

INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country report 2023 ALBANIA

Disclaimer

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1 Introduction

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is part of the vocational education and training (VET) system in Albania and is defined by two Laws: the Law on Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania (the VET Act), adopted by the Albanian Parliament in 2017, and the Law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (the AQF Act), adopted in 2010 and amended in 2018. Both laws recognise different types of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning. The VET Act covers initial VET (IVET) and partially covers continuous VET (CVET) that are provided by both public and private VET institutions. It stipulates that non-formal and informal learning can be recognised through a system of validation of prior learning (Article 21) if such learning is identified, documented and assessed so that it leads to a vocational qualification at levels 2 to 5 of the Albanian Qualification Framework (AQF). Arrangements for VNFIL in general education, higher education, adult learning, the labour market and third sector are not included in the respective laws and no changes are expected in the near future.

The VET Act defines VNFIL as including:

- the process for accrediting VET providers for the recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- RPL by accredited VET providers, through the awarding of a qualification in the form of a certificate.

The main stakeholders involved in VNFIL are the National Agency for VET and Qualifications (NAVETQ), National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), and VET providers accredited for VNFIL. The national authorities: – the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) – should act as the guarantors of the quality of the process and fair treatment of candidates, and as the impartial negotiators between all parties (employers and assessment centres).¹

VNFIL is not yet operational in Albania but policymakers, employers, employees and unions broadly accept the instrument as important in increasing flexibility in the range of VET and fostering inclusion and mobility in the labour market. Therefore, VNFIL is one of the priority measures in the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023-2030 (Priority Measure 1.2.2) and is expected to be fully operational by the first quarter of 2026.²

NESS 2023-2030 outlines the following issues on VNFIL:

- Consolidating the legal framework, governance, and procedures, consolidating the institutional arrangements to support the rollout of VNFIL, developing a database on VNFIL, increasing human capacity in VNFIL, methodologies and quality assurance. It is also important to involve representatives from employers' organisations and trade unions in the design and implementation process as they are important in the shift from the traditional certification of formal learning to the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, VNFIL implementation and financing.
- Designing regulations for the implementation of the VNFIL process comprising the four stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification.
- Prioritising certain sectors and target groups, and piloting the VNFIL process (according to the plan in the Osnabrück Declaration³).

¹ Referencing to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. (February 2022). Retrieved from https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2022-05/Consolidated_Referencing_report_Albania_Final_150222%5B1%5D.pdf.

² Ministry of Finance and Economy. (December 2022). *DRAFT National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 Strategic Document*. Tirana, Albania. Retrieved from <https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/561>.

³ The Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies was endorsed on 30 November 2020 by the ministers in charge of vocational education and training of the Member States, EU candidate countries and EEA-EFTA countries, the European social partners and the European Commission.

- Accrediting VNFIL providers.
- Implementing the VNFIL system.
- Monitoring and evaluating the VNFIL system.

The Operational Programme for Youth Guarantee 2024–2027 presented by MoFE at the Consultative Meeting on the Operational Programme on Youth Guarantee on 8 June 2023, sees the introduction of RPL to the VET system as full of potential for Youth Education and Training measures that seek to diversify opportunities for retraining and improving skills in adult students. This programme envisages developing at least six new post-secondary vocational qualifications (AQF/EQF level 5), RPL and traineeships for at least 1 200 NEETs, with six VET providers with the necessary laboratories and tools.

2 National perspective

2.1. Overarching approach to validation

Article 6 ‘Scope of the AQF implementation’ in Law No 10247 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (the AQF Act) amended to Law No 23/2018 on the revised Albanian Qualifications Framework⁴, defines VNFIL as: ‘certification (i.e. issuing of a certificate) of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in cases where the latter are certified through a validation procedure, including the recognition of prior learning’. In Law No 15/2017 on Education and Vocational Training in the Republic of Albania⁵ (the VET Act) VNFIL is used interchangeably with the term ‘recognition of prior learning’ (RPL) and is defined as ‘the process by which an individual’s learning outcomes are formally recognised as skills and competences, either through the award of a qualification in the form of a certificate, diploma or title or through the award of equivalence, credits validation of acquired skills and/or competences’.

Article 21 of the VET Act as well as the respective secondary legislation i.e. Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No 756 dated 9.12.2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning⁶ stipulates that VNFIL should be carried out against formally adopted standards, i.e. vocational qualification and assessment standards for vocational qualifications at levels 2 to 5 of the AQF (referenced to the same levels of the EQF). It follows that the current approach envisaged validation in the VET sector only.

Both laws mentioned above and the DCM serve as the main policy and legal framework for VNFIL/RPL in Albania. This framework sets the basis for the development of the RPL’s scope, objectives, functions and structure and it designates the responsibilities of the institutions implementing RPL (the ministry responsible for education and vocational training, which approves the RPL procedures and regulations, NAVETQ, NAES and the accredited VET providers recognising prior non-formal and informal learning), with a clear division of roles in implementing the VNFIL/RPL system. The framework also specifies how VET providers for VNFIL/RPL are accredited, oversight structures for VNFIL/RPL within the accredited VET providers are set up and assessors selected. The process of recognising prior non-formal and informal learning ends with the delivery of the certificate for the relevant level of AQF and is based on the validation process, which includes 4 (four) stages:

- identification
- documentation
- assessment
- certification of learning results.

VNFIL is still not operational because implementation requires a clear and stable institutional and regulatory mechanism as defined by the guiding principles and structure of the VET system, the roles and responsibilities of the key bodies, the overall standards for VET provision, assessment and certification, as well as the strengthening of the VET governing structure. However, implementing VNFIL is one of the priority measures in the new NESS 2023-2030 and accompanying action plan and both national agencies that share responsibility for VET (NAES and NAVETQ) have been assigned functional areas of responsibility for setting up the VNFIL system, accrediting VET providers for RPL and ensuring that RPL is operational by the first quarter of 2026 at the latest.

⁴ Assembly of the Republic of Albania. (5 May 2018). Law no. 23/2018 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework, as amended (Law no. 10247, dated 4.03.2010). Retrieved from <http://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2018/05/10/23>.

⁵ Assembly of the Republic of Albania. (16 February 2017). Ligj Nr. 15/2017 'Për arsimin dhe forminin profesional në Republikën e Shqipërisë' datë 16.2.2017 [Law No. 15/2017 of 16.2.2017 on the Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania]. Retrieved from <http://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2017/02/16/15-2017>.

⁶ Assembly of the Republic of Albania. (9 December 2021). Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No 756 dated 9.12.2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning. Retrieved from <http://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2021/12/09/756>.

In consolidating policy and the legal framework for VNFIL/RPL in Albania, the following RPL initiatives are noteworthy:

- RPL mechanisms were introduced 2010-2014 under the ILO–IPA 2010 project on Human Resources Development in Albania, which tested potential ways of working before a feasible legal framework for RPL is developed and adopted. The pilot scheme on RPL (ILO-IPA 2010, 2014) that the project implemented developed framework methodology for RPL and was approved by the beneficiary (Government of Albania) as a preparatory phase. During that phase, the following activities were carried out:
 - Development of two occupational standards (textile sector).
 - Capacity building of NAVETQ staff.
 - Training of 10 assessors.
 - Preparation of assessment instruments for the identification of competences.
 - Assessment process completed with a practical skills assessment conducted for eight candidates in a real working environment on company premises.

This pilot scheme provided a sound basis for developing the necessary RPL legal framework with a clear division of roles across the bodies implementing RPL and specified priority sectors for RPL.

- A joint Kosovo-Albania peer learning workshop on a legal framework for VNFIL/RPL in Albania was held in 2018 with the support of the European Training Foundation (ETF). This system is intended to mainly address the target groups of people who used to work in small family businesses, returning migrants, redundant workers and people who dropped out of formal education.

Both of the aforementioned initiatives preceded the DCM No 756 (secondary legislation under the VET Act).

As stated in the 2022 Albanian Report on equivalences to the EQF and self-certification against the QF–EHEA⁷, the initial support for implementing VNFIL/RPL is expected to come from the governmental institutions MoES, MoFE, NAVETQ and NAES. Also, it is essential to have sound outcomes of VNFIL/RPL implementation to raise the interest and confidence levels of individuals and employers. When individuals understand and feel the benefits of VNFIL they will become important promoters of the scheme and other individuals will then accept to pay for their own assessment and certification. There are no plans to recognise non-formal and informal learning in the Albanian higher education system.

2.2. Validation in education and training

Article 21 of the VET Act as well as the respective secondary legislation (DCM No 756) stipulates that VNFIL be carried out against formally adopted standards, i.e., vocational qualifications standards and assessment standards for vocational qualifications at levels 2 to 5 of the AQF, excluding level 5 qualifications issued by higher education institutions.

VNFIL/RPL in Albania will cover IVET and CVET (post-secondary non-university study). It will be nationally coordinated and is expected to be piloted in two priority sectors. The prioritisation of the sectors will be based on a study that will determine the importance and impact that different sectors have in the country's economy. The roadmap of the priority sectors for RPL implementation is in the drafting process and expected to be approved in Q2 2023.

Although in principle the AQF is an enabler of Lifelong Learning (LLL), meaning that all types of qualifications available in Albania are included in the AQF if they meet certain quality criteria, non-formal

⁷ Referencing to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

qualifications acquired through professional training courses are not yet included. For this to happen, as stipulated in the respective legal framework for inclusion of LLL in the AQF, i.e. DCM No 427 of 26.6.2019 on approval of criteria and procedures for inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications according to the Albanian Qualifications Framework for education and professional training⁸, the criteria and procedures have been laid down and must be followed and fulfilled. This process has already started. In parallel, the main bodies implementing RPL in Albania, NAVETQ, and NAES, are elaborating their respective VNFIL action plans. Professional training courses are being offered by 12 public vocational training centres (VTCs), for which NAES is responsible, and 833 private entities that are licensed to provide a wide range of non-formal training, from soft skills to advanced vocational training of varying length i.e. from one to two weeks to several months⁹ (as compared vocational courses in formal education that might last three or four years). Any adult who has a basic school-leaver's certificate (9 years in school) can enrol in such courses for a small fee (unemployed jobseekers are exempt). VTCs are used by many young people as a skilling pathway alternative to formal vocational education (around 50% of learners in state VTCs are under 26). People who are planning to emigrate also prefer these courses.

Under the legislative framework in place, VNFIL will adhere to four stages of validation: identification, documentation, assessment and certification. There is no definition of how validation fits into credit transfer arrangements (ECVET).

The respective laws do not cover VNFIL arrangements in general education, higher education, adult learning, the labour market or the third sector.

2.3. Validation in the labour market

There are no plans for VNFIL/RPL in the labour market in the current legislative framework. However, some private initiatives on RPL in the labour market were implemented by non-government bodies in Albania prior to the adoption of the DCM No 756, which requires VET providers to undergo the accreditation process before carrying out VNFIL/RPL. Examples of VNFIL/RPL in the labour market we have identified are as follows:

- RPL in some occupations such as welding, wool handling and car mechanics, provided by the National Chamber of Crafts. The National Chamber of Crafts was established on 19 December 2017, as a legal entity under Law No 70/2016 on Crafts in the Republic of Albania and it is non-profit making. The law provides the framework for a dual training system based on the German VET model. The National Chamber of Crafts awards the titles of 'Master' and 'Assistant Master' in the above-mentioned occupations under this framework, as regulated by the same law.
- The prior learning recognition initiative (PLRI) was brought in in the period 2017–2021 by the AlbContact centre, that was licensed under the MoFE as a private VET provider of bakery and pastry skills (non-formal learning). The initiative came about due to a high demand from skilled employees with experience and expertise in the bakery and pastry sectors who were looking for recognition of their skills acquired at work in Albania or abroad (during emigration). About 70 women and men certified their prior learning outcomes by obtaining the 'Master' or 'Assistant Master' title in bakery and pastry. The project came to an end when DCM No 756 came into force requiring VET providers be accredited for RPL. The AlbContact centre continues to receive many requests from individuals about RPL for their skills and competencies. The guidelines for the accreditation of VET providers to recognise prior learning are not yet in place.

⁸ Assembly of the Republic of Albania. (2019). Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No 427 dated 26.6.2019 on approval of criteria and procedures for inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications, according to the Albanian Qualifications Framework levels for education and professional training. Retrieved from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2019/06/26/427>.

⁹ Referencing to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. (February 2022). Retrieved from https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2022-05/Consolidated_Referencing_report_Albania_Final_150222%5B1%5D.pdf.

2.4. Validation in the third sector

There are no plans for VNFIL in the third sector under the current legislative framework. Nevertheless, there is huge potential in the third sector to develop RPL mechanisms given the learning opportunities provided by trade unions and youth and adult organisations, through local and international volunteering and moves abroad.

3 Links to national qualifications framework (NQF)

Albania adopted its National Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 2010 and amended it in 2018 (the AQF Act). Albania is a candidate country for EU accession and a member of the EQF Advisory Group. It has aligned its AQF to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2021. As such, AQF has reached the activation stage (ETF, 2023).

Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of eight levels whose descriptors are learning outcomes divided into three domains: knowledge, skills and competences. The eight levels include all types and levels of qualifications and certification and correspond to the EQF levels.

Article 4 of the AQF Act stipulates that flexibility and consideration of lifelong learning in formal and non-formal contexts are some of the main principles of the AQF. Furthermore, Article 5 gives access to qualifications and flexibility in the routes to qualification among the objectives of the AQF.

The AQF is open to all types of qualifications. There are three main categories of qualification identified in the AQF handbook and 2018 AQF Act: (i) general and higher education qualifications; (ii) professional or VET qualifications; and (iii) LLL qualifications catering for adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development. The term 'LLL qualifications' in the AQF Acts is used to distinguish all other qualifications from formal qualifications that are covered by the respective higher education, general education and VET Acts and automatically included in the AQF.

The AQF Act stipulates that the AQF should facilitate an accumulation and transfer of credits. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is only operational in higher education.

The AQF is seen as an enabler of LLL meaning that, in principle, all types of qualification available in the country are included in the AQF if they meet certain quality criteria. This involves structuring qualifications according to qualification standards and procedures set down in DCM No 427 of 26.6.2019, which stipulates criteria and procedures to place such qualifications on the AQF. This regulation should open the way for applications for qualifications obtained outside the formal subsystems to be levelled in the AQF (ETF, 2023). Provisions have already been made (through DCM No 427) in view of LLL qualifications being included within the AQF (these could be short courses for adults, special courses for continuous professional development or study programmes for continuous education provided by colleges and universities) but the AQF is not yet fully operational and the focus currently is on full implementation.

4 Standards and reference points

Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of eight levels with three domains for its : knowledge, skills and competences.

Originally, the descriptors were simply a translation of the (rather generic) EQF level descriptors, but a ministerial decree of June 2019 replaced them with more detailed descriptors. These draw on the wording in the EQF descriptors but have been expanded to cover more elements e.g. Level 4 Knowledge includes 'Self-management within work context guidelines' and Level 3 Skills includes 'Working independently in variable conditions', etc.

The AQF's eight levels mirror the EQF. The AQF includes LLL in its scope and provides for certification of partial qualifications or units of qualifications. Curriculums organised into modules are crucial in supporting a flexible delivery of qualifications and in offering several different pathways between qualifications and between different learning contexts.

In the VET sector, work has begun on developing a new template for occupational standards. The improved template will include criteria, tools and equipment to support RPL (ETF, 2023).

LLL qualifications are not yet fully included into the AQF but the focus is currently on the full implementation of the AQF based on the provisions of DCM No 427.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in the validation arrangements and their coordination

Article 4 of DCM No 756 specifies which bodies implement VNFIL and their roles. VNFIL has not yet been rolled out and it is expected to be operational by the first quarter of 2026.

The bodies implementing VNFIL and their roles are summarised as follows:

- the Ministry responsible for VET endorses the VNFIL procedures and regulations;
- NAVETQ sets out the evaluation and certification procedures and regulations for VNFIL implementation and is legally responsible for accrediting VET providers for VNFIL;
- NAES cooperates with NAVETQ in vetting the VET providers undergoing the accreditation process, facilitates the process and ensures necessary human resources for it;
- Accredited VET providers will have to provide information on completing a specific qualification when the NAES identifies the need for a VNFIL; they organise and keep documentation for each candidate, report on the process and implement the required VNFIL procedures;
- Only accredited VET providers will be carrying out VNFIL.

Coordination and cooperation between the institutions and the validation services they will provide (outreach and career guidance services, education and training provision, social service work and employment services) will be covered by the respective legislative frameworks.

Currently, there are no start-ups, social impact enterprises or similar involved in full VNFIL services (i.e. related to all stages of the validation process: identification, documentation, assessment and certification) such as identification of skills, guidance or skills audits.⁶

6 VNFIL service providers

DCM No 756 Article 9 states that recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning must only be carried out by VET providers accredited by the NAVETQ.

DCM No 756 Article 10 states that the accredited providers for VNFIL/RPL are VET institutions, as per the definition in the VET Act, law No 15/2017, and that they have the necessary capacities to meet the standards of RPL accreditation. The accreditation standards for RPL and the accreditation process for RPL have not yet been drafted.

DCM No 756 Article 11 states that the responsible structures for the VNFIL/RPL-accredited providers is as follows:

- the coordinator, who is responsible for the administration and implementation of VNFIL/RPL;
- the counselling expert, who informs and guides candidates on the process as a whole and at all its separate stages;
- the evaluation expert in the relevant profession, who verifies the evidence of individuals' learning and evaluates whether these comply with the standards.

7 Information and guidance

DCM No 756 defines the roles and responsibilities of all RPL/VNFIL institutions involved, with a focus on information, outreach and promotion. In addition, further guidelines and regulations will complete the required RPL legal framework.

7.1. Information, outreach, and promotion

According to DCM No 756, the tasks related to information, outreach and promotion to be carried out by the VET providers accredited for RPL/VNFIL are specified in Articles 7 and 8 as follows:

In Article 8:

- to provide information on all stages of the RPL/VNFIL process, based on the legislation in force and the official publications of the NAVETQ;
- to provide information on the possibilities of completing the qualification at the end of the process in cases where it is determined that the candidate still needs to acquire some learning;
- to keep a separate register of the records of the achievements of each candidate certified through RPL/VNFIL;
- to report regularly to the NAVETQ using the instruments specified for reporting RPL/VNFIL progress.
- to implement RPL/VNFIL procedures.

In article 7, the NAES shall cooperate with and assist the VET providers accredited for RPL/VNFIL in:

- identifying and orienting potential unemployed jobseeker candidates for RPL/VNFIL;
- making the necessary resources available for RPL/VNFIL to public VET institutions accredited for RPL/VNFIL, according to letter "ç", point 3, of DCM No 554, dated 31.7.2019 on the establishment, organisation and functioning of the National Employment and Skills Agency.

7.2. Advice and guidance

As also mentioned in section 6, DCM No 756, article 11, defines the various responsibilities at the VET providers accredited for RPL/VNFIL, including:

- the counsellor, who informs and guides candidates on the process as a whole and at all its separate stages;

8 Validation practitioners

As mentioned in section 6, DCM No 756, article 11, defines the practitioners at the VET providers accredited for RPL/VNFIL as follows:

- the coordinator, who is responsible for the administration and implementation of VNFIL/RPL;
- the counsellor, who informs and guides candidates on the process as a whole and at all its separate stages;
- the evaluation expert in the relevant profession, who verifies the evidence of individuals' learning and evaluates whether these comply with the standards.

8.1. Profile of validation practitioners

No profiles of practitioners have yet been developed.

8.2. Qualification requirements

Under the current legislative framework for the VNFIL there are no stated qualification requirements for validation practitioners. However, the bodies instituting VNFIL/RPL have been working on this.

8.3. Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

There are currently no training measures for validation practitioners, but it is worth noting the experience from the RPL pilot implemented under the IPA 2010 project on Human Resources Development in Albania, Component 3 - VET Reform. Through this initiative, RPL mechanisms for Albania were developed and approved by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MoSWY), the MoES and their on-the-ground agencies. Of the five qualifications identified as most relevant, the textile sector was selected to pilot the RPL mechanism and the two following occupations within the textile sector were selected for the development of occupational standards:

- Line Production Technician in Garment Manufacturing; and
- Quality Controller for Leather Shoes Manufacturing.

The occupational standards were developed according to the Guidelines for developing competence based occupational standards together with specialists from the textile industry and NAVETQ. Training of the assessors and the piloting of the assessment tools followed as a testing ground for RPL processes across the country. The training programme for assessors included the following topics:

- background information on the project/RPL output;
- expected results;
- objectives of the training course;
- training for participants;
- profile of assessors of informal and non-formal learning in the occupation Production Technician in Garment Production;
- requirements in the selection process to become an assessor (participant in the training);
- duration of the training course;
- training plan;

- methods to be used during the training course;
- training materials.

Based on the RPL scheme piloted by the IPA 2010 project, the assessor should encourage the candidate to ask questions so that they can clarify all aspects of the assessment process. The assessor should also clearly explain to the candidate that the role of the assessor is to help the candidate produce evidence of their competence. Also, the assessor should:

- be focused and impartial in his/her assessment;
- be cooperative and aware of body language;
- obtain information on the candidates;
- explain that the assessment process is confidential;
- encourage the candidate to ask for clarification.

9 Quality assurance

There is no Quality Assurance model set out for VNFIL/RPL in the current legislation framework. As such, there are no plans for specific processes of accreditation for VNFIL/RPL.

According to Article 3 of DCM No 756, RPL entails:

- the process of RPL accreditation for VET providers
- RPL in the form of a qualification certificate from one of the accredited VET providers

Article 16 of DCM No 756 states that RPL is carried out ‘in accordance with the evaluation and certification procedures that include evaluation and appeal procedures, quality assurance, accreditation for providers of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, appeal procedures, administration, as well as the fees applied to candidates for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and institutions applying for accreditation, as approved by the minister responsible for professional education, according to point 2, article 21, of Law No 15/2017 on Education and Vocational Training in the Republic of Albania’ (the VET Act).

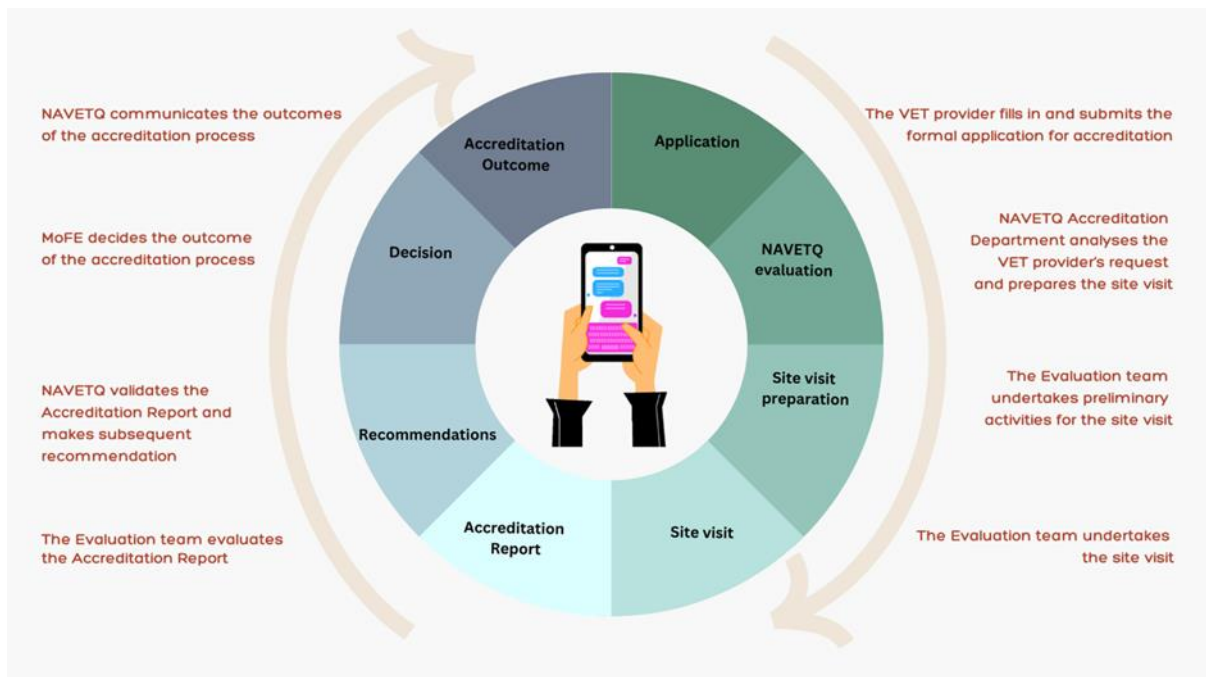
With regard to quality assurance in the country’s VET system, the UNDP-SD4E project (Self-assessment of public VET providers, 2019) developed and piloted a self-assessment instrument in close collaboration with NAVETQ and NAES. It set standards and criteria and laid the groundwork for an accreditation model for VET providers.

The self-assessment and accreditation model for VET providers presented in the graphic below (as specified by MoFE order No 128 dated 6.7.2021 on the standards, criteria, and accreditation procedures of VET providers) includes clear roles and responsibilities for government bodies for the accreditation, standards and criteria and accreditation procedures, as well as a roadmap for the roll-out. This has already been approved by the relevant stakeholders and adopted by NAVETQ.

Both quality assurance processes evaluate the same five quality areas:

- management and organisation,
- relationships and cooperation,
- curriculums put in place,
- teaching and learning,
- assessment, divided into sub-areas, indicators, and criteria (descriptors).

Accreditation model for VET providers



The accreditation model considers the differences in purpose: self-assessment is internal, continuous, less formal, focused on processes and primarily aims to improve; whereas evaluation for accreditation is: external, a one-time event, time-limited, more formal and is focused on results and accountability.

10 Inputs, outputs, and outcomes

No evident developments at this stage.

10.1. Funding

No evident developments at this stage.

10.2. Distribution of costs

No evident developments at this stage.

10.3. Evidence of benefits to individuals

No evident developments at this stage.

10.4. Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

Under DCM No 756, article 7, NAES cooperates with and assists the VET providers accredited for RPL/VNFIL in:

- identifying and orienting potential unemployed jobseeker candidates for RPL/VNFIL;
- making the necessary resources available for RPL/VNFIL to public VET institutions accredited for RPL/VNFIL, according to letter "ç", point 3, of DCM No 554, dated 31.7.2019 on the establishment, organisation and functioning of the National Employment and Skills Agency.

10.4.1. Validation trends

No evident developments at this stage

10.4.2. Validation users

VNFIL is intended to mainly address the target groups of: people who used to work in small family businesses, returning migrants, redundant workers and people who dropped out of formal education. Although Albania is not a final destination country for asylum seekers and mainly a transitory country, there are some pilot initiatives on how to approach recognition of prior learning for this specific target group.¹⁰

10.4.3. Validation and disadvantaged groups

No evident developments at this stage.

¹⁰ Albania's Referencing to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (February 2022). Retrieved from https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2022-05/Consolidated_Referencing_report_Albania_Final_150222%5B1%5D.pdf.

11 Validation methods

So far, RPL/VNFIL has only been brought in as pilot schemes and initiatives from private providers who delivered RPL/VNFIL services prior to the adoption of regulation DCM No 756. Here are some of the schemes as reported by interviewees:

AlbContact bakery school

The prior learning recognition initiative (PLR) was run by AlbContact, a centre licensed by the MoFE as a private VET provider of bakery and pastry skills (non-formal learning). Between 2017 and 2021, about 70 women and men certified their prior learning outcomes by obtaining 'Master' or 'Assistant Master' titles. This initiative came about as there was a sustained need for recognition of skills acquired at work, during emigration, in the community, etc.

The groups that the AlbContact bakery school RPL project targeted were as follows:

- Albanian returned migrants who had worked in the bakery/pastry field abroad (especially in EU countries) and wanted to open a business in their home country.
- Young Albanians who were required to certify their on-the-job learning acquired whilst legally abroad under a regular employment contract.
- Small businesses (bakeries + pastry shops) that had to comply with National Food Authority regulations.
- People who had worked in small family businesses and wanted to certify what they had learned on the job.

AlbContact's management and experts are part of a strong bakery and pastry network and the centre is also known as the German School due to the cooperation with international/German masters courses. It brought in the concept of RPL in Baking (Dough Processing Technology), with two categories: Master and Assistant Master. The main aspects of the RPL process were:

- three stages: evaluation, documentation and certification;
- a real working environment facilitated by a formal, written and notarised cooperation agreement between AlbContact and a bakery business;
- evaluation committee comprising specialists: Master bakers, representatives from bakery businesses, representatives from AlbContact management and representatives from academia/the state Hysen Cela VET school in Durres (technologist and teacher). They were supported by German baking experts from the SES project (German government);
- test included theory and practical parts over four hours, with a maximum of 4-6 persons on one shift;
- process and results of the evaluation properly documented and archived by the organiser/AlbContact Centre.
- the costs included raw materials for the practical part of the evaluation, uniforms, stationary, specialist fees and operational costs, and were covered by individuals or businesses.

The project stopped because DCM No 756 dated 9.12.2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning came into force. It sets the criteria and conditions under which a VET provider can offer RPL/VNFIL. AlbContact Centre continues to receive many requests from its clients for recognition of their prior learning, skills and competencies and is

now awaiting guidelines on the accreditation process of VET providers for RPL from the bodies responsible.

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/albcontact-centre-40bb38206/recent-activity/documents/>

National Chamber of Crafts in Albania

The National Chamber of Crafts was established on 19 December 2017. It is a legal entity under Law No 70/2016 on Crafts in the Republic of Albania and it is non-profit making. Based in Tirana, the National Chamber of Crafts operates throughout Albania.

The law provides for a full, dual-qualification system, based on the German craftsmanship model. The National Chamber of Crafts focuses on craftsmanship itself, professional qualifications in this field, matters around the various crafts and how to promote traditional crafts in Albania.

One of the services that the National Chamber of Crafts in Albania offers its members is the title of 'Master' and 'Assistant Master' in certain occupations.

Source: <https://www.dhgz.org.al/index.php/sq/benefitet/certifikimi>

New Generation – Multifunctional Centre

The New Generation Multifunctional Centre started life as a 'New Generation' Professional College. With DCM No 798, dated 22.7.2009, the first cycle of the BSc s in Beauty and Therapeutic Massage was opened and with DCM No 440, dated 09.6.2010, the Centre opened two two-year programmes: Advanced Beauty and Advanced Hairdressing. All courses are based on the Bologna process and the most up-to-date European experience. Students are awarded credits for their work. Each academic year is worth 60 credits (ECTS) and at least 1500 hours of student work, which opens the way to course transfers. In 2014, this Professional College was transformed into a Multifunctional Centre.

New Generation – Multifunctional Centre is the only VET provider accredited under Albania's pilot accreditation scheme with a view to setting up a national validation system for level 5 qualifications.

Source: <https://www.newgeneration-al.com/sq/>

12 Use of ICT in validation

No evident developments at this stage.

13 The position of validation in society

People know little about VNFIL and how it works, despite the fact that a considerable number of individuals benefited from the RPL models and initiatives prior to the adoption of the latest regulations, and despite the fact that potential candidates are continuously approaching those RPL institutions to receive RPL services.

As such, sharing examples of good experiences and building confidence regarding RPL/VNFIL could help recognise the potential VNFIL has for upskilling and reskilling – it shortens the duration of training, offers better job placements and improves labour market mobility, as shown by VET systems across Europe where VNFIL/RPL is becoming a reality and an integral part of education and training.

14 Recommendations

Although VNFIL in Albania is one of the priority measures in NESS 2023-2030 and there is agreement among all bodies involved in VET that RPL/VNFIL will boost the amount of VET in Albania in the short and long term alongside the upcoming Youth Guarantee schemes, it is not yet operational with work under way to make it so by the first quarter of 2026. Nevertheless, based on the feedback from stakeholders involved in early RPL piloting initiatives (be it under public or private arrangements) when there were still no applicable legal provisions for RPL/VNFIL in place, recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- DCM No 756, Article 1, which stipulates that VNFIL is carried out against officially approved standards, i.e. standards of professional qualifications and assessment standards for professional qualifications at levels 2 to 5 of the AQF (the same levels as the EQF), only covers VNFIL/RPL for VET and not in general education, higher education, the labour market, and the third sector. This situation is not expected to change in the future. The recommendation would therefore be to introduce RPL/VNFIL in these other sectors as well. In addition to 12 state and 833 private non-formal learning providers, there are many learning opportunities (non-formal and informal) offered by enterprises, social partners and youth and adult organisations through local and international internships and voluntary work. Social mobility is severely hindered by the limited scope of RPL/VNFIL process as currently foreseen under the DCM No 756. In particular, the inclusion of VNFIL/RPL procedures in general and higher education, the labour market and the third sector would broaden opportunities for reskilling and upskilling of the active workforce in general, improve mobility in the labour market, increase legal migration and hail the effective return and reintegration of migrant workers, as well as improve the economic outlook of individuals, young people involved in the labour market and the third sector, adult students and NEETs.
- RPL/VNFIL private providers active before DCM No 756 have had to cease their services as Article 9 stipulates that VNFIL can only be assessed by VET providers accredited for RPL/VNFIL by NAVETQ. This effectively prevents a considerable number of individuals from having their learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning recognised. The RPL models used before the adoption of DCM No 756 have contributed substantially to the needs of businesses and individuals and to mobility in the labour market, especially in sectors where there was recognition and certification of the skills and competencies acquired only in the labour market and not in any other learning environment. It would be advisable for the institutions in charge of VNFIL policy to explore the possibility of transitional provisions for the existing VET providers active in the RPL process to continue operating (under monitoring arrangements led by the oversight bodies) until the VNFIL system becomes fully operational and these VET providers are accredited for RPL. In addition, this “transition” process could serve as a repository of the VNFIL/RPL lessons learnt in VNFIL implementation and be used to develop detailed RPL/VNFIL implementation plans and roadmaps.
- Building on the experiences and know-how gained from RPL pilots and initiatives in Albania, closer and stronger collaboration among national key stakeholders including consultation with social partners, charities, volunteering and youth organisations, companies and employers would be beneficial at this initial stage of VNFIL development, in addition to exploring more advanced VNFIL initiatives in other countries to see how to adapt some parts to national (local) contexts. Cooperation between state and public institutions should be a priority at this stage of the VNFIL process, in particular when it comes to evaluating skills and competences in a real working environment, willingness to finance RPL processes, etc. Cooperation and sharing of lessons learnt among state and private RPL providers means they tackle any obstacles and challenges in the short and long term of RPL implementation better. It can also contribute to increasing the interest and confidence of individuals and employers in the benefits of VNFIL, as well as to expanding the scope of VNFIL to other sectors of education, the labour market and the third sector.

- Cooperation on VNFIL between public bodies and stakeholders in Albania and specialised international institutions is important at this stage to learn from the challenges they faced and best practices.
- There are plans to set up a portal for monitoring accredited VET providers and assessment centres. Integrating ICT systems into VNFIL could be a game changer in identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying competences. Expanding ICT-related processes may make it easier to have database repositories of learners and their knowledge and competences. Centralised registries and digital certificate formats can hold a large amount of information, enhancing transparency and providing more information to certificate recipients. Moreover, the use of artificial intelligence might provide an opportunity to better match an individual's skills profile with relevant learning, work, or volunteer opportunities.
- Lastly, the use of EU support such as IPA funds, Erasmus+ funds and TAIEX projects to organise peer learning activities and build VNFIL capacity could be beneficial in building capacity in all bodies working to implement VNFIL and other bodies in Albania interested in being involved.

RPL is becoming a reality and an integral part of many VET sectors across the European Union. This is because learning processes are not as inflexible and unilateral as they used to be in the past, acquiring new formats and new impetus every day. It is important that education and training systems recognise these fundamental changes and accommodate innovative schemes of assessing and certifying people's learning outcomes. This is a demand of modern societies and developed economies. For individuals too, RPL represents a unique opportunity to recognise and certify their what they have learned over their lifetime.

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National Agency for Vocational Training and Qualifications Framework www.akafp.gov.al

National Agency for Employment and Skills <https://www.puna.gov.al/home>

Official Publishing Centre (Albania) <https://qbz.gov.al/>

Interviewees:

Name	Organisation	Position	Yes/No*
Olta Manjani	MoFE	Deputy Minister	Yes
Stavri Lako	MoFE	Head of Sector, Vocational Education, Directorate of Employment and Skills Policies	Yes
Ejvis Gishti	NAVETQ	General Director	Yes
Etleva Gjelij	NAES	Director, VET Management	Yes
Sonila Limaj	UNDP-SD4E Programme	Capacity Development Coordinator	Yes
Eriola Shingjergji	ILO-IPA 2010 Project	Former National Expert (RPL)	Yes

Koli Sinjari	National Handcrafts Chamber Albania	General Secretary	Yes
Edlira Muhedini	RISI Albania	Project Manager	Yes
Edlira Pajuni	AlbContact Centre	Founder and Director	Yes
Ilir Tafa	New Generation – Qendra Multifunkzionale	Founder and General Director	Yes

* Interviewees agree/disagree to their name, organisation and/or position being used in this country report.

16 ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Primary Laws

1. Law No 10247 of 4.3.2010 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework, as amended Law No 23/2018 of 10.5.2018 on the revised Albanian qualifications framework.
2. Law No 15/2017 dated 16/02/2017 on vocational education and training in Republic of Albania.

By-laws in the application of **Law No 15/2017 on Vocational Education in the Republic of Albania**

Decisions of the Council of Ministers

1. DCM No 514, dated 20.9.2017 on the approval of the revised National List of Professions (LKP);
2. DCM No 729, dated 12.12.2018 on the composition, functions, functioning, field of activity, membership criteria and work modalities of the National Council of Vocational Education and Training;
3. DCM No 554, dated 31.7.2019 on the establishment, organisation and functioning of the National Employment and Skills Agency;
4. DCM No 673, dated 16.10.2019 on the organisation and functioning of the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications";
5. DCM no 755 dated 9.12.2021 on the documentation, procedures and criteria for performing state inspections of VET providers
6. DCM No 756 dated 9.12.2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning

By-laws in the application of the **Law No 10247 on the Albanian qualifications framework, as amended**

Decisions of the Council of Ministers

1. DCM No 426, of 26.6.2019 organisation, functioning and criteria selection for the members of sectoral committees and their remuneration
2. DCM No 427, of 26.6.2019 on approval of criteria and procedures for inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications according to the Albanian Qualifications Framework levels for education and professional training
3. DCM No 428, of 26.6.2019 on approval for detailed descriptions of the Albanian qualifications framework levels

Joint orders

Joint Order No 64 dated 30.3.2020, on the establishment and composition of the sectoral committee of information and communication technology

Instructions

1. No 16 dated 8.5.2018, on the development of self-assessment in institutions providing vocational education and training.
2. No 24, dated 30.7.2018 on the procedures for the recognition and unification of learning and professional qualifications at levels 2 to level 5 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework, including those obtained abroad.
3. No 26, dated 30.7.2018 on the national catalogue of professional qualifications.
4. No 28, dated 30.7.2018 on the criteria for participation, organisation and functioning of the Board of Directors of public providers of vocational education and training.
5. No 26, dated 30.7.2018 on the national catalogue of professional qualifications.
6. No 27, dated 30.7.2018 on the formats and curricular procedures of vocational education and training.

7. No 30, dated 21.11.2018, on the conditions and procedures for horizontal and vertical transfer within the VET system.
8. No 15, dated 26.04.2019, on the organisation and development of VET examinations.
9. No 16, dated 26.4.2019 on the types of and procedures for issuing certificates and the models used.
10. No 11, dated 3.3.2020 on the manner of organisation and responsibilities of public providers of vocational education and training (repealed) with instruction No 14
11. No 14, dated 27.5.2021 on the manner of organisation and responsibilities of vocational education and training institutions, as well as aspects of human resource management, composition of the development unit of providers of vocational education and training and continuous professional development of staff
12. No 18 dated 06.07.2021, on some additions and changes to Instruction No 16, dated 8.5.2018, on the development of self-assessment in institutions providing vocational education and training.

Orders

1. No 22 dated 28.1.2020 for changes in the joint order for the establishment of the task force for the development and further implementation of the Albanian Qualifications Framework.
2. No 48 dated 18.2.2020 on the appointment of members of the Corporate Council of Education and Vocational Training
3. No 66, dated 9.3.2020 for a halt to teaching at all public and non-public providers of education and vocational training
4. No 128 dated 6/7/2021, on the standards, criteria and accreditation procedures of providers of vocational education and training

17 ACRONYMS

AHE	Albanian higher education
AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
NAVETQ	National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
NASE	National Agency for Skills and Employment
NCVQ	National catalogue of vocational qualifications
NESS	National employment and skills strategy
NLVQ	National list of vocational qualifications
NLO	National list of occupations
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OD	Osnabrück Declaration
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SD4E	Skills Development for Employment
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning