

INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country Factsheet 2023: Türkiye

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Context and stage of development

Türkiye is now in the third phase of developing its qualifications system, i.e. the 'Implementation Phase', having completed the 'Preparation Phase (2010-2015)' and the 'Improvement/Development Phase (2016-2020)' successfully. Within the process, the implementation of systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) has been a priority. The Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), a powerful platform that brings together the state, employees, and employers in the country, runs this system. Türkiye has been making an excellent case of validation as an instrument of economic development policies. The main aim of the system is to equip the labour force with up-to-date qualifications and recognise learning in the workplace.

The VET sector is prioritised since there is a great need for workers to obtain qualifications which recognise their skills acquired at the workplace and provide evidence of these. The implementation of the system in higher education is still in its early stages, and it is not covered at all in general education.

In relation to the labour market, the most important elements of the VNFIL system run by the VQA are assessment and certification. They are implemented by certification bodies authorised by the VQA. To offer relevant qualifications, the certification bodies should first satisfy the accreditation requirement in accordance with TTS EN ISO/IEC 17024 Standard¹. This accreditation is awarded by the Turkish Accreditation Agency (TURKAK) or the accreditation bodies that have signed the multilateral recognition agreement within the European Cooperation for Accreditation. The institutions meeting the accreditation requirement may apply to the VQA for authorisation. The VQA examines, audits and evaluates the institutions' management system as well as their policies and procedures for assessment and certification activities. Having been found eligible, the institutions are authorised to carry out the assessment and certification based on National Qualifications (NQs) and receive the status of Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs). The ACBs are only authorised to conduct assessment and evaluation, and are not authorised to provide training. In Türkiye, authorisation to provide training is subject to the approval of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

VNFIL is mostly used for the learning outcomes leading to vocational qualifications. The VQA plays a leading role in this regard. Learning outcomes are subject to assessment based on the national qualifications published by the VQA and are certified regardless of where and how they have been achieved. In this way, people who acquire learning outcomes in non-formal and informal learning settings can be awarded formal vocational qualifications.

The Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF) classifies and supports the understanding of qualifications in general, academic and vocational training sectors. It was designed to allow for recognition of skills and competencies achieved as a result of the learning in informal and non-formal contexts. Based on that, the aim of the policy which promotes VNFIL is to create an environment where the VNFIL arrangements for all qualifications included in the TQF are available.

¹ This International Standard contains principles and requirements for a body certifying persons against specific requirements, and includes the development and maintenance of a certification scheme for persons.

Policy and Regulatory Framework

Türkiye initiated VNFIL in 2006 with the establishment of the VQA, whose mission is to develop new vocational qualifications in collaboration with labour market partners, including VNFIL. The TQF, as a transparency tool, supports the validation of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal contexts.

The 'Regulation on the procedures and principles concerning the implementation of the TQF' (TQF Regulation, 2015) refers to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and includes a specific article which foresees the preparation of principles and procedures for the recognition of prior learning and quality assurance (QA) of this process. The TQF Regulation includes provisions for VNFIL, stipulating that all qualifications included in the TQF can be attained via VNFIL. Learners can have access to programmes/exams, exemptions, certification of units, credit accumulation/transfer, and recognition of qualifications through VNFIL.

In 2017, MoNE issued the regulation on the principles and implementation of VNFIL, regarding accreditation, assessment and evaluation.

Another key legal act is the 'Regulation on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to be included in the TQF' adopted in 2018.

VNFIL for the newly developed vocational/professional qualifications was initiated in September 2021, and the procedural basis accepted by the TQF Council in December 2021 was the 'Principles and Procedures on Recognition of Prior Learning and Quality Assurance', covering the descriptions and the QA processes of the VNFIL qualifications.

The VQA published the 'Guide for VNFIL'² in 2019. The publication of this guide is a joint venture between MoNE, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the VQA. It is based on the European Guidelines for VNFIL (2015) and provides information on the VNFIL implementation in Europe, including the stages of validation and its main components as well as the methodologies used.

The VQA, together with stakeholders, is preparing the QA rules and regulations for VNFIL. Once these have been finalised in 2023, a policy document will be prepared regarding VNFIL in Türkiye as part of the lifelong learning (LLL) system.

² https://myk.gov.tr/images/articles/TYC/Yayinlar/YSOD_Rehberi_150119.pdf.

Institutional setup and collaboration

The stakeholder institutions involved in the TQF and the VNFIL processes develop national standards and qualifications as well as administer the assessment, evaluation and certification. The VQA coordinates the activities of the line ministries and the stakeholder institutions, employees, and employers in relation to VNFIL. The sustainability of the qualifications system is ensured by the existence of 28 sector committees which evaluate draft occupational standards and draft national vocational qualifications for acceptance by the VQA Executive Board. As per the 'Regulation on the Procedures and Principles for the Establishment, Duties and Operation of the VQA Sector Committees', the sector committees consist of representatives from MoNE, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the CoHE, other ministries related to particular occupations, employer and labour unions, professional organisations and the VQA.

The ACBs carry out assessment and certification processes. The ACBs offer individuals, regardless of their educational status or work experience, an opportunity to have their learning outcomes, gained in any way, recognised. As of January 2023, there were 274 ACBs in total. Almost 70 % of the ACBs are non-profit organisations, such as professional bodies, chambers of commerce and industry, LLL centres of universities, employee unions or employer associations. The ACBs develop the assessment processes in line with the requirements defined in the national qualifications. According to the principles set by the VQA, all ACBs are required to take instant video-recordings of all the assessments they carry out.

Following the 'Preparation Phase (2010-2015)', the primary responsibility for the implementation of the TQF Action Plan 2016-2018 and putting in place the TQF infrastructure during the 'Improvement/Development Phase (2016-2020)' rested with the TQF Department of the VQA and TQF Governance structures (including the criteria, procedures and principles stated in the TQF Regulation). The current 'Implementation Phase' includes a major shift in emphasis and responsibility away from the TQF Department and onto the Responsible Bodies to ensure the implementation. The Responsible Bodies – MoNE, the CoHE and the VQA – have a responsibility to implement the TQF as regards the qualifications for which they are responsible. The 'Implementation Phase' is crucial for making the TQF fully operational.

Given the strategic importance of the TQF and the key role of the Responsible Bodies both for implementing the TQF collectively and for ensuring that their qualifications and/or programmes are consistent with the TQF, they are encouraged to ensure that the TQF is featured more prominently within their strategic planning documents.

Beneficiaries and impact

VNFIL in Türkiye currently prioritises the VET sector since there is a great need for workers to obtain qualifications which recognise their skills and provide evidence of these. The 274 ACBs carry out the assessment, evaluation and certification processes. They also provide opportunities for low-skilled individuals to validate their skills and upgrade their competences. Specific support is available for people who are illiterate or visually impaired. These people are tested individually and the questions are read out for them. For people with hearing impairment, certified translators with sign language skills are used. For candidates who do not understand Turkish, all materials are translated by a certified translator.

The VQA has developed a guide on theoretical and performance-based assessment that specifies the validation process for disadvantaged groups. Women are a specific disadvantaged group. The VQA has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to work together to facilitate the labour market integration of Syrians via VNFIL and obtain further translation support for the National Occupational Standards and qualifications. Moreover, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) is implementing the EU project 'Living and Working Together', with the VQA as the main partner, which aims for the certification of 15 000 Syrians and host community members via VNFIL for better labour market integration. Among all those certified, 30 % are Syrians and 23 % of the certified Syrians are employed.

The International organization for Migration (IOM) is implementing the programme 'Career Guidance and Labour Market Integration/Adaptation Training for Migrants' and its main objective is to empower job and employment counsellors and municipal staff working in Migrant Community Centres to provide support to migrants of different status. VNFIL is an important segment of the programme. Moreover, the Pre-employment Support Programme for Syrians and Host Communities has the VNFIL process for participants as an outcome.

The International Labour Organization (ILO), within the scope of its Refugee Response Programme and earlier projects organised since 2015, has supported VNFIL for refugees through VQA exams and certification processes to facilitate their labour market integration.

There are 274 ACBs acting as VNFIL providers, and 2 412 543 people had validated their knowledge and skills as of January 2023. Most of these beneficiaries were workers employed in hazardous occupations without formal qualifications (2 021 568 people).

Challenges and opportunities

There are considerable developments with regard to VNFIL in Türkiye, however, as the VET sector is given priority, there is still room for further improvement in other sectors (particularly in general and higher education) where the development of VNFIL is still in the early stages.

Efficient funding mechanisms need to be in place for a sustainable mechanism, especially for vulnerable groups (migrants, women, people with disabilities, etc.). It is recommended that the guidance services provide information on the costs and benefits of validation. Better definitions and descriptions of the roles and responsibilities for validation practitioners have to be in place and training programmes should be designed accordingly. In MoNE, it is the Directorate General for VET that has the main responsibility for VNFIL, whereas the Directorate General for Lifelong Learning (LLL) could be more engaged in the process since VNFIL is a tool for LLL. The number of qualified VQA experts and validation practitioners must be increased.

The partners that award qualifications need to be encouraged to develop and implement quality assurance systems. All the vocational trainings conducted by MoNE, the CoHE, the Turkish Public Employment Service (İŞKUR), etc. need to be designed and provided in alignment with the National Occupational Standards and qualifications, and need to be based on learning outcomes. Moreover, the assessment and certification of those trainings are suggested to be aligned with the procedural basis of the VQA legislation.

The visibility of VNFIL in society needs to be improved. The certification obligation in hazardous occupations could contribute to the value and visibility of VNFIL. Employers have a critical role to play in this respect.