

INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country report 2023: Türkiye

Disclaimer

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1 Introduction

Türkiye is now in the third phase of developing its qualifications system, the 'Implementation Phase', after completing the 'Preparation Phase (2010-2015)' and the 'Improvement/ Development Phase (2016-2020)' successfully. With the actions from the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF) Action Plan of 2016-2018 largely completed, and the 'infrastructure' of the TQF largely in place, the 'Implementation Phase' of the TQF will focus on putting the framework in place 'on the ground' (TQF Strategy Paper, 2021). The priorities of this phase are: implementing the quality assurance (QA) processes for the qualifications of the Responsible Bodies (Responsible Bodies); populating the TQF with qualifications; developing approaches to Credit Accumulation and Transfer/modularisation; and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)/Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL), among others, thus making the TQF a daily reality and reaching end-user (TQF Strategy Paper, 2021). The implementation of systems for VNFIL has been a priority during this process. The validation system is operated by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), a powerful platform that brings together the state, employees, and employers in the country. The main aim of the system is to equip the labour force with up-to-date qualifications and recognise learning in the workplace. Türkiye has been making an excellent case of validation as an instrument of economic development policies. The VET sector is prioritised since there is a great need for workers to obtain qualifications which recognise their skills and provide evidence of these. Validation is in the initial stage of development in higher education. Continuous Training Centres (SEMs) within the universities started to become Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs)¹, with 5 of them performing as ACBs². Since SEMs are considered as non-formal training institutions, the recognition of the qualifications awarded by the SEMs could be a reference for VNFIL serving as good models for societal recognition. Validation does not yet concern general education or formal school-based secondary VET. It is only applicable for journeyman and master certification.

VNFIL is mostly applied for the learning outcomes leading to vocational qualifications. The VQA plays a functional role in this regard. The learning outcomes of the individuals are subject to assessment based on the national qualifications (NQs) published by the VQA and certified regardless of where and how they have been achieved. Thus, the individuals who acquired the learning outcomes in non-formal and informal learning settings are awarded formal vocational qualifications. VNFIL in Türkiye is currently system-focused as it concerns primarily mandatory certification in hazardous occupations. There is a need to focus more on the individuals and the use which they can make of the qualifications awarded through validation. Moreover, for the first two stages of the process, identification and documentation, there is room for development, specifically considering the potential use of digital tools.

The TQF was designed to allow for recognition of qualifications achieved as a result of the learning in informal and non-formal contexts. Therefore, the TQF supports the VNFIL processes as it helps to clarify the understanding of qualifications and learning outcomes required for the acquisition of qualifications. 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.

There are 274 ACBs as VNFIL providers and 2 412 543 people had validated their knowledge and skills by January 2023. The vast majority of the certificates have been issued in the occupations for which certification is mandatory.

¹ <https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/haberler/36-departman3/3621-atatuerk-ueniversitesi-surekli-eitim-merkezi-myk-tarafndan-snav-ve-belgelendirme-yapmak-uezere-yetkilendirildi>.

² https://portal.myk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_kurulus_ara&view=kurulus_ara.

2 National perspective

2.1. Overarching approach to validation

In 2022, the *Procedures and Principles on Recognition of Prior Learning and Quality Assurance (Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA)* were published³. They use the four phases of validation as a basis for the framework of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) requirements that should apply to all TQF qualifications.

The RPL requirements for the TQF qualifications are set out in the *Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA*. This section provides a summary of the key points of the regulation. The main aim of RPL within the TQF is to ensure that individuals can use all their learning to complete a qualification or qualifications, if necessary, regardless of the type of learning. The results of the RPL assessment can be used in several ways, including:

- awarding a qualification
- permitting direct access to an exam or training leading to the award of a qualification
- exempting from some of the requirements leading to the award of a qualification (e.g. exemption from some programme requirements, award of credits towards the qualification, etc.).

All TQF Responsible Bodies (RB) are in charge of developing and implementing the RPL systems for their TQF qualifications. These bodies include:

- the **Ministry of National Education (MoNE)**, responsible for the following groups of qualifications:
 - diplomas awarded at different grades of school education;
 - qualifications (awards, certificates) awarded at different levels of the apprenticeship system; and
 - awards issued following the completion of technical-vocational courses.
- the **Council of Higher Education (CoHE)**, responsible for education and training qualifications offered by the higher education institutions (HEIs).
- the **Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA)**, responsible for qualifications within the scope of Law number 5544⁴. These include National Qualifications which are based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) and which lead to the award of vocational qualification certificates.
- Other bodies and institutions defined in the relevant legislation for other qualifications.

Each Responsible Body is accountable for integrating the RPL processes into their qualifications. The key requirements for these processes are set out in Article 12 of the *Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA*. They can be grouped into the following three areas:

- a) **Structure of the process:** the RPL process should encompass all 4 phases of the VNFIL process model: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification. The RB should identify where responsibility for each of these phases lies and the processes and types of

³ The procedural basis of VNFIL was shared by the TQF Council for consultation in September 2021; the ensuing recommendations were noted in November 2021; and the procedural basis was accepted by the TQF Council in December 2021. The regulation was accepted on 25 March 2018 by means of Decree No 30371.

⁴ The purpose of the Law is 'to identify the principles of national qualifications in the technical and vocational fields by grounding on national and international vocational standards, to set up the Vocational Qualification Authority by setting up and managing the required national qualifications system in order to handle the activities of supervision, assessment and evaluation and to regulate the provisions regarding the Qualification Framework of Türkiye' (<https://www.myk.gov.tr/TRR/File1.pdf>).

resources required to implement each phase. This includes ensuring that the individuals participating in the process receive appropriate support and guidance at each phase.

- b) **Validation against Learning outcomes:** the RPL process should focus on validation of learning against the Learning outcomes of the RB's qualifications. The RB should define how this learning will be validated. This includes defining the minimum requirements for demonstrating that the Learning outcomes have been met and how the achievement of those outcomes will be certified.
- c) **Quality assurance:** in common with all other aspects of the TQF, RPL must comply with the requirements of the *Regulation on The Quality Assurance of Qualifications to Be Included in The Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF QA Regulation)*. This means that Responsible Bodies should ensure that the processes for assuring the quality of RPL are reflected in their Quality Assurance Paper and that these processes align with the requirements of the *TQF QA Regulation*.

Through VNFIL, the learners are provided with the following opportunities:

- access to a programme;
- access to exams;
- exemptions from other exams or entry conditions;
- certification of units;
- credit accumulation and transfer;
- award of qualification.

The *Regulation on the procedures and principles concerning the implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF Regulation)* describes the duties and responsibilities of several institutions regarding learner mobility and VNFIL. Additionally, this understanding was included in the *Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA* accepted at the end of 2021.

Whereas the primary responsibility for undertaking actions and activities during the 'Improvement/Development Phase' (2016-2020) of the TQF rested with the TQF Department of the VQA and TQF Governance structures, the 'Implementation Phase' will signal a major shift in emphasis and responsibility away from TQF Department and onto the Responsible Bodies to ensure the implementation. The Implementation Phase is crucial for making the TQF fully operational. The Responsible Bodies have a legal responsibility to implement the TQF as regards the qualifications for which they are responsible.

The 'Implementation Phase' will focus on putting the framework in place 'on the ground', including (TQF Strategy Paper, 2021):

- implementing the QA processes for the qualifications of the Responsible Bodies,
- populating the TQF with qualifications,
- developing approaches to Credit Accumulation and Transfer/modularisation,
- RPL/VNFIL.

The main aim of the system is to equip the labour force with up-to-date qualifications and recognise learning in the workplace. Efficient funding mechanisms need to be in place, especially for vulnerable groups. This is a bottleneck for the process. Moreover, as the role of career guidance in the validation process and implementing the career guidance activities before, during and after the validation process improves, more people could be informed and have access to the process. The career guidance and counselling services, such as those offered in education, training, labour market and social services, need to be mobilised to provide information and advice on validation. Better definitions and descriptions of the roles and responsibilities for the validation practitioners must be in place, and training programmes can then be designed accordingly.

2.2. Validation in education and training

The national qualifications framework and QA are built into the legislative arrangements regarding primary education, secondary education, vocational education, and higher education, and where appropriate the RPL is also incorporated. The *TQF Regulation* provides a new inter-agency coordination and operation architecture for the education and qualifications system in Türkiye especially including qualifications, QA and RPL. This new structure shall be operated jointly by the three bodies responsible for qualifications in Türkiye: MoNE, CoHE, and VQA. In line with the decisions taken at the 36th meeting of the TQF Council, *Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA* were finalised and shared with the public. Their purpose is to regulate the policies regarding the RPL and the provision of QA for the qualifications within the scope of the TQF. Although the TQF development policy has focused initially on analysing and accommodating the full range of qualifications that are awarded within the formal system, the structure of the TQF is designed to enable the award of qualifications for the learning achieved in the non-formal and informal contexts too. Such qualifications are likely to be of widely varying 'shapes' and 'sizes', sometimes addressing only some of the learning outcomes in the level descriptors. Accordingly, the template for the qualification type specifications in the TQF has been designed to facilitate the accurate description of qualifications that are significantly different from those awarded in the formal system.

One of the principles of the TQF is to allow for credit rating of qualifications, accumulation and transfer of credits as well as transition among qualifications. The *TQF Regulation* also sets out the duties of the Responsible Bodies in relation to the credit systems: 'ensure that the credit accumulation and transfer systems for their qualifications are in compliance with the credit accumulation and transfer systems at the European level'.

The VET sector is prioritised since there is a great need for workers to obtain qualifications which recognise their skills and provide evidence of these. This is also important for employers to be able to show that they have a qualified workforce. Therefore, MoNE has revised the regulation on VNFIL principles and implementation, specifically regarding the accreditation, assessment and evaluation of VNFIL (MoNE, 2021). The validation takes place against the learning outcomes specified in the curriculum designed according to the NOS and NQs. The process leads to the journeyman and master certification, but it does not concern general education or formal school-based secondary VET. Participants need to be above 22 years of age and graduates of elementary or secondary education. The scale of the implementation of validation services in the education sector is currently not monitored.

In March 2018, the regulation on secondary education was amended to include VNFIL in the system. Under the new regulation on lifelong learning (LLL) (Law No 30388 of April 2018), MoNE sets out the occupations for which learning outcomes can be validated. Non-formal and informal learning is validated according to the assessment procedures for occupational standards.

All these regulations refer to the four stages of validation as defined by the 2012 Council Recommendation. However, the implementation of validation in the education sector is currently not monitored and the scale of the services or their could not be identified.

In the higher education, some universities have arrangements at institutional level, as authorised by their respective senates. The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) is authorised by Law No 2547 to issue a directive on validation. In early 2018, CoHE issued an instruction, based on Article 44b of the Law on Higher Education, that describes the basic principles of VNFIL and entrusts university senates with the responsibility of defining VNFIL arrangements. A framework regulation on practical training was also published by CoHE in 2021. Non-formal and informal learning experience is included within the curriculum as part of formal education. Therefore, work-based learning being credited as part of practical training promotes better awareness and understanding of VNFIL (CoHE, 2021). For example, Sakarya

University has published relevant principles⁵ which include the recognition of (i) knowledge, skills and competencies acquired via experience and interests, through exemption exams, (ii) workplace experience, through exemption exams and portfolios, and (iii) certificates from accredited institutions. Applications and procedures for the recognition of prior learning are made once a year at the time announced in the academic calendar and before the start of the academic year. Continuous Training Centres (SEMs) within universities have started to become Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs)⁶, with five of them acting as ACBs⁷.

Most Turkish universities have published their VNFIL rules. There are currently no statistics at the national level on how many registered students benefit from VNFIL. However, in almost all universities there is a common practice of recognising prior learning for specific courses. VNFIL, which is generally applied as a substitute for a course, is not yet regulated as a qualification that can be used independently such as diplomas and certificates or micro-qualifications. Nevertheless, it can be said that hundreds of thousands of students benefit from course-based recognition. However, there are many limitations to the generally accepted approach to VNFIL.

Presented below is Ege University's rules regarding VNFIL, including its scope and procedures:⁸

Ege University's VNFIL rules apply only for short degrees (associate degree) and first cycle students (bachelor degree).

VNFIL is implemented in four categories.

- Recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired with special interest through exemption exams. The student can apply for exemption exams for the outcomes that have not been certified or documented and which have been gained through his/her own effort. Exemption exams can be conducted in written form or electronically, or by using other assessment methods depending on the nature of the course. The course coordinator decides how the exam is administered. A maximum of 15 ECTS credits or a maximum of 5 courses in total can be recognised.
- Recognition of workplace and internship experience through portfolio preparation. The student must certify that s/he is registered with the Social Security Institution, and submit the knowledge, skills and competencies s/he has gained in his/her application, as well as the work-training periods, with documents approved by the highest authority of the workplace. Every 40 hours of in-service training is counted as 1 ECTS credit, and every 50 hours of competencies gained through practical studies and workplace practices is counted as 1 ECTS credit point. With this practice, a maximum of 6 ECTS credit points can be exempted.
- Recognition of publications. Undergraduate students who are the main author or whose name is in the first place, and who published in SCI - SCI Expanded - SSCI - AHCI indexed journals in the last two years in the field/programme in which they are registered, can apply to have their achievements recognised. With each article being worth 3 ECTS credit points, the exemption can be granted for a maximum of 6 ECTS credit points in this way.
- Recognition of certificates received from accredited institutions or recognised by the relevant boards of the University. Provided that they coincide with the programme outcomes, the achievements of which certificates will be evaluated are determined by the decision of the academic unit's executive board. A maximum of 15 ECTS credits or a maximum of 5 courses in total can be recognised.

The process is as follows:

⁵ Sakarya University, principles on the recognition of prior learning, http://kazanim.sabis.sakarya.edu.tr/Content/Dosya/Onceki_Ogrenmelerin_Taninmasi_Senato_Esaslar.pdf.

⁶ https://portal.myk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_kurulus_ara&view=kurulus_ara.

⁷ https://portal.myk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_kurulus_ara&view=kurulus_ara.

⁸ <https://oidb.ege.edu.tr/>.

1. Applications are received by the relevant academic unit.
2. The VNFIL commission, which consists of at least three faculty members in the relevant academic unit, is established for 3 years.
3. The VNFIL commission evaluates the applications and decides for which courses the process will be applied, taking into account the positive opinion of the relevant course coordinator(s). This decision is announced by the relevant academic unit executive board.
4. Applications for recognition are not accepted for applied courses such as laboratory, workshop, thesis, graduation thesis/project/design and project.
5. Exemption exams for *foreign language* and *computer courses* are outside the credit limit.

The VQA has published a guide on credit accumulation and transfer within the TQF. This guide facilitates the credit accumulation and transfer from non-formal and informal learning across the TQF by using the same principles and structure.

The procedural basis for horizontal and vertical transition and the credit accumulation and transfer of the qualifications that will be prepared in the near future. A draft procedure on the credit transfer systems for all qualifications within the TQF has been prepared and will be submitted to stakeholders for review. This could facilitate the wider use of validation. The VQA's strategy paper has been revised in light of the input from stakeholders at the consultation meeting and will provide a basis to develop the second TQF Action Plan, which will be used as a detailed roadmap to guide the work and activities of the 'Implementation Phase', with VNFIL being a crucial part of it. During the consultation meetings, the importance of RPL/VNFIL was endorsed by the participants, including a suggestion that a more proactive approach was required to ensure that this is implemented by institutions.

2.3. Validation in the labour market

The most important elements of the VQA's VNFIL system are assessment and certification. They are implemented by certification bodies authorised by the VQA. To offer relevant qualifications, these institutions should first satisfy the accreditation requirements, in accordance with TTS EN ISO/IEC 17024 Standard⁹. 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 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 NQs and receive a status of Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs). The ACBs are only authorised to conduct assessment and evaluation, not to provide training. Authorisation for the provision of training is subject to the permission of MoNE in Türkiye.

The ACBs offer individuals, regardless of their educational status or work experience, an opportunity to have their learning outcomes recognised, regardless of how these have been gained. 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 in universities, trade unions or employer associations. The ACBs develop the assessment processes in line with the requirements defined in the NQs. According to the principles set by the VQA, all ACBs are required to take instant video recordings of all the assessments they carry out.

Decisions on the award of qualification to individuals are made by dedicated practitioners who decide on the certification of the qualifications, while the assessors who fulfil the minimum required competences conduct the assessment of the candidates. The assessors are the technical teachers for journeyman certification, and the individuals with qualifications at Level 4 and up can become assessors,

⁹ 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.

and they are required to participate in the training of trainers. Decision-makers include academics, engineers, technical teachers and technicians with at least 3 years of experience in the related field, and they are also required to participate in the training of trainers. Decisions on the awarding of certificates are made by evaluating the evidence produced by the candidates and the assessment results of the assessors. In other words, the decision-makers validate the assessment activities conducted by the assessors.

People who have applied for, participated in or completed certification may appeal against the decisions taken by the ACBs. Moreover, a person or an organisation may make a complaint against an ACB or the activities of an ACB. Therefore, the ACBs are required to have procedures for the acceptance, evaluation and resolution of appeals and complaints.

Following the decisions of the ACBs on the awarding of certification for successful candidates, the VQA prepares and issues the VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates to the successful candidates. As of January 2023, the number of VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates issued exceeded 2 412 543. VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates are recognised and represent credible qualifications in the national labour market. The accreditation of the ACBs according to the ISO 17024 Standard and the QA system applied by both the ACBs and the VQA improve international trust in the VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates. If an individual fails to pass all the units of the qualification, a Certificate of Unit Achievement is awarded to the individual for the units which he/she passed. In this way, the candidates can accumulate units and apply for the award of a full qualification once they have passed all the units.

The TQF constitutes a basis for the recognition, equivalence, progression, and horizontal and vertical transfer of units between different levels and qualification types. In this regard, guidelines will be completed in 2023 to identify the principles and procedures for horizontal and vertical transfer between qualifications in the TQF. With the initiation of the TQF implementation process, the equivalency of VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates with other qualification types will be clarified, and the processes for the use of VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates in access, exemption, credit accumulation and transfer procedures regarding the education programmes and assessments for the qualifications under the responsibility of other bodies or institutions will be identified. Progression and transfer between VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates and opportunities for vertical transfer are also defined in the relevant NQ. There are also various legislative arrangements for regulating the requirements of qualifications awarded by the VQA.

As the existing validation system established by VQA is geared towards assessment and certification, the first two stages – identification and documentation – require further development.

The first two stages of the VNFIL process, identification and documentation, need to be further improved in the Turkish context. The development of career guidance interventions in VNFIL could support the identification and documentation processes. There is room for development of digital tools for VNFIL for all four stages (see section 12). The main aim of the system is to equip the labour force with up-to-date qualifications and recognise learning in the workplace.

2.4. Validation in the third sector

Further research is needed to establish if validation is used in the third sector. There could be examples of validation to support youth work and other non-formal learning opportunities offered by third sector organisations. If validation is used in the third sector, it could easily be included in the TQF.

3 Links to the national qualifications framework (NQF)

The TQF has been designed as a single integrated structure for the classification of qualifications in Türkiye, to accommodate all quality-assured qualifications achieved through all education and training programmes, including primary, secondary and higher education, as well as those achieved through experience-based learning and through individual learning that takes place at the work place or other non-formal and informal learning environments. The establishment of the TQF increases the quality of the education system and strengthens the relationship between employment and education, which are the priority needs of Türkiye. With the TQF, a consistent and common quality assurance base has been developed and legalised. The qualifications in the TQF, via the external and internal evaluations, increase the quality of the process. *Promoting the relevance of learning for employment and to meet society's wider needs is also an underpinning part of the TQF's philosophy. The development of a common language for describing the learning outcomes independently of context (i.e. the Learning Outcomes Approach) is key to the understanding, classification and comparison of learning achieved in different contexts. It is also central to achieving improved understanding by the employers, advisers and learners, of the value and relevance of learning (TQF Strategy Paper, 2021).*

The TQF is the key instrument to support the implementation of a range of policies and strategies for education and training in the country, and is mentioned in the key documents, such as the 10th and 11th Development Plans, the Strategy for LLL, the National Employment Strategy, as well as the Strategic Plans of MoNE, VQA, CoHE, and the Higher Education Quality Council. The TQF has a strong infrastructure in place consisting of the regulations, policies, and procedures, including: the Qualification Type Specifications of the Responsible Bodies, the QA requirements of the TQF and the QA Papers of the Responsible Bodies.

Comprehensive legislation and guidance for the TQF is in place, including amongst others:

- Law on VQA
- TQF Regulation
- Working Principles and Procedures of the TQF Council
- Regulation on the Quality Assurance of Qualifications to be included in the TQF
- The Principles and Procedures for the Inclusion of Qualifications into the TQF
- Procedures and Principles for the Identification of the Existing Qualification Types, Determining New Qualification Types and Updating and Cancellation of Qualification Types
- Principles and Procedures for Appeals Against Decisions Relating to the TQF
- Procedures and Principles for Use of TQF Logo
- Procedures and Principles for Updating, Modification and Cancellation of the Qualifications in the TQF
- TQF Communication Strategy

The 'Implementation Phase' will make the vision and perceived benefits of the TQF a reality for Turkish society, the Responsible Bodies, learning providers, employers, learners and workers alike.

According to the TQF Strategy Paper *'Drawing on the key documents of the TQF as well as other related and complementary strategies and documents, the broad philosophy underpinning the TQF could be described as fundamentally about valuing learning. Valuing learning of all individuals, both in terms of recognising the intrinsic value of their learning, wherever and however it takes place, is a central part of*

the philosophy of the TQF. By allocating learning a level within the TQF and where possible a credit value, learning can be given real currency and recognition’.

‘The infrastructure of the TQF, including level descriptors and qualification type specifications, provides a transparent and equitable means for comparison of different types and programmes of learning and therefore enables fairer recognition of learning achieved. It supports mobility between different types and sectors of learning, as well as a fairer valuation and better understanding by the employers of different types of learning and qualifications.’

According to the TQF Regulation, the TQF must ensure that qualifications are designed based on learning outcomes to make qualifications transparent and comparable. VQA national vocational qualifications are developed from occupational standards. Higher Education qualifications are based on learning outcomes and precise outcome statements as defined by the CoHE. However, they could also be defined as learning outcomes.

A TQF register was established in 2020. It has been developed to present, nationally and internationally, comprehensive information regarding qualifications (diplomas, certificates, vocational qualification documents, etc.). The qualifications have not been placed at the appropriate levels of the TQF; therefore, if a qualification is featured in the register, it does not mean that it has been included in the TQF. The qualifications included in the TQF are defined with a special expression. A filter in the search function of the website allows users to find those qualifications. It is anticipated that this will continue to be the procedure in the near future. As of December 2022, 728 VQA qualifications, 931 MoNE qualifications, 28 791 CoHE qualifications and 51 qualifications of other Responsible Bodies (30 427 qualifications in total) were registered in the database. The database prioritises quality assurance mechanisms and criteria; therefore, the process is slower than anticipated.

The qualifications provided through validation are part of the national qualifications system. A full formal qualification may be awarded at the end of a validation procedure. VQA qualifications have a unit-based structure; candidates may acquire the units separately and accumulate them. MoNE awards the same qualifications through education and training and through validation. The validation system is an integral part of the TQF. All qualifications awarded through validation will be included in the TQF. The VET programmes and curricula are being revised and redesigned considering the occupational standards developed by the VQA. 412 occupational standards have been linked to the VET curricula. All education and training programmes and curricula need to be (re)designed based on learning outcomes, so that they align with the national standards and qualifications and are included in the TQF. The three main institutions responsible for the development of qualifications are MoNE, the CoHE and the VQA. They define the qualifications based on learning outcomes and each institution carries out this process based on its regulations. In MoNE, 412 national occupational standards have been aligned with the programmes, including 47 areas and 107 branches. Formal and non-formal VET programmes are modular. This may lead to partial or unit qualifications in the future. The TQF structure allows for the inclusion of qualifications that have been achieved through credit accumulation: for example, ‘unit’ qualifications are included in the range of qualification types. The qualification standards in the TQF include credit value, which will facilitate the development of credit systems by the bodies responsible for the awarding of qualifications. Currently, Türkiye has an operational system for credit accumulation and transfer only in higher education, but MoNE is working on capacity building aligned with current EU principles on lifelong learning. Moreover, the National Agency for European Affairs arranges events to encourage improved awareness and preparations for a policy paper on ECVET to support the validation of learning outcomes of individuals and to support LLL.

The establishment of a credit accumulation and transfer system within the scope of the TQF is included in Article 16, point 9 f of the TQF Regulation, which states the following as one of the duties of the TQF Board: ‘Preparing the procedures and principles regarding the horizontal and vertical transfer between the qualifications to be included in the Turkish Qualifications Framework and credit accumulation and transfer’.

Only when qualifications are placed within the framework can the benefits of TQF begin to be realised. The more qualifications are brought into the framework, the greater is the credibility of the framework

and those qualifications, and the greater is the incentive for other qualifications to be brought into the framework. Faster progress in including more qualifications into the TQF could thus create a virtuous circle leading to further progress and more tangible benefits.¹⁰.

Box 1 Implementation of Turkish Qualifications System and Framework Operation (TUYEP)

The TUYEP Operation, which was designed as a continuation of UYEP-I (Strengthening Vocational Qualifications Authority and National Qualifications System in Türkiye) and UYEP-II (Strengthening National Vocational Qualifications System and Implementing the Turkish Qualifications Framework) Operations within the scope of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (HRD OP), has received a 48-months direct grant (Direct Grant for Certification-II), 36-months service (technical assistance) and 18-months grant scheme (VOC-Test Centres-III Grant Scheme) components. The operation aims to deliver 75 000 VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates to individuals within the scope of the direct grant component, provide activities on capacity building for VQA and its stakeholders on QA, implementation, and management of the TQF, provide capacity building for VQA Portal and awareness raising, and establish 23 authorised certification bodies within the scope of the VOC-Test Centres-III Grant Scheme. The service contract was initiated on 25 November 2019. The evaluation of the project proposals under the grant component has been finalised and 23 contracts were signed. The project implementation began on 1 November 2020 (www.tuyep.org).

Source:

<http://www.ikg.gov.tr/turkiye-yeterlilikler-sisteminin-ve-cercevesinin-uygulanmasi-operasyonu-tuyep/>

¹⁰ TQF (Turkish Qualifications Framework), Strategy Paper, Ankara, VQA, 2021.

4 Standards and reference points

The VQA is responsible for developing qualifications under the National Vocational Qualifications System. Qualifications under the mandate of the VQA are based on NOS and learning outcomes. NOS are technical documents that define the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes required to practice an occupation successfully. They are defined by the VQA based on labour market needs. Occupational standards describe the worker's profile as demanded by the sector and include the learning outcomes that the worker should have. Also present in the standards are:

- legislation on health, safety, and environmental protection in the professional field;
- work setting and conditions in which the occupation is practiced;
- tools, materials, and equipment used in the practice of the occupation;
- technical requirements.

National vocational qualification standards are based on occupational standards and are the basis for study programmes. The qualification standards include the NQF Level (the level of the qualification is defined by the RB and TQF Committee approves it), credit value and typical duration of the programme, learning outcomes, awarding body, assessment methods, and progression paths. The VQA uses these qualification standards for validation. Employer organisations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been active in developing occupational standards (898 occupational standards as of December 2022). Furthermore, 631 national vocational qualification standards have been developed.

For validation, MoNE uses the same learning outcomes as those defined for the formal education system. The VET programmes and curricula are being revised and redesigned considering the occupational standards developed by the VQA. So far, 412 occupational standards have been linked to the VET curricula.

The education and training standards in the non-formal learning programmes run by MoNE are being aligned with the TQF and occupational standards so that the validation systems have the same reference points.

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

The stakeholder institutions develop national standards and qualifications, and administer the assessment, evaluation and certification processes. The VQA coordinates labour market validation activities between the ministries and the stakeholder institutions, employees and employers.

Sustainability of the 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 the occupation, employer and trade unions, professional organisations and the VQA.

The VQA Sector Committees have the following duties:

- Make suggestions on the preparation, updating and improvement of the occupational standards and qualifications as well as the timing of updates.
- Submit opinions on new occupational standards and qualification formats and their updates.
- Review the draft occupational standards and draft qualifications in terms of format and content, make evaluations and develop opinions to submit to the Executive Board.
- Refer the deficient draft occupational standards and qualifications to the relevant department to be amended, review the amended drafts once more, make evaluations and develop opinions.
- If necessary: audit the site where the occupation is practiced to develop an opinion on the draft occupational standard and draft qualification.

The private sector is at the centre of the VQA's validation system.

The DG VET and, to a limited extent, DG LLL are the main departments in MoNE for the validation arrangements. According to a recent reorganisation at MoNE, Vocational Education Centres that administer validation are being transferred from DG LLL to DG VET.

Some universities have validation arrangements at institutional level, authorised by their respective senates. Sakarya University, Yıldız Technical University and Bartın University are the HEIs that have established the basic VNFIL principles and have guidelines in place for both students and administrators.

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, the Responsible Bodies are encouraged to ensure that the TQF is featured more prominently within their strategic planning documents.

6 VNFIL service providers

The VQA is the main body of development and coordination of the VNFIL services. The service providers are the ACBs and institutions under MoNE. Higher education institutions (see section 2.2) have some VNFIL practices. There are 274 ACB providers. The ACBs have recruited professionals who inform and guide the individuals through the validation process for VQA qualifications. These are quality management representatives, assessors/decision-makers/internal verifiers and certification managers. There are also several committees for appeals and complaints, objectivity, and programmes. The VQA monitors the qualifications of all these professionals and the VQA experts provide support through face-to-face communication, e-mail and the VQA web portal.

The assessors at the vocational training centres under MoNE's remit are VET teachers who administer assessment in their own fields and have had no prior training on validation. Under MoNE, VET is prioritised. The curricula of VET in secondary and higher education will be aligned with the occupational standards in a year's time. Moreover, in LLL institutions, the programmes will be aligned with the curricula in VET in modules to enable the transfers among the programmes.

7 Information and guidance

7.1. Information, outreach, and promotion

The TQF Communication Strategy (TQF, 2018) defines and provides for communication activities to promote and develop awareness of the TQF among the stakeholders and the public. It includes the roles and responsibilities of the parties, and supports the activities of the stakeholders in their participation in the process. The strategy was accepted, approved and published on 29 November 2018 by the TQF Council.

Online meetings have been organised in different cities to promote and develop awareness on the TQF and some of these meetings concerned VNFIL. There was an international conference on TQF as a national and international medium to disseminate, share and learn about the developments in the Turkish case and to hear about the international examples. VNFIL was one of the thematic seminars of the conference.

Moreover, in media and television, information was provided on the examinations, the certification and the certification obligations.

7.2. Advice and guidance¹¹

The 2012 Council Recommendation pays particular attention to the role of guidance and counselling in taking forward the validation (Cedefop, 2015). It underlines the importance of providing impartial and comprehensive information, guidance, and counselling throughout the entire validation process. However, in the Turkish case, there is still room for development in this respect¹². Since the first two stages of the validation process (identification and documentation) have not been fully implemented in Türkiye, information, advice, and guidance services (IAG) are focused on the opportunities for validation, the benefits of validation and the assessment and outcomes of the validation procedures. IAG is provided free of charge to validation candidates for VQA qualifications through the VQA web portal, the e-State (e-government) online tool, the 'ALO 170'¹³ telephone line, the helpdesk established in VQA and face-to-face briefings by the ACBs. IAG is also provided to employers and providers before, during and after validation. The Job and Employment counsellors employed by the Turkish Public Employment Service – İŞKUR - in previous years received training on the validation processes and have been actively involved in IAG activities for job seekers. In MoNE, a short briefing is provided to the candidate on the validation process when they apply. Moreover, the information on the websites provided in section 12 could also be considered valuable for the advice and guidance process.

¹¹ Lifelong/career guidance includes 'a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.' Guidance is in fact an umbrella that encompasses counselling as well as activities such as informing, coaching, teaching, assessment and advocacy (See, The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2014). Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: Glossary, <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no.-2-llg-glossary/> and Council of the European Union, (2008). Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf).

¹²Akkök, F (2022). The role of career guidance in the VNFIL. Panel on the Turkish Qualifications Framework: Engagement with the Labour Market, Turkish Qualifications Framework International Conference, İstanbul: 26-27 October 2022.

¹³ The telephone line of the Communication Centre of the Ministry of Labour and Social Services.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1. Profile of validation practitioners

According to the TQF Department and the SWOT analysis in the TQF Communications Strategy, there is still a lack of expertise and experience in Türkiye generally as well as within the Responsible Bodies and stakeholders, regarding the TQF. This was also identified within the TQF referencing report as one of the challenges. As the Learning Outcomes Approach is increasingly in place across the sectors of education and training covered by the Responsible Bodies, it would be useful to try to map the existing expertise and experience in order to develop a pool of experts who could contribute to the dissemination of relevant expertise during the 'Implementation Phase' of the TQF.

The ACBs have recruited professionals who inform and guide candidates through the validation process for VQA qualifications. These are quality management representatives, assessors/decision-makers/internal verifiers and certification managers. There are also several committees for appeals and complaints, objectivity, and programmes. The VQA monitors the qualifications of all these professionals and the VQA experts provide them with support through face-to-face communication, e-mail and the VQA web portal. Since the validation arrangements of MoNE and VQA are focused on the assessment of Learning outcomes, the role of assessors is very important. The assessors' profiles are defined in the qualification standards. The assessors for the technical fields are mostly teachers at VET schools and engineers. For the other fields, the assessors are experienced professionals, e.g. an experienced hotel manager in the tourism field. There are also guidance practitioners/counsellors working in the education and labour market sectors. In schools and İŞKUR (Turkish PES, called job and employment counsellors) there are guidance professionals, however, they have no responsibilities or intervention in relation to VNFIL. The assessors at the vocational training centres under MoNE's remit are VET teachers, who administer assessment in their own fields and have had no prior training on validation. There are no requirements, by regulation, to deploy guidance practitioners in the context of VNFIL provision.

Since the most extensive arrangements on VNFIL are carried out by the VQA at the national level, it is foreseen that the General Directorate of LLL of MoNE, as the other major authority in this field, will work in close cooperation with the VQA in terms of the transparency and accountability of the VNFIL processes. Also, in terms of the development and update of the VNFIL policy at national level, it is intended that the approaches to VNFIL of the HEIs and the CoHE will be in parallel to the other two institutions.

8.2. Qualification requirements

Specific requirements exist for all professionals who take part in the validation arrangements for the VQA qualifications. Certification managers and quality management representatives of the ACBs should undertake the training provided by the VQA focusing on the VQA processes and validation. The assessors/decision-makers/internal verifiers should undertake the assessment training on competence-based assessment. These training courses are a prerequisite for being employed by the ACBs. The ACB programme committee members should meet the mandatory requirements for assessors, as specified in the qualification standards and accessible on the webpages of the VQA and ACBs¹⁴. The programme committees are responsible for the preparations of the assessment process. The mandatory requirements for other practitioners are defined in various VQA guidelines¹⁵. The assessors are the technical teachers for journeyman certification, and the individuals with Level 4 or higher qualifications can become assessors. They are required to participate in the training of trainers. Decision-makers are the academics, engineers, technical teachers, and technicians with at least 3 years of experience in the related field and they need to participate in the training of trainers. They assess the process and the

¹⁴ <https://portal.myk.gov.tr/>.

¹⁵ <https://portal.myk.gov.tr/>.

decision-makers award the certification based on the assessment. For VNFIL under MoNE's remit, VET teachers at vocational training centres can administer validation in their field of expertise. The requirements are defined by the assessment criteria of each national qualification¹⁶.

8.3. Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The VQA has developed a mandatory training programme for assessors in which 6 697 people have been trained so far, of which 3 997 were trained on assessment and certification and 2 700 on assessment and evaluation. The participants cannot work as assessors unless they pass the course. The ACB managers provide additional 1 or 2-day courses to assessors on the national qualification system, national standards and qualifications. The assessors are observed and supervised during the assessment. For VNFIL under MoNE's remit, training on the role of counsellors in the validation process was piloted under the LLL projects, but no further regulatory measures incorporating such training into the practice/regulations/guidelines for VNFIL under MoNE are in place.

Moreover, the VQA experts/staff and the related stakeholders are involved in many capacity-building training courses.

The VNFIL providers are required to participate in seminars organised by the VQA in order to become ACBs. Two participants from ACBs have to complete the seminar before completing their application, namely one person responsible for quality management, and another person responsible for VQA activities.

There is no continuous training/professional development on VNFIL processes for assessors and counsellors.

¹⁶ VQA Regulation on assessment, measurement, evaluation and certification, <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/File/GeneratePdf?mevzuatNo=21180&mevzuatTur=KurumVeKurulusYonetmeligi&mevzuatTertip=5>.

9 Quality assurance

Valuing learning of all individuals, both in terms of recognising the intrinsic value of their learning, wherever and however it takes place, is a central part of the TQF's philosophy. By allocating learning a level within the TQF and where possible a credit value, learning can be given real currency and recognition. Assuring and improving the quality of education and training programmes is an important factor in valuing learning, and QA is therefore at the heart of arrangements for the TQF. (TQF, Strategy paper).

QA is one of the building blocks of the TQF. For this reason, a set of provisions, that all Responsible Bodies will comply with, are determined in the TQF Regulation. It also makes clear that the Responsible Bodies should establish and operate QA systems in compliance with the principles below:

- identifying clear and measurable objectives and learning outcomes for qualifications,
- planning the processes for internal and external QA,
- developing practical guidelines including the involvement of stakeholders,
- allocating appropriate resources,
- defining methods for self-assessment and external evaluation,
- developing feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement,
- organising accessible evaluation results.

The TQF QA Regulation (adopted in 2018) sets out the parameters and requirements for the QA of all qualifications to be included in the Framework.

The Procedures and Principles for Maintaining Quality Assurance of Qualifications Included in the Turkish Qualifications Framework and the TQF Quality Assurance System are designed in line with the principles below:

1. The qualification form is prepared and approved.
2. A valid and reliable assessment process is carried out.
3. Certification processes are conducted in a transparent and impartial way.
4. The processes related to the qualifications are subject to self-assessment and external evaluation.
5. Units, teams or bodies conducting the external evaluation are subject to regular review.
6. Improvement activities are carried out in the light of the findings arising from self-assessment and external evaluation.
7. The involvement of stakeholders is maintained in the processes related to the qualifications.
8. The processes related to the qualifications are implemented based on explicit and measurable objectives, criteria and guidelines.
9. The allocation of sufficient and appropriate resources for all processes is maintained.
10. Feedback mechanisms are established and implemented.
11. Electronic accessibility to the outcomes of all processes is maintained.

The level descriptors of the TQF and the Qualification Type Specifications of the Responsible Bodies provide reference points for RPL/VNFIL and for credit accumulation and transfer. Learning outcomes and QA are closely linked. Also, a guidebook on the QA of the TQF has been prepared by the stakeholders and publicised. (Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu, (<https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/haberler/102-tuerkiye-yeterlilik-cercevesi-dairesi-bakanl/3917-tyc-kalite-guevence-el-kitab-yaymland>)). The legislation indicates that the TQF will only include the qualifications that are quality-assured.

Box 2 Key Principles of TQF in terms of QA

A key principle of the TQF is that all TQF qualifications include provisions for RPL. Following the publication of the Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA (2022), all Responsible Bodies within the TQF are required to develop and implement RPL processes that align with these principles and procedures. These processes should ensure that all qualifications provided by the Responsible Bodies integrate RPL in a way that supports access, progression and completion whilst ensuring QA for the qualification.

Article 11 of the Procedures and Principles on RPL and QA highlights the importance of ensuring that RPL is integrated into the QA arrangements for the RB's qualifications. All Responsible Bodies are required to produce a QA Paper that defines the QA arrangements for their qualifications. As part of this paper, the Responsible Bodies must develop 5 QA guidelines. Each of the guidelines must have a direct link with RPL and the RB may have to revise the guidelines to ensure that they reflect those links.

For ensuring the QA, MoNE is responsible for the education and training qualifications under its remit, the CoHE and HEIs are responsible for higher education qualifications, and the VQA is responsible for vocational qualifications in the scope of the Law on VQA No 5544 (for example, Mechanised excavation operator, Level 4, Steam boiler operator, Level 4). QA in other qualifications will be ensured by the Responsible Bodies specified in the corresponding legislation.

The VQA has a quality-assured audit process for the ACBs, and the specific quality criteria for authorising assessment and certification bodies are based on ISO EN 17024 - Accreditation, the VQA Quality Assurance Criteria and Legislative Regulations. The audits can be scheduled or ad hoc. There were 1543 scheduled and 743 ad hoc audits by December 2022. In case the ACBs offer vocational training, they are required to separate training activities from their assessment system. All assessment activities are video-recorded and stored. Successful candidates are awarded the formal Vocational Qualification Certificates. The VQA has developed draft certification criteria and the process of internal verification has started. A guide for this process was published in August 2018 and is available on the VQA web portal.

Moreover, ACBs should first satisfy the accreditation requirements of the TTS EN ISO/IEC 17024 Standard¹⁷. 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 NQs and receive the status of Authorised Certification Body (ACB). The ACBs are only authorised to conduct assessment and evaluation, not to provide training.

The ACBs develop the assessment processes in line with the requirements defined in the NQs. According to the principles set by the VQA, all ACBs are required to take instant video-recordings of all the assessments they carry out. Decisions on the awarding of certificates to individuals are made by those who decide on the certification of the qualifications, while assessors with the minimum required competences conduct the assessment of the candidates. Assessors include journeyman technical teachers, and individuals with Level 4 qualification and up can become assessors, and they are required

¹⁷ 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.

to participate in the training of trainers. Decision-makers are the academics, engineers, technical teachers, and technicians with at least 3 years of experience in the related field, and they are also required to participate in the training of trainers. The assessors assess the process and the decision-makers make the decision on certification based on the assessment. Decisions on the awarding of certificates are made by evaluating the evidence produced by the candidates and the assessment results of the assessors. In other words, the decision-makers validate the assessment activities conducted by the assessors.

People who have applied for, participated in or completed certification may appeal against the decisions taken by the ACBs. Moreover, a person or an organisation may make a complaint against an ACB or the activities of an ACB. Therefore, the ACBs are required to have procedures for the acceptance, evaluation and resolution of appeals and complaints.

There are some aspects, which are regarded as specific for Türkiye, in the design of QA systems within the education and qualifications system. For example, education at all levels is planned, organised and executed in a centralised way and the vertical hierarchy is a distinctive characteristic of the education system. Therefore, it is very important to ensure the effective functioning of the organisational structures and the vertical and horizontal relations within the hierarchy in order to achieve the outcomes of the system successfully.

The qualifications under the responsibility of MoNE and higher education qualifications mostly focus on academic knowledge and key competences, while the qualifications under the responsibility of the VQA focus more on the skills required for employment. Thus, the QA systems operated by different Responsible Bodies have different procedures by nature.

MoNE has been finalising the QA arrangements and has developed a QA system in VET which includes a self-evaluation, as well as internal and external evaluations. It aims to monitor and develop the quality of the educational processes and programmes. The guidance and audit criteria of the system are in accordance with the European System of Quality Assurance (EQAVET) and the EFQM model.

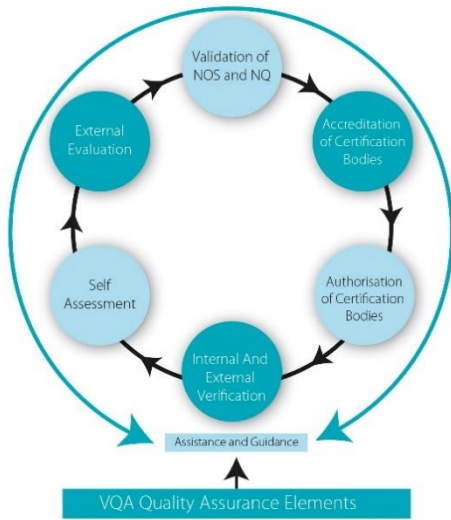
The VQA has adopted the principles for the activities implemented in NVQS in order to offer vocational qualifications within a quality-assured system, and has been implementing certain QA elements in various processes in order to attain the targets for quality.

In operating and improving the QA elements, the principles and criteria set in the EU recommendations including the EQF, EQAVET, and former ECVET are taken into consideration.

The elements of the QA model implemented within the scope of NVQS are:

- development and validation of the NOS and NQs,
- accreditation of certification bodies,
- authorisation of certification bodies to carry out assessment and certification activities,
- internal and external verification,
- self-assessment of ACBs,
- external evaluation of ACBs.

Figure 9.1. Elements of the Quality Assurance Model



10. Inputs, outputs and outcomes

10.1. Funding

Funding arrangements involve the state, individuals, and the organisation/institution. In some cases, it is the employers, and in others, the candidates who cover the expenses for validation. Support from the state funds and the EU funds is available. A direct grant for validation, supported by EU funds, is available for the assessment and certification of all qualifications provided by the VQA; as of 30 June 2018, 32 040 people had made use of this fund, for a total amount of TRY 18 million¹⁸. There are no sustainable mechanisms or funds for VNFIL for host communities and migrants. There is room for development in this regard.

10.2. Distribution of costs

10.2.1 Costs for ACBs

The ACBs have several costs such as for the establishment of the centre, the accreditation fee paid to TURKAK, the authorisation fee paid to the VQA, the audit fee paid to both TURKAK and the VQA, staff costs, facility costs, etc. The fees related to the exam and certification activities that lead to the VQA Vocational Qualification Certificates vary depending on the occupation and are determined by the ACBs in line with the free market approach. The VQA monitors the costs and fees via the visits and audits. The application fee for authorisation ranges from TRY 5 000 to TRY 7 000 (approx. EUR 230 to EUR 330) and the audit fee (per person/day) is TRY 2 100 (approx. EUR 100). Table 10.1 shows the additional annual fees that ACBs pay to the VQA depending on the number of certificates awarded.

Table 10.1 Annual fee paid by the ACBs to the VQA depending on the number of certificates issued

Number of qualification certificates	Annual fee (TRY)	Annual fee (approx. in EUR) ¹⁹
0–500	10 400	485
501–1 000	15 600	727
1 001–2 000	23 400	1 091
2 001–3 000	31 200	1 455
3 001–4 000	39 000	1 818
4 001–5 000	46 800	2 182
5 001–6 000	54 600	2 545
6 001–7 000	62 400	2 909
7 001–8 000	70 200	3 273
8 001–9 000	78 000	3 636
9 001–10 000	85 800	4 000
10 001 and above	95.000	4 429

Source: VQA (2022)

10.2.2 Costs for individuals

The assessment fees for vocational qualification certificates range from TRY 850 to TRY 7 000 (approx. EUR 40 to EUR 330); the average is around TRY 2 000 (approx. EUR 100). The fees are determined by the ACBs depending on the complexity of the qualification and assessment cost. The fees are monitored by the VQA. The assessment fees can be increased twice a year at inflation rate. The certification fee for all levels is TRY 250 (approx. EUR 10) in 2022 and 2023.

¹⁸ 18 million Turkish lira (TRY) is approx. EUR 840 000, the EUR/TRY exchange rate was 21.45 as of 05.2023.

¹⁹ Based on the EUR/TRY exchange rate of 05.2023, i.e. 21.45.

For non-nationals who want to have their vocational qualification certificates recognised/validated, if they apply from Türkiye, the fee is TRY 2 000 (approx. EUR 100), and if they apply from abroad, it is EUR 130 or USD 150, and financial support is available from the EU grant programmes for everyone.

10.3. Evidence of benefits to individuals

There are several articles published in the magazines of the occupational bodies, employers' associations and social stakeholders about the benefits of validation to individuals, employers and the economy broadly. These articles indicate that the most important validation benefit is that qualifications are trusted by employers. Since stakeholders such as the employers' associations are involved in the VQA validation processes, they trust the quality of these qualifications more than others. People who have worked without a formal qualification for years have the opportunity to receive a formal qualification to certify the learning outcomes they already have without further training. The VQA awards are becoming well-known in all sectors of the economy and are perceived as an opportunity by individuals and employers.

A study conducted among higher education students that the awareness of learners on the recognition of learning acquired outside formal institutions is almost non-existent. In the higher education system, as the legislative measures are set, this could create a window of opportunity for learners/students (Aydemir, 2019).

10.4. Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

10.4.1. Validation trends

There is an increasing demand for validation services in the 204 qualifications that concern dangerous and hazardous occupations. By January 2023, 2 412 543 people were awarded such qualifications through VNFIL. On average, 28 000 people per month are awarded these qualifications through validation. The construction sector, as one of the pioneer sectors of the economy, has the greatest demand for validation, since many employees in this sector lack formal qualifications and the occupations in this sector are considered hazardous. Most of the validation cases in the past 2 years were in the construction sector, with almost 240 000 awards. Other popular sectors include transport, logistics and communication, with nearly 140 000 awards. Woodworking, paper and paper products follow with around 116 000 awards.

There are no available statistics indicating the use of validation services in the education sector.

10.4.2. Validation users

Among the 2 412 543 individuals who obtained VQA certificates through validation between 2016 and 2022:

- 94 % were male;
- 5.4 % were between 15 and 20 years of age; 61.8 % were between 21 and 40 years of age; 32.8 % were over 40 years old;
- 83 % were already employed when they applied for validation;

The educational status of validation users is provided in Table 10.2 below.

Table 10.2 Education level of validation users

Level of education	Number of individuals	Share of total
Literate	306 004	12.7 %
Illiterate	22 401	0.93 %

Graduates of junior high school	670 589	27.8 %
Graduates of secondary school	533 645	22.13 %
Graduates of VET high school	133 757	5.55 %
Graduates of high school	582 243	24.15 %
Graduates of vocational high school	64 389	2.67 %
Graduates of university	93 723	3.89 %
Master degree	4 302	0.17 %
Doctoral degree	168	0.007 %

10.4.3. Validation and disadvantaged groups

The ACBs provide opportunities for low-skilled individuals to validate their skills and upgrade their competences. The ACBs also provide information about training to support their skills development so that they can have better success rates in the assessment process.

Specific support is available for people who are illiterate or visually impaired. These people are tested individually and the questions are read for them. For people with hearing impairment, certified sign language translators 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. Female participation in validation is only 6 %. This can be explained by the fact that most of the validation candidates are workers in hazardous occupations, where a VQA qualification is required by law. Women are underrepresented in these occupations.

Several ACBs already conduct assessment and certification for migrants. The VQA has plans and allocated resources for further capacity building among ACBs, specifically related to the assessment and certification process for migrants (most of them are Syrians, but there are individuals from China and other countries). In cooperation with national and international organisations, the VQA is translating validation documents and item banks into Arabic to serve the target group. The ACBs have stressed the higher validation costs as additional funds are needed for interpreting as well as translating foreign language original documents and strongly emphasised that sustainable financial resources are required to maintain the validation activities for this target group. At present, the costs are paid by the projects, employers and the VQA. Moreover, Varol (2022) investigates the active labour market policies (ALMPs) delivered or supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Türkiye. The ILO purchases services from the certified accreditation bodies (certified by the VQA) to facilitate access to certification and covers all the expenses. It is indicated that, 12 years after the Syrian refugees' arrival, there is still no structured information on the skills profiles of the refugees, resulting in a deepening skills mismatch and underemployment, considering the very large number of Syrian refugees (around 3.35 million²⁰) in the country.

Box 3. Labour Market Integration of Syrians and the host community: International support

The VQA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to work together to facilitate the labour market integration of Syrians via VNFIL and to obtain further translation support for the NOS and qualifications. Moreover, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) is implementing an EU project entitled 'Living and Working Together', with the VQA as the main partner, which aims for the certification of

²⁰ https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw9pGjBhB-EiwAa5jl3E1pwuRhZy7aimkxD-qVstQ7o6DMbH8A9PGNntUvG01bMGn29tyq6hoCKg4QAvD_Bw.

15 000 Syrians and host community members via VNFIL for better labour market integration. Among all those certified, 30 % are Syrians and 22.9 % of the certified Syrians are employed.

Moreover, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a 5-day training programme entitled 'Career Guidance and Labour Market Integration/Adaptation Training for Migrants'. The main objective of this training programme was to empower job and employment counsellors and municipal staff working in the Migrant Service/Community Centres to provide effective and efficient support to migrants with different statuses. VNFIL was an important segment of the programme to encourage them to use this opportunity. Moreover, the Pre-employment Support Programme for Syrians and Host Communities under Temporary Protection in December 2022 had the VNFIL process for participants as an outcome.

ILO, within the scope of its Refugee Response Programme, supported the VNFIL for the refugees through VQA exams and certification processes to facilitate their labour market integration as part of the consecutive projects organised since 2015. Considering the skills shortage among the refugee population, vocational training interventions were placed before the VNFIL process in their labour market integration. As a part of a work-based learning (WBL) programme, the jobseekers are placed into jobs at private sector enterprises to receive both on-the-job and off-the-job vocational training. Following their participation in WBL, either MoNE or the VQA validates their learning outcomes. Since 2018, ILO's Refugee Response Programme has organised various activation programmes, mainly focused on skills development, in the provinces most populated by refugees. In most cases, the training courses were complemented by ensuring access to the VQA examinations, especially in hazardous or very hazardous occupations. Moreover, acknowledging the language barrier, in the VQA exam process for refugees who have difficulty understanding Turkish, pre-examination and post-examination information was provided. This included the scope, method and calendar of examination, exam results, and posting certificates to all examinees in Turkish and Arabic. In addition, the exam questionnaires were translated from Turkish to Arabic, and consecutive translation (Turkish-Arabic-Turkish) for each Syrian examinee was provided during the theoretical and practical examinations so that the refugee examinees could have equal opportunity for a successful completion of the exams. Over 5 000 refugees and over 2 000 vulnerable host community members have benefitted from these skills development interventions. Around 400 refugees and 150 host community members were referred to VQA examinations. The success rate is around 35 %.

11 Validation methods

Since the VQA validation system is based on the actual demonstration of the Learning outcomes rather than documented evidence, the first two stages – identification and documentation – have been implemented poorly. Every candidate should take the theoretical (multiple choice, structured oral interviews, open-ended questions) and practical exams regardless of their previous experience and career.

Several methods are used at the assessment stage, such as case studies, structured interviews, practical demonstrations, simulations, role-plays and presentations. The assessment methods are determined in detail in each qualification standard. In MoNE, based on the assessment criteria prepared for each occupation, the individuals are assessed by means of observation techniques.

12 Use of ICT in validation

The VQA web portal (<https://portal.myk.gov.tr/>) contains information for users on the NOS and qualifications, the ACBs and vocational qualification documents. Moreover, information on the statistics and cost of the process are also provided. Users can register on the portal for more specific information.

Moreover, the VQA has an official web page (<https://www.myk.gov.tr/>) with information on the sector committees, TQF, NQs, NOS, projects, etc.

Furthermore, the Europass website also has information about VNFIL in Türkiye (<https://europa.eu/europass/tr/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>).

MoNE's non-formal education website (<https://e-yaygin.meb.gov.tr/login.aspx>) provides information on the non-formal education/training programmes which offer free courses in many areas to support LLL and employment for all citizens. Those attending the courses can also apply for the VNFIL process.

13 The position of validation in society

The VQA awards are becoming well-known in various sectors of the economy and are preferred by individuals and employers. In particular, the VET sector is prioritised in the process. The demand for validation processes in the labour market has been created by the mandatory certification requirement²¹, in hazardous occupations although the numbers of certificates issued in occupations without such requirement are growing. Therefore, there is still a need for better promotion, information and awareness-raising to inform the learners about the process and how it could be accessible for them, especially among vulnerable groups.

Considering the legislative developments and regulatory measures taken, the qualifications that are quality-assured and integrated in the TQF and the Turkish Qualifications database set the stage for VNFIL and facilitate its implementation. The database includes VQA, CoHE and MoNE qualifications, which are described as learning outcomes with corresponding credit values. The conditions for accessing the qualifications and the vertical and horizontal progression paths are well defined. All these facilitate the process of validation.

The Regulation that made VQA qualifications mandatory for (currently) 204 occupations has given a boost to validation in Türkiye. 2 412 543 people have validated their knowledge and skills and most of these were workers in hazardous occupations without formal qualifications (2 021 568 people). The involvement of stakeholders such as employer organisations in validation through the ACBs creates visibility and trust in the VQA qualifications and the validation process. People who have worked without a formal qualification for years therefore have the opportunity to receive a formal qualification and certify their learning outcomes.

A challenge for the coming years will be to make the validation accessible to other groups such as women, migrants, unemployed people and to operationalise the validation service in education and higher education sectors. Steps in this direction are being taken, both by the VQA and the ACBs and through the new validation arrangements under MoNE.

²¹Ceylan, A (2022), Opening Speech. Turkish Qualifications Framework International Conference, İstanbul: 26-27 October 2022.

14 Recommendations

- The operationalisation of VNFIL in the education sector (general education, VET, higher education, LLL) seems underdeveloped and more efforts are recommended and needed on this issue.
- Efficient funding mechanisms need to be in place, especially for vulnerable groups and for individuals whose participation in validation is not funded by employers under mandatory certification.
- The first two stages of the VNFIL process need to be improved for more tailored services.
- Learners need to be better informed on VNFIL and how they could make use of it for upskilling and reskilling for better employability. More efforts are needed in conducting awareness-raising programmes and activities.
- There is still room for development in the understanding of the role of career guidance in the validation process and in implementing career guidance activities before, during and after the validation process. Career guidance and counselling services, such as those offered in education, training, labour market and social services, need to be mobilised to provide information and advice on validation.
- Existing career guidance and counselling service networks must be improved to address all potential target groups for validation.
- Guidance services should provide information on the costs and benefits of validation.
- Better definitions and descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of validation practitioners have to be in place, and training programmes (in particular continuous training) can then be designed accordingly.
- The number of qualified VQA experts and validation practitioners must be increased.
- Micro-credentials and individual learning accounts have great importance for the future and could make significant contributions for the LLL and VNFIL of learners.
- VNFIL is of crucial importance for a qualified workforce, in terms of efficiency and to reduce accidents. This needs to be better and more frequently communicated to stakeholders and the public.
- It is vital to work together to achieve a well-developed system of validation and effective implementation. This needs to be embraced not just by the Responsible Bodies, but by their stakeholders and ultimately by society as a whole, including learners, employers, trade unions, professional organisations, etc. This will require a concerted effort on the part of not only the Responsible Bodies but also other key stakeholders who have significant roles in implementing the TQF.
- The partners that provide the qualifications need to be encouraged to develop and implement QA systems. The programmes need to be aligned with the NOS and NQs.
- In MoNE, it is the DG VET that has the main responsibility for RPL/VNFIL, whereas the DG LLL could be more engaged in the process since VNFIL is a tool for LLL.
- All the vocational training courses conducted by MoNE, CoHE, İŞKUR, etc. need to be designed and provided in alignment with the NOS and NQs; moreover, the assessment and certification of those courses should be aligned with the procedures set out in the VQA legislation.

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Sources – interviewees:

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Gizem Karslı	ILO	Employment and Education Officer
Dr. Yelda Devlet	IOM	
Melis Kılavuz	IOM	

16 ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policies
ACB	Authorised Certification Bodies
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
HAK-İŞ	Trade Union Confederation
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
İŞKUR	Turkish Public Employment Service
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NQ	National Qualification
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
QF-EHEA	Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education area
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SEM	Continuous Training Centres
SuTP	Syrians under Temporary Protection Regime
TQF	Turkish Qualifications Framework

TQD	Turkish Qualifications Database
TOBB	Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges
TURKAK	Turkish Accreditation Agency
TUYEP	Implementation of Turkish Qualifications System and Framework Operation
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
VET	Vocational and Technical Education
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority
WBL	Work-based Learning