training on VNFIL for practitioners is required in most of the countries studied.** In Azerbaijan, as part of the quality assurance of the VNFIL process, all practitioners must attend mandatory training related to their duties and responsibilities. This concerns the members of the Assessment Commission, as well as assessment instrument developers.

In Georgian VET, only counsellors (consultants) have to be trained and certified by the supervisory body. The training includes topics related to NQF, VET qualifications and their structure, validation processes, and duties and tasks of counsellors. Candidates for the counsellor role must participate in case-study simulations. There is no requirement regarding validation-related training for other validation practitioners.

Assessors in Jordan may also attend a training course on conducting skills tests delivered by CAQA, although participation is not mandatory and is not part of the RPL quality assurance systems. There is an assessment items database that supports the work of assessors.

In Moldova, each validation centre is responsible for organising training sessions for the members of the Evaluation and Certification Committee on the process, covering counselling, documentation, evaluation, recognition and certification.

In Ukraine, training programmes specific to validation have not yet been identified, but the National Qualifications Agency is planning to implement training for assessors.

**The further development of validation arrangements will require more attention on the continuous professional development of practitioners.** Candidates for validation, especially persons from disadvantaged groups, might need a special approach to succeed. Some of them might have had a negative experience with the education system. Validation requires an effort to identify peoples' strengths. This aspect of validation work – which was not in the focus of traditional educational systems – including special tools and working methods, will need to be further developed. The continuous development of validation practitioners could be supported by the establishment of professional support networks.

## 2.8. Information and awareness raising

Validation is not a widely known mechanism and requires promotion, information and outreach. It includes relatively complex procedures, and candidates need to be guided through the process. They should be informed of the potential benefits of validation, the possible outcomes, the steps and costs involved, the duration, the available support and the appeal procedure (Cedefop, 2015). Information about validation should explain the potential benefits and opportunities of accessing the service. It should be targeted to different potential categories of users: working persons, unemployed people, migrants, persons working in the informal economy and seeking better jobs, women performing domestic work, and persons considering changing careers. In an ideal set-up, information on validation is incorporated into the career guidance and development systems (ETF, ILO 2021). It requires close collaboration with stakeholders, those who refer candidates for validation, those who provide validation services, and those who offer upskilling opportunities.

**Information about validation is generally available.** In all countries included in the study, information about VNFIL arrangements is available online, typically on the website of an agency that

oversees validation in the respective sector, as well as on the websites of the individual service providers. The websites often include information about the regulatory framework, the qualifications covered by the service, and the procedure. Qualification standards for qualifications covered by validation arrangements are sometimes included as well.

**The available information does not aim at attracting potential beneficiaries.** With the exception of Azerbaijan (where the EQAA website includes a short promotional video) and Moldova, the information provided does not explain in a user-friendly manner why potential beneficiaries should use the services, what their purpose is and what its potential benefits are. Some more detailed information can be found on the websites of individual service providers.

The website of the Moldovan Ministry of Education and Research includes a promotional brochure explaining the benefits of validation, all the relevant regulatory acts, a practical guide, lists of validation centres and qualifications open for validation, and videos with success stories of beneficiaries (<https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/validarea-educatiei-nonformale-si-informale-0>).

**Public employment services are involved in providing information on validation to some extent.** Considering the low participation in adult training, particularly among low-skilled persons, and the lack of awareness of validation, many potential candidates are unlikely to pursue information on validation on their own. Public employment services, which often carry out skills audits and have access to the skills profiles of jobseekers, play a key role in informing and advising on validation opportunities. Some involvement of public employment services in information and advice on validation is reported in all countries studied. In Ukraine, the centres delivering validation services have been operating under the labour market sector, and the employment services are aware of the validation service and provide related information and advice within the career guidance framework. Most candidates certified since 2016 were referred to the professional centres as unemployed. In Azerbaijan, intensified collaboration with employment services is planned. The report on Georgia points to the need for stronger involvement of public employment services that use digital and mobile technologies to communicate with clients. The information on validation opportunities could be incorporated in the materials shared.

**Promotion activities are carried out only on a small scale.** Small-scale promotion activities have been reported in social media and on TV channels. In Ukraine, the employment service includes information about validation during an information session on the available training options. Outreach and awareness-building campaigns have not been reported, with the exception of donor-funded projects that include the provision of validation services for targeted groups of beneficiaries (Jordan, Moldova).

**The user's perspective in accessing information on validation is not commonly considered.** The availability and quality of information is influenced by the fact that validation services are new and have limited scope in terms of the number of qualifications covered. The countries are still focusing on building the system, a fact that is reflected in the information provided on the websites of the agencies in charge. For example, the website of the Ukrainian NQA includes a browser with qualification standards, application forms for potential validation providers and a call for experts in the accreditation of validation centres, but not yet any information that would be useful for potential candidates. On the website of the centres that are actively providing validation, such as the qualification centre in Odesa, the information about the process is comprehensive and very clear to the user. It includes a very useful self-assessment form for each level of the qualifications available through validation. In Jordan, the national policies and procedures on RPL are not yet in place. A communication campaign on NQF is planned to be launched, and information about RPL can be incorporated into the general messages. Some providers of occupational assessment tests required for a licence to practise include the

applicable rules on their websites. In Georgia and Moldova, guides to validation have been developed and are available online to explain the process from the user's perspective.

### VNFIL INFORMATION IN AZERBAIJAN

The Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) is the only provider of validation services in Azerbaijan. The EQAA website has a subsection on informal education, which is easily visible on the home page. After opening the subsection, potential candidates can find a promotional video explaining the objectives of validation, a detailed explanation of the process, its cost, the required documents and the applicable regulations. A list of qualifications covered by the service and the related educational standards that are used as the basis for the assessment process are also included on the website. The website has a link to the application process, which takes place only in a digital form through an online account.

Beneficiaries can also contact the EQAA by phone or email for free advice on the available options.

Source: <http://www.tkta.edu.az/>

**The absence of clear policy objectives and identified priority groups prevents the development of targeted communication strategies.** Another key factor might relate to the fact that partnerships between players involved in validation systems are missing, which prevents agreement on a consistent message to stakeholders. In the countries where the main responsibility for information, advice and guidance falls on the providers, some support with information and outreach might be needed, as validation is often not their core function.

## 2.9. Guidance

Learning from experience differs from learning at the training institution. It is more context-specific, structured around tasks rather than disciplines, and often involves different vocabulary and cocreation through team work. When the validation process includes the assessment of candidates against educational standards, it can be challenging to link skills acquired by experience to the learning outcomes as described in the educational standards. Educational standards still tend to prioritise knowledge over practical skills. Identifying and documenting learning outcomes can be a lengthy process requiring a considerable level of key competencies such as literacy and communication skills. Assessment might take many different forms such as written tests, online interviews or skills demonstrations in the workplace. Better prepared candidates are more likely to succeed. The role of guidance is to support candidates throughout the process from the initial steps to the post-validation advice on available options for both groups of candidates – those who have succeeded and those who have not.

**Guidance is integrated in VNFIL arrangements to various degrees.** In Azerbaijan, where the application and documentation stages are limited and carried out entirely online, a candidate can receive support by contacting EQAA staff by phone or email. Dedicated support in linking the learning from experience to the educational standards, or in explaining the assessment criteria used, is not envisaged. The initial process is followed by an interview with the Assessment Commission, which

decides on the candidate's eligibility for the assessment and the scope of validation (validation for the full qualification or for selected modules). The Commission provides guidance on further steps of the process. During the pandemic, all interviews were carried out online.

In the general education sector, guidance is not included in the process of extramural exams, and candidates can receive some support from the administrative personnel. The report on Georgia recommends that more attention be given to informing and guiding applicants, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the vocational education sectors in Georgia and Moldova, guidance is considered a key component of validation arrangements. These countries clearly identify the role of a VNFIL counsellor. In Georgia, the steps and outcomes of the guidance process are recorded digitally and enable monitoring. The quality of a guidance service is a condition for the accreditation of validation providers.

### VNFIL GUIDANCE IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, RFNE providers are required to provide consultative and guidance services, and the availability of certified consultants is one of the main criteria for the accreditation of validation service providers. The consultation form is defined in detail by the RFNE Regulation. The application process is digitised and followed by consultations with a guidance specialist. Evidence on each step of the guidance is recorded. The process is concluded by compiling documentation that includes a decision on the scope of validation (full or partial), and a list of skills identified and their links to learning outcomes and performance criteria in vocational education standards. Documentation presenting the identified skills is compiled. The documentation is signed by the consultant and the candidate and managed electronically, which enables the NCEQE to monitor and assess the guidance process. This system provides adequate data for continuous improvement of the service quality. The consultants must be certified by the NCEQE and their responsibilities are defined in the Regulation.

Source: Thea Siprashvili, *Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Country report Georgia, ETF 2021* (unpublished).

In Moldova, validation service providers offer guidance services from counsellors. The function of a counsellor is well defined in the validation regulation. At the start of the process, the secretary helps the candidate to prepare the application and the documents that have to be included in the candidate's file. The support of a counsellor is triggered after the initial screening by the assessor and a positive decision on admission to the next stage. The counsellor supports the candidate in implementing the assessment plan, identifying and documenting competencies, and linking them to the learning outcomes included in the standards used for assessment. In addition, the counsellor provides clarification on the assessment criteria and the details of the assessment process. Support is provided for candidates with special educational needs. Where appropriate, the counsellor organises consultation sessions for candidates, with input from teaching staff and industry practitioners. The counsellor also clarifies the decisions of the assessment committee.

In the Ukrainian assessment centres in Kyiv, Odesa and Rivne, the members of the validation commission provide support and guidance to the candidate during preparations for the assessment.



The centres have developed a number of tools to help link the skills learnt from experience to the learning outcomes in the professional standard. The draft regulation on validation in higher education includes provisions on candidates' right to free assistance and guidance at each step of the process.

In Jordan, guidance is not regulated but is offered by the providers of skills assessment tests. It is offered on an individual or a group basis by either an occupational work regulating officer or a trainer. It explains the competencies covered by the occupational standards at different job levels and the details of the assessment and licencing procedures.

**Digital technologies are increasingly used.** Most of the countries covered by the study make use of digital technologies in providing validation services. The most advanced are Azerbaijan and Georgia, which have digitised the application process. Electronic records can be a good source of monitoring data, and the digital process can save time and resources. While online registration can facilitate access, it is worth remembering that some groups of potential beneficiaries might require support in accessing IT equipment or might not have adequate digital skills.

## 2.10. Funding

**Donor funding has been used to support the establishment of the validation systems.**

Internationally funded projects have supported the development of validation in all the countries studied. In Azerbaijan, the EU-funded NQF project supported the training of assessors and the development of an assessment items bank for piloting the first validation scheme in two occupations. In Jordan, the EU-funded Project 'Technical Assistance to the "Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme"' (SESIP), implemented between 2017 and 2021, provided support to RPL in Jordan, including the development of a concept paper with recommendations for implementing RPL and assistance in identifying players' roles and responsibilities. Simultaneously, a project implemented by the ILO supported skills assessment and occupational licencing of Syrian refugees and host Jordanian communities. Internationally funded initiatives are currently in place, facilitating the further development of validation systems in Jordan, Moldova and Ukraine.

**National public funding is only modestly mobilised to sustain the system.** National public funding is typically used to fund a portion of expenses related to the administration of the system, mainly covering costs related to personnel in units and agencies in charge of accrediting validation service providers. Depending on the country, various degrees of state funding is used to develop occupational and qualification standards that form the basis for validation. In Azerbaijan, where the Education Quality Assurance Agency oversees validation, a unit of four persons has been established to manage the validation arrangements. In Ukraine, the National Qualifications Agency is in charge of accrediting the validation providers. The NQA charges fees for accreditation services, and income from these fees could be used to administer and further develop the validation system. Reports from most of the partner countries' studies conclude that no dedicated national public funding is envisaged for the provision of validation services.



**TABLE 2: INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR VALIDATION – EXAMPLES OF OUTPUTS**

Supported output	Project title	Supporting agency	Country
Roadmaps for implementation, guidelines on players' roles	Technical Assistance to the 'Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion (SESIP) Programme', 2017-2021	EU	Jordan
Assistance with drafting VNFIL-related regulations	Technical Assistance to the 'Support to implementation of NQF in Azerbaijan' (2017-2020)	EU	Azerbaijan
Creation of assessment items databanks for selected occupations			
Training of assessors in selected occupations and pilot of the scheme			
Expanding validation to higher education sector	Qualifications recognition support for Ukrainian universities (QUARSU), 2019-2022	EU Erasmus+	Ukraine
Pilot of validation arrangements in nine sectors	Migration and Local Development (phase 2), 2019-2022	UNDP, IOM	Moldova
Funding validation for disadvantaged groups	Program for Results: Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian Refugees' under the Jordan Compact, 2016-2022	World Bank, ILO, Government of Jordan	Jordan

Source: authors based on national Inventories on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**In vocational education, fees are the main source of funding for validation services.** Fees are envisaged as the main validation funding mechanism in the VET sector in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In Jordan, the fees charged do not cover the full cost related to the assessment procedure, and the validation service providers, whose main mandate is to provide training, use their regular budgets without earmarked lines for validation. The fees vary depending on the skill level for which the assessment is performed, from JOD 20 (approximately EUR 25) for assessment at 'semi-skilled' level to JOD 40 (approximately EUR 50) for assessment at 'craftsperson' level. In Ukraine, similarly, fees are calculated depending on the qualification level and range from approximately EUR 50 to over EUR 100. In Azerbaijan, candidates bear the full cost of the validation process. The fees have been fixed at AZN 100 (approximately EUR 50) for the theoretical test and AZN 80 (EUR 40) per module of the practical test. Validation for a diploma qualification with five modules costs candidates AZN 500 (EUR 260). The Agency will organise validation sessions in a trade only when the number of candidates for validation is sufficient to cover the full cost of assessment (when the 'break-even' point is reached). This number varies depending on the trade, and for some qualifications for which assessment is costly, it is difficult to gather a sufficient number of candidates in a reasonable time.

Interestingly, in general education, different rules seem to apply regarding fees. In Georgia, extramural exams in general education are free of charge. In Ukraine, similarly, in the general education sector

the process is covered through the regular budget of the MoES and educational institutions, and is free of charge.

**Disadvantaged groups are not financially supported by state funding to use validation services.** Fees can be a strong barrier for participants, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These persons are likely to be the ones benefiting the most from validation. The need to address this barrier has been reported in Georgia and Moldova (in Moldova, preferential fees can be used for disadvantaged groups). In some cases, internationally funded projects support disadvantaged groups. The project implemented by the ILO in Jordan supported the assessment and certification of over 16 000 Syrian refugees and workers from host communities. In Azerbaijan, following a successful collaboration between the Education Quality Assurance Agency and the State Employment Agency on the provision of validation services for persons with disabilities, further use of the national employment fund for financing validation services for vulnerable groups is being considered.

**Engagement of the private sector in funding validation is scarce.** With the exception of occupations for which certification is mandatory, interest among employers in covering the fees for validation is low. The involvement of employers through the provision of assessment venues and equipment is reported in Azerbaijan, where collaboration with the Small and Medium Business Development Agency on funding validation is considered. Some engagement in providing assessment venues is reported in Azerbaijan and Moldova.

**Funding mechanisms do not support the scaling-up or further development of validation systems.** All five national reports raise the issue of a lack of a dedicated, sufficient and sustainable funding model for validation services and further system development. Funding through fees tends only to cover assessment-related costs (assessors' fees, cost of material and equipment). This approach risks overlooking the full costs related to validation procedures, such as outreach, information and guidance. In addition, further developing the system requires investments in quality assurance, professional development of validation personnel, and resources needed to build partnerships and assess the needs of potential target groups. Complementary training courses will have to be offered to candidates who have not fully succeeded in the validation process. Developing these important components of the validation system will require more dedicated and diversified funding.

## 2.11. Inter-sectoral cooperation, role of players

The roles and responsibilities of national players and stakeholders bear quite a lot of similarities in all five countries in focus. In education, training and labour market VNFIL activities, the ministries responsible for education and labour commonly have a central role in VNFIL in terms of developing procedures and legislation. In terms of governance and implementation, however, there are various players in the countries.

The cooperation of different stakeholders and authorities in VNFIL appears somewhat fragmented in the target countries. In some countries, many ministries and national authorities are responsible for some part or aspect of the VNFIL system. This may lead to a situation in which there is no overall vision of the purpose of validation. It may also lead to competing agendas between stakeholders, for example concerning funding. The fact disadvantaged persons (unemployed people, migrants and refugees) are not prioritised as beneficiaries in any of the five countries may be an indication of fragmented policies and the lack of a common vision. It was reported in Moldova and Azerbaijan that the roles of the different VNFIL stakeholders are not described in the legal framework.

**In Azerbaijan**, the Assessment and Recognition Rules define the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA), operating under the Ministry of Education as an Agency implementing the assessment and recognition process. An Assessment Commission is established during the assessment process, which consists of three members, including the chair (a representative of the EQAA), a member of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population (MLSP) and an employer representative. The members are approved by the Chair of the Board of the EQAA. The Commission has the right to involve independent experts in the assessment with relevant education in the field and at least 5 years of work experience in the specialism. However, the roles of the Commission members and independent experts are not clearly defined in the Rules.

**In Georgia**, the national quality assurance and qualifications body (NCEQE) has a major responsibility in terms of the design, monitoring, governing and implementation of the validation procedures, both in general education (Externat exams) and in VET (RNFE procedures). Another important player in both education sectors is the EMIS Unit, which is responsible for electronic platforms, data collection and system monitoring. The education and training providers, both public and private, are responsible for delivering VNFIL procedures concerning the organisation of the assessor bodies, and for assessing and validating the results.

**In Jordan**, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions (AQACHEI) is the leading institution for the design, implementation and development of the NQF system, including VNFIL procedures. Detailed instructions for implementing VNFIL to identify different institutions' roles and the required coordination between them have not been issued yet. The Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) is the leading institution in supervising occupational tests, issuing relevant certificates, and licencing institutes for conducting occupational tests. The main institutes providing testing services for validating non-formal/informal learning in the VET sector are the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) and the National Employment and Training Company (NET).

**In Moldova**, the main player in VNFIL governance is the Ministry of Education and Research (MoECR), with its Lifelong Learning (LLL) Service. The legal framework for VNFIL does not provide specific roles for the educational partners, e.g. the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP), the National Employment Agency (NEA) or the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CoCI). The VET institutions that are nominated to act as validation centres have good potential, in terms of both human capital and institutional basis, to ensure the VNFIL processes.

**In Ukraine**, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), which was established in 2019 and is answerable to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, is responsible for implementing state policy in the field of qualifications. The NQA accredits qualification centres responsible for assessing and recognising learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings, it confirms relevant professional qualifications, and it recognises professional qualifications obtained outside of Ukraine. The NQA is currently the key agency coordinating the validation activities of all relevant players in the country.

The Federation of Employers of Ukraine, as the most influential association of business organisations, cooperates with the government and trade unions to support initiatives in the implementation of the national qualification system, the development of occupational standards and VNFIL services. The state research and scientific institutions take an active part in providing support in modernising and improving the Ukrainian education system, promoting lifelong learning, developing innovative forms and methods of non-formal and informal learning, and researching successful international practices in VNFIL.

The State Employment Service (SES) plays a major role in the national VNFIL system, providing validation processes and guidance and information services through the network of employment and assessment centres.

## 2.12. Practices, beneficiaries and impact – services waiting for customers

### 2.12.1. Typical processes

Despite modest implementation, in all five countries there are at least provisional descriptions of the typical VNFIL processes. In most of the countries, the full VNFIL process, including identification, documentation, assessment and certification by the Council Recommendation of 2012 is fully envisaged or implemented. According to the process descriptions, most of the countries focus on the assessment that typically includes a theoretical part and a practical part. Additionally, in all the countries there are some types of guidance and information services available, although the direct connection to the VNFIL procedures often remains weak.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is a process whose purpose is to look rather holistically at an individual's knowledge, skills and competences. There is quite a strong consensus among VNFIL experts in Europe that guidance and career management services should be directly linked with the VNFIL process. Adults with low or no qualifications who have dropped out of school due to undiagnosed learning difficulties should be a priority target group for validation. There may be difficult experiences in the background, and therefore guidance for most candidates throughout the VNFIL process – and even before and after – is essential.

The centrality of assessment in the typical procedures was very evident in the reports. There was little or no information as to what the purpose and scope of the identification and documentation component are, or what the outcomes of these elements are. According to the Council Recommendation of 2012, the VNFIL process should include the four aforementioned components, allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, depending on the needs of the individual. For some individuals, it could be very beneficial just to have their experience documented appropriately, whereas some kind of formal certification is of essence for others.

**The Azerbaijani process consists of registration, an initial review of documents, assessment and certification.** In the application phase, applicants who have completed general secondary education at least 4 years ago, or full secondary education at least 2 years ago and have at least 2 years of work or other experience in the specialism in question, may apply to the Agency for an assessment and recognition of their competences. The application process is carried out online.

In the acceptance and initial review phase, the documents typically include ID; a state education document; documents reflecting knowledge, skills, competences and experiences (photos); a written description of the applicants' knowledge, skills, competence and experience; examples of work; employment records; reference letters on work experience and relevant certificates; and a compulsory state social insurance certificate. The initial review includes interviews with applicants and an assessment of the submitted documents (materials). The aim of this process is to obtain information about applicants' relevant knowledge, skills, competences and experience and how and where they were acquired. As a result, the Agency decides whether to admit the applicant to the next stage. An applicant who is not admitted to the next stage of the assessment may re-apply to the Agency for the review phase after 3 months.

The assessment phase is organised by the Assessment Commission, which consists of representatives of the Agency, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, and employers. The members are approved by the Chair of the Board of the Agency. The Commission has the right to involve independent experts. An assessment may be conducted on several modules at the same time. The decision in this regard is made by the Commission depending on the results of initial review.

The assessment comprises a theoretical and a practical part. In order to participate in the practical tests, the candidate must answer at least 50% of questions correctly for each module in the theoretical multiple-choice test. In the practical test, the candidate is given assignments at a VET institution or an employer's premises. In the practical test, the 50% rule applies as well. Unsuccessful candidates may re-apply for testing after 6 months. Both tests carry a standard fee that the individual must pay.

There are two types of certification available through the VNFIL process: candidates who have passed some modules of the curriculum are awarded a Certificate (partial qualification), while those who pass all modules are awarded a Diploma. The Diploma is equal to the state document at initial vocational education level. Certificates can represent initial vocational, technical vocational or higher technical vocational education qualifications.

**In Georgia, a four-phase VNFIL process is applied in VET:** filing an application for VNFIL; consultation/documentation; assessment (which might include an examination); and a decision on certification. The validation committee created by a validation provider should consist of representatives of relevant employers, education institutions, teachers in the vocational field and, in some cases, other persons as deemed necessary by the validation body. The consultation and documentation process is conducted by a certified consultant. The NCEQE trains and certifies the consultants.

**The main focus in Jordanian VNFIL procedures in VET is on the assessment and certification phases**, while the identification and documentation phases according to the Council Recommendation of 2012 are not well defined or established. The typical process consists of the following steps:

- individuals apply for the RPL tests at VTC institutes;
- the institutes assign dates for conducting the tests and form the testing committees as required;
- both the theoretical and practical tests are conducted on the assigned dates and are marked by the assigned committees;
- the test results (theoretical and practical parts) are documented by the unit concerned at the vocational training institute;
- the TVSDC issues an occupational practice licences for to the successful applicants.

The duration of the assessment test, particularly the practical part, varies according to the occupation tested, although no average length for the process from application to certification is indicated by the involved institutions.

**Moldova adheres to the four-phase VNFIL system of identification, documentation, assessment and certification.** At the documentation stage, candidates provide a portfolio with evidence. Applicants for validation services are guided by a counsellor. In addition to the portfolio, the counsellor interviews the applicants on their skills and knowledge, aiming to identify the competences for which the person is to be certified. The counsellor clarifies the assessment plan for the required competences. It is decided which modules are to be assessed and validated. Applicants have the option to have some or all modules within the qualification validated.

The assessment is similar to the assessment process in formal education. The assessment process consists of a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical assessment is based on a test. The test items are developed according to the curricula. The practical test is usually an authentic activity that simulates sequences of the person's workplace activities according to the occupational standard or profile. The successful passing of the theoretical and practical tests is followed by the certification process.

**In Ukraine, in the VNFIL services implemented under the State Employment Service, the candidate contacts the nearest employment centre to obtain detailed information and advice on validation services.** The employment centre expert informs the candidate of: (1) the requirements for the qualification level of a chosen profession; (2) the assessment criteria; (3) the validation procedure; and (4) the assessment centre, the schedule and the estimated cost of the validation service. The candidate is then asked to fill out a self-assessment questionnaire to determine the level of professional qualification (3-6). Based on the results of this questionnaire, the employment centre expert issues a referral for further validation.

The assessment comprises a theoretical test and a practical test. There are set time limits for both types of test, and a jury assesses the results. Any employee who uses and masters certain professional skills, but does not have documentary evidence, has the opportunity to confirm the competences and obtain a state standard document.

In higher education, a typical validation procedure should consist of identification, documentation, assessment and certification. Initially, the candidate applies for validation by submitting an application form and relevant documentation online. Secondly, the candidate, together with an authorised consultant, identifies the relevant learning outcomes in the educational standard or programme that can potentially be assessed, based on the candidate's experience. For the assessment process, the authorised institution forms a commission consisting of at least three experts to assess an applicant's learning outcomes.

## 2.12.2. Methods

In most countries, the assessment consists of a theoretical part and a practical part. In the theoretical part, traditional written tests or multiple-choice tests are used. Practical tests are carried out as simulations in the training institution's facilities or at a workplace in an authentic environment. Interviews are conducted to determine the level or the relevant parts of qualifications to be assessed. Self-assessment is also provided for in some systems. The portfolio is used mostly for identification purposes, rather than for assessment, i.e. work-sample portfolios were not described as a regular practice. Using video recordings to document practical tests was also mentioned as an assessment method or tool.

The theoretical tests, despite being multiple-choice, are rarely ideal for people with learning difficulties or people who are not using their native language. Written tests usually give a relatively narrow scope to prior learning and mainly measure knowledge. However, it would be quite easy to assess the required knowledge during the practical tests by asking the candidate questions such as 'Why did you choose tool X instead of tool Y?' or 'Why do you think it is important to carry out this working process in this particular order?' This type of questioning better informs the assessors on whether the candidate has the appropriate theoretical knowledge related to the actual work processes. If the assessors feel that further information is required, an interview is always an option. Knowledge, skills and competences are not separate entities, but together form the elements of a working process and can all be assessed together, simply by observing and through dialogue.



Written work obviously can and should be a requirement in qualifications where good writing skills are essential, but even then, testing knowledge through sets of questions or multiple-choice tests is rather dubious and redundant.

None of the countries reported actual work performance being monitored at a workplace (non-simulated situation) or using dialogue in the actual assessment phase. Assessment methods should be further developed in a more holistic, supportive, transparent and dialogical direction.

### **Erasmus+ project 'Qualifications recognition support for Ukrainian universities' (QUARSU)**

It is important to address the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in higher education institutions. Methods and techniques for such recognition developed by European countries are researched in Ukraine. The Erasmus+ project 'Qualifications recognition support for Ukrainian universities' (QUARSU) is being implemented between 2019 and 2022. The National University 'Odessa Maritime Academy' is a coordinator of the project. The national and international partners include the Universities of Kherson, Lviv, Mariupol and Sumy; universities in Estonia, Ireland, Poland and Portugal; the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine; the Federation of Employers of Ukraine; and the Estonian Qualifications Authority<sup>6</sup>.

The aim of the project is to strengthen the role of the higher education sector in society by supporting the development of the recognition and validation system in Ukraine. Project goals are to develop and test the recognition and validation methodologies compatible with the National Qualifications Framework, to train human resources for recognition and validation, and to design a platform to support validation. The main project activities are the following:

- analysis of existing standards and methodologies;
- development of recognition and validation methodology;
- development and implementation of a training system for recognition and validation practitioners;
- establishment of recognition and validation centres at Ukrainian partner universities.

The expected project outputs include guidelines for recognition and validation with policy recommendations, guidelines for internal quality assurance in recognition, training centres at partner universities, trained administrative and academic staff, recognition centres and a recognition support platform<sup>7</sup>.

Source: Hanna Voronina, *Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Country report Ukraine, ETF 2021* (unpublished).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://quarsu.nltu.edu.ua/en>

<sup>7</sup> <http://kntu.net.ua/index.php/ukr/Nauka/Strukturni-pidrozdili/Viddil-z-navchal-no-naukovoyi-roboti-i-mizhnarodnoyi-diyal-nosti/Erasmus/Pidtrimka-viznannya-kvalifikacij-dlya-ukrayins-kih-universitetiv>

### 2.12.3. Beneficiaries

In general, there is little information on beneficiaries in the reports. The centrality of the individual is one of the key features in the VNFIL system, and the services and policies should reflect that.

In order to focus VNFIL services efficiently and appropriately, it is of paramount importance to have a vision of the primary target groups of beneficiaries. If a country suffers from high unemployment, the focus should be on unemployed people. If there is a lack of skilled workforce in certain economic sectors, focus should be on individuals who have some experience in the sector and whose skills can be validated and then provided with upskilling services. If there is a refugee crisis, the focus of the efforts should be on VNFIL services for the refugees, combined with relevant training. VNFIL should be seen as a powerful tool to tackle various labour market issues, as well as a tool for individuals to better move forward in their lives.

In the countries studied, most VNFIL users appear to be employed individuals with low or no qualifications. These include migrants and other vulnerable groups. In education and training, the target groups are wider and there appears to be no special focus in terms of the target group.

In several of the countries, there are legal VNFIL provisions for disadvantaged groups, but as there is a lack of public funding, the measures are meagre and mainly occur in specially funded projects by international organisations; in other words, there is little or no sustainability.

Those sitting Externat exams are often emigrant returnees; migrants with certification of general education programmes in their own countries, who wish to gain access to higher education; or other individuals whose general education track was for some reason disrupted.

It is remarkable that unemployed people are not the main target group in any of the five countries, as validation for this target group would benefit the individuals and the economy the most.

### 2.12.4. Evidence of impact and monitoring systems

Reporting on the evidence of impact appears to be quite weak, due partly to a lack of wide implementation and partly to lack of participant surveys. However, electronic databases have been developed, e.g. in Georgia and Azerbaijan, which can be used for monitoring purposes. It remains unclear, though, to what extent the monitoring systems can provide information about the evidence of impact. The issues to be monitored should at minimum include employment after VNFIL (if unemployed); promotions in working life (if employed); and access to further education and training. In addition, systematic feedback on the VNFIL process from candidates could provide a lot of added value for the improvement and further development of the VNFIL procedures, and would make them more customer-friendly.

It is important to develop monitoring systems that do not merely record the number of candidates participating in VNFIL. At best, the system can provide solid evidence of the advantages of VNFIL in terms of the overall economy, the well-being of individuals, more flexible job markets, a more competent workforce, better access to education, etc. The evidence can in part persuade decision-makers to further develop the VNFIL system.



## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1. Make the beneficiary the focus of attention

When planning and developing VNFIL systems, the individual should always be the focus of attention. The systems should support the individual with the aim of making their competences visible and usable in various ways, whether in working life, in further education or even for personal development. The basic principles of a functioning and customer-friendly VNFIL system are that the system is not too bureaucratic, it is accessible (in terms of geography or of the background of the individual), it has tailored support and guidance systems in place, and it has further learning paths available to the individual in case further learning is required. The validation system should include quality assurance mechanisms that provide the individual with fair and transparent treatment.

At the moment, there appears to be little or no focus on specific beneficiaries in the five countries studied. Especially concerning was the lack of targeted VNFIL services for the most disadvantaged beneficiaries, who would benefit from validation the most. It would also be beneficial to the countries' economies in many ways (e.g. by reducing the informal economy and increasing the number of taxpayers, and by reducing social support to individuals as they become self-sufficient), and it would increase the flexibility of the labour markets. Defining the focus of VNFIL services requires pinpointing the priority groups of beneficiaries. At the initial stages, financial stimuli are necessary to support both the VNFIL providers and the individuals applying for the VNFIL services. However, in the long run, the process will even out the costs and provide a surplus.

EU guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015) state the following:

*'Validation arrangements should enable the individual to acquire a qualification (or part of it) and/or to make visible (to him/herself and to others) their knowledge, skills and competences. Validation aims at empowering the individual and can serve as a tool for providing second chance opportunities to disadvantaged individuals. Validation is (normally) voluntary and it is up to the individual to take the first step and decide whether she or he wants to enter the process of identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning. The individual should be able to take control of the process and decide at what stage to end it. However, the individual has to receive adequate information and guidance not only through the entire process, but also before the decision to seek validation is taken. Candidates need to know what to expect, which requirements to meet and what evidence to provide. It is also necessary to inform individuals of the costs and benefits of validation, allowing them to make informed decisions on whether to proceed or not.'*

In this light, all five countries should consider providing better access to individuals, in terms of both widening the provider base geographically and targeting the individuals who would benefit from the VNFIL procedure the most, such as unemployed people, inactive, low-skilled persons working in the non-formal economy, or migrants and refugees. Additionally, it would be important to further develop the guidance and counselling services and the systematic competence development activities for practitioners in charge of the guidance and assessment at different phases of validation.

## 3.2. Create bridges with other policies

### Focus on what individuals want to learn

**Validation is being introduced to realise the principle of lifelong learning**, often as result of the introduction of national qualifications frameworks. The pandemic and the digital transition have accelerated education systems' acceptance of alternative forms and contexts of learning, which are now striving to accommodate the needs of different profiles of learners. The validation report on Moldova mentions this aspect of 'democratisation' in the education systems. Such a shift brings hope that validation may in future become an integral part of education and a necessary component supporting flexible learning pathways. Validation should foster access or re-entry to further education programmes. While the partner countries are making an effort to upgrade their career guidance and management systems, validation should become an integral component of these systems to build individuals' awareness of the available opportunities.

### Integrate VNFIL in active labour market policies and social inclusion

**Validation should be linked to active labour market programmes and offered as one of the services for unemployed people in combination with an offer of upskilling.** In most ETF partner countries, the adult participation in lifelong learning is well below the EU average and the opportunities for training are limited to larger cities. Low-skilled adults and unemployed people are the least likely to receive training, and at the same time should be prioritised as the main target group for validation. It is surprising, however, that the link between validation and the upskilling strategies does not seem to be strong at the moment. The current arrangements do not sufficiently support the adult population in more fragile situations and do not seem to link well enough to adult training. The validation funding mechanisms rely almost exclusively on fees. The lack of subsidies and support services for persons from disadvantaged groups is likely to have a negative impact on service uptake. Linking validation with upskilling policies and wider participation of stakeholders dealing with active labour market measures will be necessary. Partnerships between players from adult education sectors, employment services, qualifications agencies, sector associations and civil society could lead to a joint approach in developing solutions for persons who are at risk of unemployment and poverty due to low educational attainment. Validation needs to be integrated into these wider support packages, which apart from financial support, might need to accommodate additional measures such as support with transportation, childcare, guidance or mentoring.

**In the context of migration, validation could be used in secondment and in the host country prior to migration, during the time abroad or upon return.** The recognition of migrants' skills could prevent 'brain waste' and support better integration. This aspect has been recognised in Moldova, which struggles with generally low economic growth, high levels of outward migration and dependence on remittances. The government's goals are to reduce the outflow of youth from the country, increase Moldova's investment attractiveness, and create jobs across the country and personal development opportunities for young professionals. In Moldova, limited access to VNFIL services has been opened up to migrants through the projects of international organisations. Ukraine is one of the major countries of origin of labour migrants to the European Union. In Jordan, it is mainly employed migrants who have had access to occupational tests. In Georgia, many of the people taking part in the external exams are either migrants or Georgian returnees. Many migrants return to their home country at some stage, for example when there are economic problems or conflicts in the host country, or when they are active in a sector with seasonal employment (hospitality, agriculture, construction).

Use VNFIL to support economic development and address skill shortages, upskilling and reskilling, and in getting people into decent jobs in the formal sector

**Validation could become a measure included in economic development policies, due to its role in making the pool of available skills visible to employers and investors, and to provide routes to skills development.** By recognising the skills that people already have and shortening the time needed to gain a qualification, the cost of training can be reduced. This aspect seems to be particularly strong in Azerbaijan, where only 33.5% of the employed population have a formal vocational, secondary specialised or higher education qualification and there is a need to diversify the oil-dependent economy. Mandatory certification is being considered as a potentially necessary step to commit employers to workforce skills upgrading. Strategies for the further development of validation could link more strongly with sector-specific skills development strategies, provided that the agencies in charge of validation collaborate with the stakeholders from relevant sector bodies. In this context, validation could also be used in reskilling for the green and digital transition.

**New forms of work, in particular online platform work, are becoming more popular.** They can offer an alternative to migration. Online workers gain valuable skills, which most often remain unrecognised due to the fact that standards are often international and change quickly. The national education and training systems are struggling to keep up with developments. However, considering demographic trends, more adult workers might need retraining to sustain the growth of these sectors. Validation methods might need to include online assessment and online complementary learning modules. These needs are relevant also in the context of the pandemic and remote work.

**Include validation services in programmes supporting the development of micro, small and medium enterprises,** which dominate in economic structures in the EU Neighbourhood but at the same time are less likely to provide opportunities for adult training. Validation could be combined with training that develops the competences needed to grow small businesses and enter new markets. In addition, it could include transversal skills such as communication or problem solving.

**Use VNFIL to combat informality.** People working informally have vast experience and skills that often remain unrecognised. Validation and upskilling could support their transition to decent jobs in the formal economy, which would also contribute to wider economic development through more tax and pension contributions. There is growing evidence that validation contributes to confidence-building among candidates and motivates them to continue learning. Having their skills certified and raised, they will be more likely to pursue better jobs in the formal economy.

To scale up and mainstream validation services, close collaboration between stakeholders will be necessary. This collaboration is needed to identify the needs of potential validation users, to address them through targeted information, and to fine-tune the validation services considering the additional necessary components that must be put in place to ensure that the service is appropriate for a wide range of purposes. Closer collaboration is necessary, both for a wider uptake of the service and for improving its efficiency through potential cost-sharing arrangements.

### 3.3. Further steps to roll out the system

**Having a solid legislative basis for VNFIL procedures is important, as it promotes sustainability in the system.** However, if the laws and regulations do not facilitate implementation by either mandates or incentives, progress may be stymied or stagnated. It is important that the benefits of the VNFIL system be made clear, possibilities be marketed and novel ways of financing the VNFIL

procedures be designed in cooperation with the policymakers and provider institutions. The cost benefits should be calculated, and public funding should be made more available, at least for the vulnerable target groups.

**Share good practices and organise peer learning activities so that existing, well-functioning practices are further strengthened.** It is commendable that in some countries, there are possibilities to obtain occupational certifications that are accepted by the labour market to ensure employability, while there are also possibilities within the formal education and training system to gain formal qualifications for those who have a formal certification. However, it would be important in both systems to ensure the possibility to access further learning (be it formal, non-formal or informal) or even qualifications.

**Awareness-raising is crucial, especially at the early stages of VNFIL development.** If potential VNFIL providers do not know that the system exists or what its benefits could be, there is no implementation. On the other hand, if the potential candidates are not informed, they will not apply for VNFIL services. All potential stakeholders, such as trade unions, chambers of commerce, employment agencies, career services, etc., should also be informed that the message spreads. An effective way of promoting VNFIL as a learning process and a service is to include it in teacher training curricula in higher education. It is even more efficient if the prospective teachers and trainers go through validation themselves during their studies.

**In addition to formal teacher training, there should be systematic competence development for VNFIL practitioners** – assessors and guidance counsellors, and perhaps also administrative coordinators. Especially assessors are typically working-life experts in addition to teachers and trainers. It is important that all practitioners have the same view and understanding of the entire VNFIL process, as well as the standards against which the assessment is carried out. That is one of the cornerstones of quality in validation.

**In terms of quality and quality assurance, there is a clear need for practical guidelines in most countries.** Laws and regulations can provide the overall framework for validation, but clear procedural guidelines are needed to ensure common and transparent practices. The guidelines should define the roles, responsibilities and key competences of different players, as well as clear and sufficiently detailed VNFIL procedures for VNFIL providers. The purpose of quality assurance in VNFIL is to steer the validation system to be efficient, transparent, fair and trustworthy. Quality assurance in validation should include:

- the system level and governance of VNFIL;
- the actual validation process, including clear standards; and
- the competence base of the practitioners.

Instead of heavy and costly VNFIL provider accreditation procedures, the improvement of VNFIL systems should concentrate on developing more available standards for VNFIL purposes, ensuring the competences of the practitioners, streamlining the VNFIL process and awareness-raising to all different stakeholders. A high-quality, transparent VNFIL system promotes trust among education and training providers, as well as in the labour market.

## 4. ANNEX – 2021 COUNTRY PROFILES

### 4.1. Azerbaijan

#### 4.1.1. Context and stage of development

The validation process in Azerbaijan is called ‘assessment and recognition’ and 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 in all modules of a qualification are awarded a diploma equivalent to that granted to graduates of formal vocational education programmes. This grants the right to continue vocational education or start labour activity in the specialism. 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.

#### 4.1.2. Policy and regulatory framework

Only 33.5% of the employed population in Azerbaijan have vocational, secondary specialist or higher education. To meet the country’s demand for a qualified workforce, the [Strategic Road Map for the development of vocational education and training](#) in the Republic of Azerbaijan 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 in the Law on Education adopted in 2009. The Law defined these concepts but did not include any further information about the validation of non-formal and informal learning until 2018. The latest additions to the Law provided for the possibility of validating 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 the document confirming professional qualification to recognise the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning (the Rules).

#### 4.1.3. Institutional set up 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 Population \(MLSPP\)](#) (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); and
- the [State Agency on Vocational Education](#) under the Ministry of Education.

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

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

#### 4.1.4. 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, of whom 118 passed the initial review process. 11 persons were awarded diplomas and 16 were awarded certificates. The demand is increasing.

Validation services are currently limited to the capital city Baku, but the EQAA is planning to widen coverage. Pilot activities at regional level were supported in 2020 by the EU-funded project '[Support to the establishment of the Regional Industrial Vocational Education and Training Competence Centre in Ganja](#)' for the qualification 'Drywall installer and repairer'.

The validation service is available to disadvantaged groups. With the sponsorship of the private sector ([PASHA Holding](#)) 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. Nine of these people were awarded a diploma and four of them were awarded certificates.

#### 4.1.5. Challenges and opportunities

The EQAA should evaluate the reasons for the low candidate success rate. 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 a computer or are computer-illiterate.

Considering the number of unqualified employees in the labour market, the range of qualifications available for VNFIL needs to be expanded. The most in-demand occupations should be defined in consultation with the MLSP and prioritised for validation.

There is an opportunity to increase coverage outside of the capital. The EQAA is working on extending the procedures to regional centres 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 expanding validation. Additional funding from the Unemployment Insurance Fund could be considered.

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

VNFIL is a new process in Azerbaijan, and the EQAA intends to raise awareness of the procedure particularly among persons who work in the informal economy. The Agency has 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 the SEA's guidance services 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 of the advantages of assessment and recognition, the available qualifications and the processes.

## 4.2. Georgia

### 4.2.1. Context and stage of development

Systems for validating learning outcomes acquired in informal and non-formal settings are in place in general and vocational education. In secondary general education, the terms 'formal' and 'non-formal' education are not commonly used; however, there is a possibility to have the learning outcomes acquired independently, without attending an education institution, recognised at each grade and for all three cycles – primary, basic and secondary. The process is called 'certification of education acquired through external studies / externship' and allows applicants to have their learning outcomes assessed and validated vis-à-vis general education programmes for a particular subject, grade or cycle.

In VET, the distinction between formal and non-formal learning and the possibility to have non-formal learning recognised have been in place since 2007. 'Recognition of non-formal education' (RNFE) is the term established to denote a process comparable to VNFIL in vocational education. The system was re-introduced in 2019 and consists of the identification, documentation, assessment, recognition and validation of learning outcomes. The process is still at its early stage of introduction and the services have not yet been performed. The first providers have applied for authorisation.

### 4.2.2. Policy and regulatory framework

The Law of Georgia on General Education (2005)<sup>8</sup> and Minister of Education and Science (MoES) Decree 15N of 2010 create the legal bases for the Certification of Education Acquired through External Studies / Externship in the general education system. It is a process for obtaining a state document, certifying general education, by a person who has independently completed the general education programmes. The rule covers recognition possibilities for all general education cycles and grades or subjects within general education programmes. Assessment, recognition and validation during an externship is carried out through a written examination and is administered by the MoES directly, or through its regional offices – Education Resource Centres and general education schools.

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<sup>8</sup> Law of Georgia on General Education of 2010 (in Georgian, 2021 version) <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/29248?publication=90>



In the vocational education sector, the Laws of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement (2010)<sup>9</sup> and on Vocational Education (2018)<sup>10</sup> provide the legal basis for RNFE, and are further stipulated in the Rule for obtaining a right to provide RNFE<sup>11</sup>, GoG Regulation No 459 of 20 September 2019, and the Rule for RNFE<sup>12</sup>, an MoES decree. The objective of RNFE is defined as 'to validate/certify the learning outcomes acquired beyond formal education for a person willing to obtain recognition in order to facilitate LLL, personal development, access further education and/or obtain a qualification and/or employment / career development / self-employment' (Rule of RNFE, Clause 3, The objectives of recognition). The RNFE process allows any applicant to get their prior formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes recognised and counted towards any partial or full formal VE qualification.

### 4.2.3. Institutional set up and collaboration

The certification of GE acquired through external studies / externship is administered by the MoES, Education Resource Centres (regional branches of the MoES) and schools. The achieved learning outcomes are identified and assessed vis-à-vis relevant education programmes (subject, grade or cycle programme). Candidates are assessed through a written examination for each subject within each grade or cycle to be certified. The examination instruments are developed by GE institutions and/or resource centres. The examinations for full general education certification are directly administered by the MoES. The MoES is authorised to allocate external observers to examination sites as and when needed. Applicants are entitled to a consultation on the certification process and the programmes that will be covered by examinations.

RNFE is implemented by institutions specially licenced by the NCEQE, a national quality assurance and qualifications body. Only institutions that have the right to provide officially recognised vocational education qualifications are eligible to obtain the right for RNFE within the fields of their current education programmes. To date, the right for VNFIL has been granted to four institutions: LTD Community College – Nataly Academy; LTD Tegeta Academy, LTD Business and Technology Academy and LTD Georgian Business Academy.

The consultation and documentation process is conducted by a consultant trained and certified by the NCEQE. Validation is carried out with regard to the existing education standards and modules. The validation committee, created by a validation body, consists of representatives of relevant employers, educational institutions and teachers in the vocational field. The RNFE process is partially automated: applications, RNFE portfolios and RNFE results are registered through a special electronic system.

### 4.2.4. Beneficiaries and impact

Validation in general education appears to be in high demand in Georgia. Between 1 500 and 12 500 applicants make use of the system each year. The validation users are from different groups: emigrant Georgian families who come back and continue their studies in Georgia; individuals who could not attend formal education for personal reasons (mostly illness or migration); and graduates of general

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<sup>9</sup> Law of Georgia on Education Quality Enhancement of 2010 (in Georgian, 2021 version) <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/93064?publication=20>

<sup>10</sup> Law of Georgia on Vocational Education of 2018 (in English, 2018 version) <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/4334842?publication=0>

<sup>11</sup> GoG Resolution No 459 of 20 September 2019 (in Georgian, 2021 version) <https://eqe.ge/res/images/images/NewFolder/N459.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> MOES Decree No 188N of 6 September 2019 (in Georgian, 2021 version).

education programmes with no formal recognition in Georgia who intend to continue higher education in Georgia.

**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF GE CERTIFICATIONS BY GRADE, 2015-2021**

Year Grade	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Full general education	Total
2016	18	26	23	23	72	74	788	1 611	3 078	2 367	3 009	1 382	12 471
2017	14	27	30	39	45	66	619	969	2 313	1 492	2 277	859	8 750
2018	21	48	43	58	72	107	641	1 116	2 178	1 377	2 238	1 407	9 306
2019	49	58	88	67	101	105	648	1 283	2 935	1 813	2 484	3 072	12 703
2020	32	63	70	62	76	88	104	191	282	296	583	333	2 180
2021	22	147	52	49	43	51	78	95	172	176	306	384	1 575

The RNFE system is new, and so no certificates have been awarded yet.

## 4.2.5. Challenges and opportunities

### General education

Considering the number of validations, externship exams seem to be increasingly used by general education students to find an alternative to attending general education schools. This does not seem to be the primary goal of the procedure, and the sheer number of applicants is a strain on the system's resources.

The assessment methods used during certification need to be improved to better address the learning outcomes described in the National Curriculum. The tests mostly check knowledge of facts and fail to check higher skills.

The information about validation is insufficient. There is no webpage providing all relevant information on externship exams and the opportunities they offer.

The MoES, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and involved practitioners should consider improving data collection and analysis of the externship exams to be able to assess the effectiveness of the validation processes.

There is a need to further improve the quality of the validation procedures in general education by training validation practitioners and controlling the quality of the assessment instruments.

The MoES should consider creating a webpage dedicated to the certification of general education acquired through external studies / externship, explaining in user-friendly language the associated procedures, potential providers, deadlines, opportunities for individual counselling and results. It should also provide better support to applicants in terms of improved and better-resourced services, and printed and online tools for guidance.

### RNFE in VET

The visibility of RNFE in society is very low, despite some PR activities carried out by the MoES and NCEQE.

RNFE is fee-based. The absence of a government subsidy for RNFE might be considered a barrier to potential applicants, especially those who belong to vulnerable groups.

The process of accreditation for RNFE services is burdensome (potential providers obtain authorisation and then apply for a special right for RNFE). The NCEQE could consider making the quality assurance mechanisms for RNFE more efficient and transparent by applying a one-step procedure.

Quality assurance of RNFE could include aspects such as professional development of practitioners: assessors and validators. The quality of validation procedures would benefit from training programmes for validation practitioners.

Access to VNFIL for vulnerable groups will be limited unless subsidies are made available. In this regard, the NCEQE could consider cooperating with employment services and exchanging mutual services for jobseekers and legal migrant workers.

### Higher education

The recognition of learning outcomes acquired beyond the formal education system is almost absent in higher education, where there is an increasing need, especially considering the volume of distance non-formal learning opportunities and work-related experience. The NCEQE should explore modalities for quality assurance and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in higher education.

## 4.3. Jordan

### 4.3.1. Context and stage of development

In Jordan, the term used for validation of non-formal and informal learning is 'recognition of prior learning' (RPL). RPL is currently limited to the vocational education and training (VET) sector. Individuals or employers can request an assessment, an occupational classification, and the issuance of an occupational practice licences within three basic occupational skill levels (semi-skilled, skilled and craftsperson) in a wide range of occupational areas.

The service was introduced in 1999 as part of mandatory occupational licencing, but demand for services is limited by a lack of awareness among individuals and has gradually fallen due to the declining enforcement of licencing requirements and weak buy-in from employers.

The system of occupational testing has recently been used as one of the measures to address the refugee crisis. With the support of international community, over 18 000 Jordanian and Syrian workers had their skills tested and received an occupational practice licence.

The recently adopted Jordanian National Qualifications Framework (JNQF) provides for an overarching approach to validation across the whole qualification system, but the necessary bylaws and guidelines are not yet in place.

## 4.3.2. Policy and regulatory framework

### RPL in the VET sector

In the VET sector, RPL has been applied since 1999 in accordance with Law No 27 of 1999 (Occupational Work Organisation Law) and its secondary laws. Under this law, carrying out specific occupations/jobs in the labour market requires the possession of an occupational practice licences indicating the worker's occupational skill levels. The list of occupations subject to the procedure is identified by the cabinet. However, individuals can also apply for RPL in other occupations to improve their chances of better employment and to qualify for training courses facilitating professional development. Occupational Work Organisation Law No 11 of 2019 restricted the enforcement of the procedure.

The Occupational Work Organisation Law classified workers into five categories according to their occupational skill levels: semi-skilled (lowest level), skilled, craftsperson, technician and specialist (highest level). However, the RPL assessment tests and the issuance of related practice licences are limited to the three basic levels: semi-skilled, skilled and craftsperson.

Candidates are assessed against occupational standards that are also used to develop training programmes and assessment instruments in VET. The occupational standards are based on the Arab Standards Classification of Occupations (ASCO).

### Towards an overarching approach to RPL

The Human Resources Development Strategy (HRDS) 2016-2025 included a strategic objective regarding access to VET: 'Establish progressive pathways to promote and recognise all forms of learning and skills development within the system and in the labour market and create new options for high quality tertiary TVET'. One of the projects under this objective was to adopt the National Qualifications Framework, which provides for a new and overarching RPL system.

The Jordan National Qualifications Framework (JNQF) was adopted in 2019 through [Bylaw](#) No 9. It consists of 10 qualification levels from preschool certificate (KG2) (level 1) to PhD qualification (level 10). VET-related qualifications range from level 2 to level 5.

Once the reformed qualifications system is implemented, it will allow people to obtain qualifications at all 10 levels through RPL. According to the JNQF bylaw, RPL should enable individuals to continue their education and learning.

Within the 12 general policies developed and adopted for the JNQF, the 5th policy is related to RPL. The policy indicates that education and training institutions and awarding bodies should facilitate RPL in order to have their qualifications placed in the JNQF. Qualifications awarded through RPL have equal status as those awarded in the formal education system. However, the bylaws, policies and guidelines necessary to implement RPL across the national qualification system have not yet been developed.

## 4.3.3. Institutional set-up and collaboration

According to Law No 27 of 1999, the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) was the government institution mandated to implement occupational assessment tests and issue practice licences for workers, including those who have acquired their competences and skills through non-formal and informal learning.

In 2012, the responsibility for conducting occupational assessment tests and issuing practice licences was transferred to the body that was at that time referred to as the Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), according to Employment and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ETVET) Council Law No 46 of 2008 and CAQA Bylaw No 35 of 2012. CAQA authorised the VTC to continue conducting assessment tests in the VET sector, as it is the main vocational training provider with the required technical equipment and human resources. The National Employment and Training Company (NET) was also authorised to conduct RPL assessment tests for groups of Jordanian and Syrian workers targeted by the projects of international donors.

In 2019, CAQA was incorporated into the newly established Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) in accordance with Law No 9 of 2019 (Technical and Vocational Skills Development Law). The TVSDC continued cooperation in implementing assessment tests for individuals seeking RPL with the VTC. Occupational practice licences are currently issued by CAQA/TVSDC.

According to the instructions for conducting occupational tests and awarding practice licences, private-sector involvement in RPL in VET is possible through participation in the supervisory committees composed of practitioners from both the public and private sectors to conduct assessment tests for individuals. Additionally, subject-expert members from the private sector participate in technical committees set up for developing occupational assessment tests. In addition, private-sector representatives lead the Sector Skill Councils, which are in charge of developing occupational standards.

The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions (AQACHEI) is the public institution mandated with implementing the JNQF. In addition, the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) is partly involved in JNQF implementation through its role in processing applications for institutional and programme listing on the JNQF.

To implement the JNQF, the AQACHEI has formed a steering committee for general policies with members representing the key institutions concerned, as well as technical committees covering different aspects of JNQF implementation. In addition, the AQACHEI has established a JNQF directorate.

The 5th policy on JNQF calls for both the AQACHEI and the TVSDC, 'each according to its mandate', to work on ensuring that all training and education providers and qualification awarding institutions develop RPL policies, ensuring that information, guidance and advice as well as quality assurance mechanisms are included in RPL policies, promoting RPL and approving the award decisions made through RPL. However, the AQACHEI and the TVSDC have not started working on the implementation of this policy.

#### 4.3.4. Beneficiaries and impact

Individuals apply for RPL in VET in Jordan to get occupational practice licences as nationally recognised evidence of their skills and competences for practising specific occupations. Individuals' benefits as a result of RPL may include improving their opportunities for employment, promotion, and access to further training, as well as migration for work. However, there are no documented studies or data on the impact of RPL on beneficiaries.

RPL services in the VET sector are open to migrant workers, provided that they have valid work permits. The number of individuals (Jordanians and migrant workers) who undertook the VTC's RPL occupational assessment tests other than through donor-funded projects and obtained occupational

practice licences between 2010 and 2018 amounts to 38 205 (Jordanians: 34 095; migrants: 4 149). The annual number of licences issued declined almost every year during that period, from 5 600 in 2010 to around 3 200 in 2018.

Additionally, with the support of international organisations, several projects/initiatives are being implemented in Jordan with the aim of providing opportunities for Jordanian and Syrian workers who are already employed to obtain occupational practice licences at semi-skilled worker level. The international organisations have cooperated with the VTC, National Employment and Training (NET) and the Jordan Construction Contractors Association (JCAA) training centre in implementing these initiatives. The total number of workers who obtained licences through projects supported by international organisations between 2017 and August 2021 was 18 200.

### 4.3.5. Challenges and opportunities

Close coordination and cooperation between the AQACHEI and the TVSDC will be necessary to develop unified concepts, procedures and measures for awarding qualifications in the RPL system under the JNQF.

Although RPL has been applied in the TVET sector for more than two decades in Jordan, it was limited to the three basic levels of the NVQ system. The RPL system to be developed according to the JNQF should cover all qualification levels in all education subsystems. Therefore, there is a need to extend and deepen the experiences to cover new involved institutions and sectors.

The AQACHEI's recently established NQF directorate is responsible for all aspects related to JNQF, including RPL. Insufficient human resources are a potential barrier for fulfilling its responsibilities effectively. This also, but to a lesser extent, concerns the TVSDC. To advance the RPL agenda, relevant units would have to be established with a mandate to deal with RPL matters at the AQACHEI and the TVSDC. Capacity-building of staff involved in RPL will be necessary.

Sufficient public funding will have to be allocated for the development and implementation of RPL. International donor projects can be used to facilitate the further development of RPL, including financial and technical support. The technical support could include staff capacity-building, the development of an RPL database, assessment, and quality assurance procedures.

Individuals applying for RPL are required to pay fees for the assessment tests and the occupational practice licences. There are no exemptions or subsidies for disadvantaged groups such as long-term unemployed people and those with disabilities, for whom the fees might be a barrier. Except for projects supported by international donors, the fees paid do not usually cover all the costs of RPL assessment, which have to be covered by the testing institution. This type of funding model disincentivises RPL providers from promoting the service.

RPL is not well known among stakeholders (employees, employers, students, trainees, parents and training providers). This negatively affects the demand for RPL services. There is a need for awareness campaigns targeting different groups of potential beneficiaries. The public employment offices could provide guidance on RPL and refer jobseekers to the RPL service. This requires capacity-building.

The low trust in RPL outcomes could be another potential barrier to the wide adoption of the RPL system. More interest and support will be needed to develop high-quality RPL processes and methodologies, and to build capacity among RPL practitioners. There is a need to develop relevant job profiles such as RPL counsellor and RPL assessor, and relevant accredited training programmes.



Digital tools could be better used to support RPL implementation and monitoring. The monitoring system should provide data for continuously improving RPL service.

## 4.4. Moldova

### 4.4.1. Context and stage of development

Efforts to fulfil the strategic objectives and recommendations on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Moldova began in 2018. In 2019, the national regulatory framework on VNFIL was approved and eight vocational education and training (VET) institutions obtained the title of Validation Centre (VC), and were tasked by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MoECR) to pilot and support the implementation of validation services.

The legal framework for VNFIL requires validation to be undertaken in VET for the qualification of levels 3, 4 and 5 of the NQF. Currently in demand is the validation of professional competences in trades at level 3 of the NQF in fields such as construction, catering, services and textiles. Only full qualifications can be awarded.

Validation is possible only for learning outcomes in qualifications approved and registered in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and exclusively by those VET institutions that are accredited by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) and whose training programmes are approved by this legal body.

### 4.4.2. Policy and regulatory framework

The Education Code, approved in 2014, provides for the assessment of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning. Certification may be carried out by authorised bodies on the basis of a regulation approved by the MoECR. To this end, the MoECR approved a number of acts implementing Article 123 of the Education Code, including the Regulation on VNFIL and the Practical Guide, approved in 2020.

The VNFIL Regulation establishes the legal framework for the functioning of the national validation system, through which the process of identification, documentation, assessment and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts is carried out.

The VNFIL Regulation lays out requirements and procedures for the organisation and conducting of the VNFIL process and grants VET institutions the right to provide VNFIL services.

The legal framework does not expressly specify the purpose of VNFIL or its importance for citizens in terms of training or career development prospects.

The officially endorsed Practical Guide on VNFIL includes specific terminology, a step-by-step VNFIL procedure, the list of required documents for starting the VNFIL process, tools and mechanisms for the validation of professional competences, and guidance on developing examination programmes.

The draft of the Education 2030 Strategy considers ‘the need to develop an education system resilient to social, demographic, economic, environmental and pandemic shocks by developing people’s individual competences to cope with them in formal, non-formal and informal learning’. The Education Strategy points to the need to create a system and tools enabling individuals’ professional competences to be identified, validated and certified.



### 4.4.3. Institutional set-up and collaboration

The MoER<sup>13</sup> is the central public body responsible for developing the legal framework on validation and its enforcement. The main services within the MoER that have duties directly or indirectly related to validation are the Life-long learning (LLL) Service, the NQF Department and the VET Department.

The MoER has assigned the role of validation providers to VET institutions with increased potential and capacity.

Information on the legal framework for the validation of competences can be found and accessed on the websites of the MoER<sup>14</sup> and of validation providers who are the main source of information, advice and guidance, and the contact point for VNFIL candidates. The counsellors at the validation centres provide free consultations and advice on the VNFIL services and offer support to potential beneficiaries.

VET institutions that act as validation centres are subject to evaluation and accreditation by ANACEC. ANACEC, under the MoER, is the key agency coordinating the accreditation of all education institutions and education and training programmes in the country.

Other public and private organisations are involved or consulted in the development of VNFIL policy.

The [Ministry of Labour and Social Protection](#), with its Department on Employment and Migration Policies, deals with the VNFIL, among others, and is responsible for issues relating to the National Employment Agency (NEA), sector committees, occupational standards, the classification of occupations, and developing policies on the labour market and migration. However, the VNFIL legal framework does not explicitly define the roles for the above-mentioned stakeholders.

#### Funding

There is no public funding available to support the implementation of VNFIL. The cost of certification must be borne by the candidates<sup>15</sup>. Fees for VNFIL are set by the validation centres and coordinated by the MoER, in accordance with the legislation and in respect of the cost-effectiveness ratio. The VET institution is a non-profit organisation, and therefore the fees for VNFIL services must not exceed the actual costs incurred.

For certain at-risk groups (unemployed and disabled persons), the certification fee may be staggered by applying preferential financial conditions, or reimbursed to candidates through funding programmes.

Businesses may cover the costs for their employees, but very few participating businesses do this.

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<sup>13</sup> In 2021, the MoECR was reorganised and renamed the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER).

<sup>14</sup> <https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/acte-normative-5>

<sup>15</sup> For registered unemployed persons, the expenses will be borne by the NEA in the future. In 2021, given that the mechanism for implementing Article 35 of Law 105/2018 is not yet in place, during the VNFIL piloting process the expenses for the validation services provided to unemployed people were borne by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

#### 4.4.4. Beneficiaries and impact

VNFIL beneficiaries may be Moldovan citizens and persons included in the categories specified in Article 2(l) of the Law on the Integration of Foreigners in the Republic of Moldova.

With the support of development partners, the International Organization for Migration and the UNDP project 'Migration and Local Development', as of December 2021, 260 citizens have certified their professional competencies at nine validation centres.

Validation services are offered in 46 trades.

Certificates issued by validation centres are intended to have the same impact on employment, further education and training in formal systems as those obtained via formal VET programmes.

#### 4.4.5. Challenges and opportunities

Despite the evidence of good progress achieved in the field of VNFIL, the implementation of validation is faced with challenges that might limit the opportunity for further rollout.

The legal framework delegates all VNFIL obligations and responsibilities, including the certification process, to the VET institutions. The roles of other national stakeholders (such as the NEA or the 6) are not identified or specified. As a result, awareness of VNFIL among the entire stakeholder ecosystem is low and the private sector is not involved. Institutional dialogue among stakeholders would enable validation to be linked with other relevant national policies and a plan to be drawn up for the strategic development of the system. This might be necessary in order to better target beneficiaries. The purpose of VNFIL and its role in facilitating training and career development of individuals is not currently defined.

Validation is not sufficiently promoted. There is a need to develop and implement a promotion and communication strategy, targeted to the identified groups of potential beneficiaries.

The slow progress in updating qualifications and a low number of quality-assured qualifications included in the qualifications register are impeding the expansion of validation. The list of vocational training fields is limited and does not allow competences to be validated in many labour-market-relevant areas. There is not currently an option for partial awarding. Allowing a gradual accumulation of validated competences (in modules) to subsequently obtain the full qualification certificate would make the system much more attractive. This would have to be accompanied by the availability of complementary courses.

No monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure VNFIL impact are in place. External evaluations are not carried out due to the limited number of staff in the LLL Service and the lack of funding and instruments for monitoring and evaluation. Investment in this area will be necessary.

There is a lack of state legislation that would better motivate public and private institutions to engage in the provision of validation services. The funding model, in which the certification fee cannot exceed the actual costs incurred, does not offer a financial incentive for VET institutions to prioritise these services in their development plans. Consideration has to be given to additional sources for sustainable funding of validation. The involvement of partners in the further development of the system will be crucial.

Digitising some of the processes and services could increase the efficiency of the system and allow for better monitoring of progress and results.

Further capacity development of the key personnel involved in VNFIL, including staff at the LLL Service and validation centres, will be necessary. The Practical Guide could be expanded by adding more guidelines on assessment methods that are suitable for various groups of beneficiaries, including those coming from disadvantaged groups.

## 4.5. Ukraine

### 4.5.1. Context and stage of development

The validation system in Ukraine is at an early stage of development, and currently available only in one occupation. The recent developments should support the gradual implementation of the service in the education and labour market sectors.

Validation in the education and training sector is introduced through the procedure on recognition of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. In accordance with the Law on Education (2017), a number of higher education institutions have developed validation regulations. Since 2019, it has been a highly recommended requirement for the accreditation of educational programmes in higher education. The government has also approved a regulation on granting educational institutions the right to recognise the learning outcomes of non-formal learning in the workplace.

Validation in the labour market sector is implemented on a limited scale. The recognition procedure approved in 2013 is implemented for the profession 'cook' in three assessment centres, in Kyiv, Odesa and Rivne. The typical validation procedure consists of identification, documentation, assessment and certification according to the Guidelines on the process of assessment and recognition of the results of non-formal vocational training.

### 4.5.2. Policy and regulatory framework

A number of national laws provide the legal framework for VNFIL, including the Law on the professional development of employees (2012), the Law on employment (2013) and the Law on education (2017).

The Law on education defines non-formal and informal learning and introduces a legal right for recognition of the results of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning in the formal education system (Article 8), and assessment of learning outcomes acquired through external studies / externship within education programmes and the certification of educational qualifications (Article 9). According to this Law, the qualification centres are authorised to assess and recognise learning outcomes, including those acquired in non-formal and informal learning, and to confirm relevant professional qualifications (Article 34).

In the labour market, the first validation procedure was introduced in 2013 with the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers on approval of the procedure for verification of non-formal vocational training results. Other ministerial orders regulate different aspects of the validation system, such as establishing the criteria for VNFIL providers and the list of occupations available for assessment.

Some important steps have recently furthered the operationalisation of VNFIL. The validation of professional competences acquired in the workplace is entrusted in qualification centres. The Regulation on qualification centres, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) in April 2021 is the core national regulatory document on validation that defines the main tasks and functions of qualification centres. The procedure on the accreditation of qualification centres, approved by the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in September 2021, defines the basic principles

and mechanism of the accreditation procedure for legal entities that intend to acquire the status of qualification centre to assess/recognise the learning outcomes of individuals, including non-formal or informal learning; to confirm professional qualifications; and to recognise professional qualifications obtained outside Ukraine.

Ukrainian legislation also allows for the recognition of foreign educational documents (including documents relating to non-formal and informal learning) of migrant workers, refugees and persons who require additional or temporary protection through processes established under international conventions.

The term 'recognition of (learning outcomes of) non-formal and informal learning / training' is prevalent in official documents dealing with validation.

### 4.5.3. Institutional set-up and collaboration

The main agencies involved in VNFIL in Ukraine are the National Qualifications Agency (NQA), the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), the [Ministry of Economy](#) (MoE), the State Employment Service (SES) and the Ministry of Social Policy.

The NQA, which was established in 2019 and reports to the Cabinet of Ministers, is responsible for implementing state policy in the field of qualifications. According to the Regulation on accreditation of qualification centres, the NQA is authorised to accredit qualification centres responsible for assessing and recognising learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal or informal education; confirming relevant professional qualifications; and recognising professional qualifications obtained outside Ukraine. The NQA is currently the key agency coordinating the validation activities of all relevant players in the country.

The NQA has developed and launched the Register of Qualifications in close cooperation with the ETF. The Regulation on the Register of Qualifications, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in June 2021, determines the procedure for creating and maintaining the Register of Qualifications. The Register contains information on educational/professional qualifications, occupational standards, qualification centres, experts on the accreditation of qualification centres, documents on professional qualifications and applications for the development of professional standards, thus providing a unified platform for all validation stakeholders.

The MoE, in cooperation with the SES and its regional centres, has principal responsibility for validation activities in professional qualifications. The representatives of national and local businesses and employers' associations play an essential role in coordination and cooperation with the SES in pilot projects for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, dual education, foresight and the development of occupational standards, the digitalisation of training services, and professional training for adults.

The MoES plays a leading role in policymaking and introducing effective mechanisms for the validation system in the education sector, particularly in higher and adult education.

### 4.5.4. Beneficiaries and impact

The number of validation users is slowly but steadily increasing. Since 2016, some 673 applicants have confirmed their professional qualification for the vocational occupation of cook in three assessment centres, in Kyiv, Odesa and Rivne. Validation users receive certificates that are equivalent to the official documents approving the level of their relevant qualification and recognised

by their employers. Potential validation users in the labour market are employed individuals, migrant workers and vulnerable groups; in the education and training sector, they are students at all levels of education.

Since validation is still at the implementation stage, the impact on beneficiaries has not yet been measured.

#### 4.5.5. Challenges and opportunities

At present, Ukraine is implementing the concept of lifelong learning in accordance with EU recommendations. To facilitate the visibility and benefits of non-formal and informal learning, the validation system has to be introduced to different sectors: education and training, the labour market and the third sector. The crucial factor for the operationalisation of validation arrangements is to design and implement a unified national VNFIL system covering all the above-mentioned sectors and support validation users at each stage of life.

In the education sector, the increasing popularity of distance learning among students requires transparent and reliable validation. However, the development of effective validation mechanisms for recognising educational and professional qualification is challenging.

Policymakers are aware that simplifying the validation system in Ukraine and making it more flexible are crucial factors for its successful implementation. A new impact is expected from qualification centres that are tasked with recognising professional qualifications independently of the learning path: formal, non-formal and informal. The first experts in qualification centre accreditation are currently being certified, and applications for qualification centre accreditation are being accepted by the NQA.

An effective legal basis for the National Qualifications System is a key challenge. Currently, all aspects of the National Qualifications System are regulated by the Law on education (2017). This Law anticipated that a special law on the National Qualifications System would be drafted in 2018; however, the draft has not yet been submitted to the parliament.

Significant developments to the current validation system are anticipated in the draft legislation on adult education and training. The MoES has developed a draft Law on adult education that reflects some topical issues on VNFIL, outlining the benefits, conditions and mechanism of validation for adult learners.

The adoption of the regulation 'on approval of the procedure for recognition of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning in higher education', developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, is expected to speed up the implementation of validation procedures in higher education.

Further regulatory changes are needed regarding the National Classifier of Occupations, which follows the old ISCO-88 classification. It should be updated in accordance with the modern ISCO-08.

Raising public awareness of validation is one of the important missions of the NQA. Currently, the awareness on potential benefits of validation among potential users is low. The benefits of information and communications technology should be used for promotion of VNFIL. The NQA website and the qualifications register could be used to create a unified digital platform for communicating with potential users and providers of validation services.

The lack of funding might undermine the potential for scaling up the validation arrangements. State funding should be provided, particularly for vulnerable groups. The qualification centres will need a financial incentive and a sustainable funding model to engage in validation and expand services.

The procedure for obtaining permission for VET schools for VNFIL activities should be simplified.

Relevant validation methodologies will need to be developed and training programmes for assessors and other validation practitioners will need to be provided. International experience could be leveraged to facilitate these developments.

The assessment centres in Kyiv, Rivne and Odesa have developed a valuable body of experience, which could serve as a reference for the newly authorised centres.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (Moldova)
AQACHEI	Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions (Jordan)
ASCO	Arab Standards Classification of Occupations
CAQA	Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (Jordan)
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CoCI	Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Moldova).
DACUM	Developing a Curriculum
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EMIS	Education Management and Information System
EQAA	Education Quality Assurance Agency (Azerbaijan)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
Externat	Extramural exams
GeoNQF	Georgian National Qualifications Framework
ILA	Individual learning account
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
JNQF	Jordanian National Qualifications Framework
LLL	Lifelong learning
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population (Azerbaijan)
MoE	Ministry of Economy (Ukraine),
MoECR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (Moldova, until 2021)
MoER	Ministry of Education and Research (Moldova, since 2021)
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science (Ukraine)

MoLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (Moldova)
NCEQE	National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (Georgia)
NEA	National Employment Agency (Moldova)
NET	National Employment and Training Company (Jordan)
NQA	National Qualifications Authority (Ukraine)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QUARSU	Qualifications recognition support to Ukrainian universities
RNFE	Recognition of non-formal education
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SEA	State Employment Agency (Azerbaijan)
SES	State Employment Service (Ukraine)
SESIP	Technical Assistance to the ‘Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme’
TVSDC	Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VTC	Vocational Training Corporation (Jordan)