European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update

Final synthesis report for Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro

Acknowledgements

Contents

1   Introduction

The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (hereinafter, Council Recommendation on validation) was adopted in 2012 to redirect people's employment prospects and careers at a time when Europe's economies were still recovering from the 2008 recession, a period characterised by rises in unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

The Council Recommendation on validation required Member States to establish, by 2018, validation arrangements allowing individuals to identify, document, assess and certify their competences as to obtain a qualification. validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is intended to take a pivotal role in increasing employability and mobility (across sectors, occupations and geographies), as well as motivation for lifelong learning, especially concerning socio-economically disadvantaged individuals and those with low qualification levels. Thereby, it is expected to contribute to economic competitiveness, economic growth and social cohesion.

The European Inventory provides an overview of validation practices at national level in 39 European countries[1] in form of individual country reports. This Synthesis Report[2] forms part of the 2018 update to the European Inventory on VNFIL (hereinafter, the 2018 Inventory). It is based on an analysis of three countries, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, which are candidates or potential candidates for EU accession.

The synthesis is based on an analysis of the data collected through a 'country fiche', which was completed by country experts alongside the country reports. The fiche mapped the situation in each country according to standardised indicators. Data was collected in these different areas:

■   The country situation as a whole;

■   The Education and training area:

    –   General education;
    –   Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET);
    –   Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET);
    –   Adult Education;
    –   Higher Education;

■   The labour market area; and

■   The third sector area.

By labour market, we refer here to initiatives in which private sector institutions play a central role (alone or in collaboration with public sector institutions.). These initiatives might be promoted, for example, by employers or employers' associations. In the third sector, validation initiatives might involve youth work or volunteering in relation to validation, or might be validation arrangements developed by third sector organisations such as charities or NGOs, to support a variety of target groups (e.g. third country nationals, the unemployed, young people facing exclusion, people with a disability, etc.). They might or might not be connected to formal education activities. In this sense, there might be some overlap between the areas, but in general, it was possible to differentiate between the three broad areas of education and training, labour market and third sector area.

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[1] EU-28, EEA EFTA countries, Switzerland, Turkey and ETF countries (Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia).

[2] The contents of this synthesis report – as those of country reports and fiches - cannot necessarily be taken to reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission, Cedefop, the EQF AG Members or the members of the external quality assurance panel. Neither the European Commission nor any person/organisation acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of any information contained in this report.

2 National approaches to validation (policies, strategies and priorities)

2.1 Validation arrangements and approaches

The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation asks Member States to have in place, no later than 2018, validation arrangements (such as a legal framework, strategy and/or policy) that allow individuals to validate their skills and competences or obtain a (part) qualification through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. While Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro are not Member States and so are not directly implementing the Recommendation, their validation systems, as with their broader education and training reforms, look to European instruments and examples. This section looks at the extent to which their developing VNFIL systems are compatible with the Council Recommendation.

Education and training area

Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro were reported to have validation arrangements in place in at least some parts (or subsectors) of the education and training area(see table below). All countries were reported to have arrangements in place in IVET and adult education, and two out of the three countries were reported to have arrangements in place in higher education and CVET. However, only North Macedonia has validation arrangements in place in general education. Two out of the three countries were reported to have arrangements in place with regards to the labour market, but none in relation to the third sector.

Table 2.1   Validation arrangements in place, by broad area

Country	Education and training					Labour market	Third sector
	General education	IVET	CVET	Higher education	Adult education		
North Macedonia	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Kosovo	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Montenegro	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Source: European Inventory (2018)

North Macedonia is reported to have adopted VNFIL legislation in accordance with the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), but arrangements in the education and training area are still in development and not fully functional as yet. Additional legislation remains to be adopted and tools and systems (e.g. in quality assurance), still need to be implemented to allow the award of certificates as a result of validation. VNFIL has been integrated into broader national strategies for education and qualification system reform. North Macedonia is reported to have prioritised validation in initial education (it is the only out of the three countries that has arrangements in place in both general education and IVET).

In Kosovo, the National Qualifications Framework is reported to serve as the basis for validation. One of the main objectives of the law is to improve assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning. Based on this law, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology developed secondary legislation "Administrative Instruction No. 31/2014 on the Recognition of Prior Learning" which complies with the European Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning issued by Cedefop. This legislation defines general principles, responsibilities and procedures to

be applied to the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) including formal, non-formal and informal learning, within the scope of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Kosovo. According to the key regulatory framework, validation practices can be implemented only for learning outcomes-based qualifications/modules (partial qualifications) approved and registered in the NQF and only by the institutions accredited by appropriate regulatory bodies. The main policy and legal framework is in place and the secondary legislation is being developed. Implementation is expected to commence in 2019. Kosovo is reported to have prioritized the VET sector, in particular CVET to support individuals' entry to, or progress in, the labour market, given current high unemployment rates, e.g. 30.5 % in 2017, and has continued with the development of further specific subsector policies and bylaws.

In Montenegro, it is reported that legislation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is compatible with the 2012 EU Recommendation – arrangements are in place in all subsectors except general education -, but implementation is partial, and necessary secondary legislation has yet to be introduced. VNFIL is mainly offered in vocational education and training. While the conceptual foundation of the modern Montenegrin education system is lifelong learning, the degree of individualisation of learning processes is still limited and the predominant focus is largely formal education. Many characteristics of the Montenegrin educational system provide a solid foundation for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, including the modular and flexible nature of Montenegrin VET qualifications, redefinition of higher education qualifications, and an approach based on learning outcomes.

Labour market area

In North Macedonia, it is reported that the Employment Service Agency (ESA) implements measures defined in the document "Operational plan for active programmes and measures for employment and services on the labour market". The measures are funded from the Agency's budget, with some activities financially supported by IPA (EU Instrument for pre-access) funds. ESA counsellors develop an "Individual plan for employment" for registered unemployed adults around the country. These practices could be used in validation.

A successful example of implementation of validation arrangements in the private sector is the "Build-up skills" project (Build-up skills report, 2016; http://buildupskills.mk). The project is presented in Box 1.

Box 1. "Build-up skills"

The Republic of Macedonia participated in the EU-wide project "Build-up skills", aimed at enhancing energy efficiency in construction. The development of relevant skills for energy efficiency practices in the sector is a priority, which is addressed through a combination of validation and additional training on specific elements. The project was financed from Horizon 2020, and was carried out between July 2014 and March 2016.

The project consortium included six partners including a chamber of commerce, a governmental institution, two higher education institutions and two non-governmental organisations. Applicant-workers had an opportunity to be enrolled in programmes for five occupations in the field of energy efficiency construction. They had the opportunity for their knowledge and skills to be validated, or/and to participate in relevant training to acquire the skills they lacking to achieve certification. A methodology for validation of prior learning was developed in the project, consisting of a portfolio, interview, theoretical test and practical exam. A public call for validation of prior learning was announced in the beginning of the project, followed by 55 validation sessions. The project registered high participation, as 967 workers were certified through the process of recognition of energy efficiency skills.

Kosovo, it is reported, does not have validation arrangements in place in the labour market. However, in Kosovo, existing national policies in VET include validation of prior learning for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the NQF. Enterprises and other organisations, upon the adoption of the secondary legislation by the Minister of Education, will be able to apply for accreditation to assess validation candidates in order to award NVQs.

The Employment Agency of Montenegro is reported to be implementing measures and activities to support unemployed people in returning to the labour market. The Agency emphasises the importance of lifelong learning and seeks to increase the share of unemployed people involved in education programmes leading to national vocational qualifications and acquiring key skills. Although the majority of these activities are part of the regular services offered by the Agency and are not formally linked to national validation systems or tools, some activities include identification and documentation stages found in VNFIL systems.

Third sector area

None of the countries has validation arrangements in the third sector area.

2.1.1   Validation outputs and outcomes

Looking at the outputs and outcomes in terms of certification and labour market results that can be achieved as a result of validation of non-formal and informal learning (see the table below), the award of modules, award of credits, and access to the labour market are the most common outputs/ outcomes across the three countries covered by this report.

The award of a full, or part of a, formal qualification is widespread. However, this is not possible in CVET in Kosovo and Montenegro.

It is reported that the award of other non-formal qualification/ certificates is possible in all countries, but only in some sub-sectors. Award of credits, award of modules, and exemptions from part of a course are possible in all sub-sectors (where arrangements exist) in Kosovo. This is true in North Macedonia except that exemptions are not l possible in any sub-sector. In Montenegro, it is reported that award of modules is possible in IVET, higher education and adult education, and award of credits is only possible in higher education. Exemptions from part of a course reportedly do not feature at all in Montenegro.

Access to formal programmes can be achieved through validation only in North Macedonia (general education) and Kosovo (higher education).

A training specification, it is reported, is a validation outcome only possible in North Macedonia, and for IVET and adult education.

It is reported in Montenegro that access to the labour market is a possible validation outcome in all education sub-sectors where arrangements are in place. In particular, in CVET validation is predominantly used for acquiring and/or renewing a work license, improving employability and promotion at work. It is reported that access to the labour market is also possible in all sub-sectors in North Macedonia (where arrangements exist). In Kosovo, it is reported that this is only possible in CVET and adult education.

Table 2.2 Outputs and outcomes (formal education and labour market) of validation of non-formal and informal learning, by country and sector

	Award of full formal qualification	Award of part of a formal qualification	Award of other non-formal qualification/ certificate	Award of credits	Award of modules	Exemptions from part of course	Access to formal programmes	Training specification	Access to the labour market
North Macedonia									
General education	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
IVET	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
CVET	*No validation arrangements*								
Higher education									
Adult education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Kosovo									
General education	*No validation arrangements*								
IVET	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
CVET			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Higher education	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Adult education			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Montenegro									
General education	*No validation arrangements*								
IVET	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓
CVET									✓
Higher education		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Adult education	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓

Source: European Inventory (2018)

2.1.2   Validation uptake and information on users of validation

No specific arrangements that involve validation targeted to migrants and refugees were reported for any of the countries covered in this report. In relation to validation targeted to target groups covered by the Upskilling pathway, there are no specific arrangements in place in North Macedonia, systematic arrangements are in development in Kosovo and in Montenegro arrangements are in place, but they are not systematic.

In North Macedonia it is reported that the groups that were reported to use validation initiatives to a greater extent (in general education, IVET and adult education) include low-skilled individuals, low-qualified, adult learners, and jobseekers / unemployed or individuals at risk of unemployment. Older workers are also a target in adult education and early school leavers are a target in general

education and IVET. In North Macedonia, a significant proportion of the general population belongs to various disadvantaged groups, including long-term unemployed individuals and those at risk of unemployment. Increased efforts are needed to improve their participation in lifelong learning and their access to the labour market. In this context, measures linked to Upskilling Pathways Recommendation are also needed, and in line with it, the establishment of skill audits. Prioritization of target groups for validation depends on two factors: the needs of the labour market for qualified workers in certain sectors, and the general effort of the authorities to support unemployed people (especially with lower qualifications and skills) to access the labour market.

In Montenegro, in regard to validation in the labour market, the target groups are persons with lower skills levels, or holding qualifications not in demand on the labour market, long-term unemployed persons, and other social benefits users.

There is no data about the number of individuals starting validation procedures/ applying for validation in the education and training area for North Macedonia and Kosovo, but in Montenegro in CVET it is reported there has been an increase in numbers. In the labour market in Montenegro, the number of individuals applying has remained the same.

3 Developing and implementing validation

3.1 Basic features: the four stages of validation

In Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro it is reported that all four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) are covered in the education sub-sectors where validation arrangements are in place, except in the case of general education in North Macedonia, and IVET and higher education in Montenegro where only assessment and certification are covered. In Montenegro, the identification and documentation stages of validation are not fully implemented. Instead, these elements are substituted by administrative procedures specifying which relevant documents need to be gathered to allow applicants to be assessed. In North Macedonia, draft legislation foresees that validation providers need to deliver all four stages of VNFIL, and therefore, to be accredited they will need to meet the criteria for implementation of all stages.

In the labour market, all four stages are covered in North Macedonia. Only identification and documentation are covered in Montenegro.

3.2 Stakeholder involvement in validation

3.2.1 Stakeholder involvement and functions

Education and training area

In the education and training area, in all three countries it is reported that governmental organisations have a role in coordination (within and between sectors) and design of quality assurance mechanisms. In North Macedonia and Kosovo they also design national strategies for validation, and set up standards. In North Macedonia, for example, it is reported that the Ministry will have overall policy responsibility for VNFIL and for overall management of its implementation. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo is responsible for the development of the legal framework for the entire education and training area. However, when it comes to policy formulation and implementation in different educational subsectors responsibility is shared among different bodies. In Montenegro, the Ministry of Education is responsible for overall coordination, monitoring and quality assurance of the validation process. The Ministry coordinates the development of legislation and the creation of national policies and strategies in validation, in

cooperation with key partners: the relevant ministries, trade unions, employer associations, the non-governmental sector and other important national stakeholders.

In North Macedonia and Kosovo, it is reported that the design of national strategies for validation is also carried out by education and training providers, as is setting up standards. Education and training providers are particularly important in North Macedonia as they also have responsibility for identification and documentation, assessment, and certification. Also, in Montenegro, the 2016 revised version of the Law on Vocational Qualifications transfers responsibilities for assessment and award of vocational qualifications to licensed education providers. Interested candidates apply to the licensed education providers with a request to organise an assessment as part of the validation process. The provider then forms a commission consisting of assessors licensed by Ministry of Education. Licensed education providers also issue certificates.

It is reported that the PES has a key role in North Macedonia, covering all functions related to validation, but in Kosovo, the role of PES is limited to design of national strategies for validation and setting up standards. In Montenegro, the role of PES is fairly broad and covers coordination, provision of information, advice and guidance, design of quality assurance mechanisms, and identification and documentation.

It is reported that national organisations are relatively prominent in all three countries. In Montenegro, they carry out assessment and certification functions. The VET Centre is a national agency responsible for developing and strengthening the vocational and adult education system. In the context of VNFIL, the Centre is responsible for the NQF level 1-5 qualifications development in VET (formal education and vocational qualifications that may be obtained through the validation process). In addition to this, the centre is responsible for strengthening and expanding the adult education providers' network, as well as for the validation related guidance and counselling. Also, the Centre for Adult Education in North Macedonia will provide technical and capacity-building support to the development and implementation of the VNFIL system.

Employer organisations and trade unions are relatively central in Montenegro (coordination between sectors, provision of IAG, and design of quality assurance mechanisms), but not so for the other two countries, it is reported. Sectoral commissions in Montenegro are professional bodies set up on partnership principles and comprise representatives from employers, trade unions, universities, relevant ministries and institutions involved in education policy making.

In Kosovo, it is reported that social partners such as chambers of commerce were involved in the process of policy development for validation arrangements. However, involving employers in implementation and assessment is particular is challenging. Potentially, employers could be involved as external assessors in the assessment panel or they could allow the use of their premises for practical assessment of the intended learning outcomes.

Labour market area

Regarding the labour market, in North Macedonia it is reported that governmental organisations have a role in coordination within and between sectors, design of national strategies for validation, design of quality assurance mechanisms and setting up standards. In Montenegro, governmental organisations are limited to assessment and certification functions.

In North Macedonia, it is reported that education and training providers cover the same functions as governmental organisations but with the addition of provision of IAG, identification and documentation, assessment and certification. Again, in Montenegro, education and training providers only cover assessment and certification functions.

PES also have a strong role in most functions for both countries, it is reported. For example, in Montenegro, the key organisation for the labour market is the PES, which has a role in coordination within and between sectors, provision of information, advice and guidance, and identification and documentation. In the same way as for the education and training area, in

Montenegro, national organisations (i.e. the VET Centre) play a role in assessment and certification. Chambers of commerce are important in North Macedonia; they have a role in coordination, design of national strategies for validation, and design of quality assurance mechanisms.

3.3   Funding

Education and training area

In the education sub-sectors, it is reported that the main sources of funding are national public funding and individuals. These are sources for validation in all countries and all sub-sectors where validation arrangements are in place.

Funding from private organisations is also common in all countries and all sub-sectors where validation arrangements are in place, it is reported, except for Montenegro where it is not a source for IVET and adult education.

European public funding does not feature at all in Kosovo it is reported, but does in North Macedonia (all relevant sub-sectors) and Montenegro (higher education and adult education).

It is reported that regional and local public funding is only evident in North Macedonia, and in the IVET and adult education sectors.

Labour market area

In the labour market, the sources of funding are European and national public funding. This is the case for both North Macedonia and Montenegro. But private sources also feature in North Macedonia.

3.4   Information, advice and guidance

Education and training area

There is provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) to candidates across all three countries and all education sub-sectors where validation arrangements are in place.

It is interesting to note that in Kosovo IAG provision is reported to be a requirement. This is the case for IAG about process (all sub-sectors), assessment (IVET, higher education, and adult education) and outcomes and benefits (CVET, higher education and adult education).

In North Macedonia and Montenegro it is reported that IAG provision is not a requirement. Provision of IAG covers mainly process (although not in higher education in Montenegro), but also outcomes and benefits (in the case of all sub-sectors in Montenegro and general education and IVET in North Macedonia). IAG about assessment is also provided in Montenegro in IVET, CVET and adult education.

In North Macedonia, legislation and planned implementation arrangements envisage setting up offices and other contact points where initial information and guidance will be provided for the potential candidates. It also focuses attention on quality training, guidance and counselling for validation practitioners, which will be provided by Centre for Adult Education (CAE). Currently, the priority is to raise awareness about validation among the institutions that will be involved in and responsible for validation in the future.

Labour market area

It is reported that there is also IAG provision in the labour market in North Macedonia and Montenegro. In both places the IAG is about the process, but only in Montenegro it is a requirement. In Montenegro there is also IAG about assessment, which is not a requirement.

3.5 Links with national qualifications systems and frameworks

Education and training area

As the table below sets out, it is reported that there is a strong link between validation and NQFs in all three countries. It is possible to acquire any qualification on the NQF in North Macedonia and Kosovo (except in adult education) through validation, but it is not possible in Montenegro, where the award of some qualifications on the NQF through validation is nevertheless possible. It is also possible to acquire modules or partial qualifications on the NQF in North Macedonia and Montenegro, but in Kosovo this is only possible in the adult education sector. In Kosovo, it is most common (all sub-sectors) to be able to acquire credits on the NQF. This is also the case in all the subsectors in which validation arrangements are in place in North Macedonia, but in Montenegro it is only possible in the higher education sector. In Montenegro, it is possible to access formal education covered on the NQF (IVET and adult education). This is not at all possible in Kosovo and is only possible in general education in North Macedonia.

Table 3.1 Links between validation in the education and training area and the national qualifications framework (NQF)

	Acquire any qualification on the NQF	Acquire some qualifications on the NQF	Acquire modules or partial qualifications on the NQF	Acquire credits on the NQF	Access formal education covered on the NQF	Link with NQF is under discussion	No discussions on a link
North Macedonia							
General education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
IVET	✓		✓	✓		✓	
CVET	*No validation arrangements*						
Higher education							
Adult education	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Kosovo							
General education	*No validation arrangements*						
IVET	✓			✓			
CVET	✓			✓			
Higher education	✓			✓			
Adult education		✓	✓	✓			
Montenegro							
General education	*No validation arrangements*						
IVET		✓	✓		✓		
CVET							✓
Higher education		✓	✓	✓			
Adult education		✓	✓		✓		

In North Macedonia, it is reported that validation arrangements are linked to the Macedonian Qualifications Framework (MQF), which is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Law on MQF defines the standards for qualifications and occupations, the process of establishment and mandate of sectoral commissions, development of a national register of qualifications and administering the register of qualifications. It establishes the right to validation of prior learning, with Article 3 stating that one of the principles of the MQF is building a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Among other goals, the Law on the establishment of the MQF stipulates that the MQF aims to "indicate the transfer and progression (horizontally and vertically) through and within all types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal)."

In Kosovo, it is reported that validation arrangements are linked to the Kosovo Qualifications Framework (KQF) and only qualifications approved and registered in the KQF can be awarded via validation of prior learning. Learning outcomes are the reference point for validation, facilitating the acquisition of partial or full qualifications through validation of prior learning.

In Montenegro, it is reported that validation arrangements are linked to the NQF. Laws on the Montenegrin Qualification Framework (MQF) and vocational education and training (VET) provide the legal framework for the country's VNFIL system. The MQF is based on credit value of qualifications; defined learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence); credit transfer; progression from one qualification to another; recognition and valuation of knowledge acquired in a non-formal and informal manner; cooperation of all stakeholders and transparency of procedures; and quality assurance in the process of qualification development and attainment.

Labour market area

In the labour market, in North Macedonia it is reported that validation initiatives are not linked to the formal education and training area.

In Montenegro, validation in the labour market can result in a training specification, mapping what training needs to be completed in order to achieve a (full) qualification in an education sub-sector. Validation can also lead to recommendations for future study options.

3.5.2   Standards and certificates

For all countries and education sub-sectors, where standards (e.g. occupational or educational) are used for validation of non-formal and informal learning (no standards for validation of non-formal and informal learning are used in CVET and higher education in Montenegro), it is reported that these are exactly the same as those used in the formal education system. This is also true in the labour market. Also, generally, there is no differentiation between certificates to know if they have been obtained through validation or not. There is only some difference in IVET (North Macedonia), higher education (Kosovo), and CVET (Montenegro).

3.6   Quality assurance

It is reported that there are national/ regional quality assurance frameworks (QAFs) specific to validation in North Macedonia. The roadmap and guidance note on VNFIL foresees procedures and measures for quality assurance. The MoES together with other institutions such as the CAE and the State Educational Inspectorate (SEI) will have overall responsibility for VNFIL quality assurance through accreditation, and monitoring and inspection of the system. In Addition, MoES will have overall responsibility for the accreditation of validation providers.

By contrast, the QAF's that apply to validation in Kosovo are existing national/ regional general ones. Validation can be implemented only by institutions accredited by regulatory bodies such as

the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) or Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). To be authorised to administer validation, institutions need to meet specific criteria such as designated validation practitioners, internal quality assurance mechanisms, field-specific equipment etc.

In Montenegro, it is reported that there are no compulsory national/ regional QAFs in IVET and CVET but there are quality codes or guidelines in place. In adult education, existing national/ regional general QAFs apply to validation and have to be followed, and in higher education, there are no QAFs; QA is devolved to the awarding body or institution.

The main reported strengths of the QA system for validation in North Macedonia are that it is consistently applied across institutions, there is support for providers to implement the system, and it covers all phases of validation. Support for providers to implement the system and QA covering all phases of validation are also strengths in Kosovo. In addition, QA being highly customised for validation is also a strength in Kosovo. Being consistently applied across institutions is a strength in IVET only. The strengths are a little different in Montenegro where professionals involved in validation knowing the system well is a strength in IVET and CVET, and QA being flexible and easy to change according to need is relevant to higher education. Similarly to North Macedonia and Kosovo, QA covering all phases of validation is a strength (adult education and IVET) as is being highly customised for validation (CVET).

3.7   Practitioner professional competences

Education and training area

In all three countries it is reported that there are mandatory requirements in terms of qualifications, experience or training on practitioners involved in validation.

In North Macedonia, it is reported that this involves both IAG practitioners and validation assessors having validation-specific qualifications (IVET and adult education) and relevant professional training. However, only non-specific qualifications are needed in general education. For IVET and adult education requirements involve having a minimum number of years of relevant experience.

Qualification requirements for validation practitioners have been predefined in the guiding documents on validation, especially the Handbook on VNFIL Assessment, which specifies the competences needed for counsellors and assessors. The document describes in detail the generic, communication and technical competences the counsellors should have, as well as personal attitudes and attributes. It likewise describes specific competences required by counsellors in every step in the process of identification and documentation. It will be mandatory for practitioners-counsellors to undertake relevant training on counselling in validation, provided by CAE, while the practitioners-assessors will be obliged to undertake relevant training on assessment in validation provided also by CAE.

In Kosovo, it is reported that requirements are that IAG practitioners and validation assessors should posses certain non-specific qualifications and relevant professional training. However, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has supported by a project on 'support to VET Reform in Kosovo', and has developed a Level 5 qualification for career guidance counsellors. The qualification contains a specific module with 20 hours on validation of non-formal and informal learning. This will enable career guidance counsellors in secondary education (schools, school counselling services, school career centres), higher education (usually in university career centres) and public and private employment services, municipality career centres and companies in future to provide information and guidance to candidates for validation practices in Kosovo.

In Montenegro, it is reported that requirements only apply to assessors, and involve non-specific qualifications (CVET, higher education, adult education) and minimum years of relevant

experience (CVET, adult education). However, validation-specific qualifications are sometimes required in adult education.

There is reportedly some entitlement to training for staff involved in the provision of IAG or assessment for validation. In North Macedonia (general education and adult education), practitioners get paid leave for training. In Kosovo, practitioners have the cost of the training fully covered. In Montenegro, IAG practitioners in IVET get paid leave for training and have the cost of the training fully covered. IAG practitioners in adult education also get paid leave, and can also receive some financial assistance to support the costs associated with training. In CVET, assessors get some financial assistance.

Labour market area

In the labour market, the picture is similar to the education and training area in regard to the entitlement to training for staff involved in the provision of IAG or assessment for validation. In North Macedonia, it is reported that IAG practitioners and assessors get paid leave for training and the cost of the training is fully covered. In Montenegro, this is true for IAG practitioners only.

4   Skills audits

In both North Macedonia and Montenegro, career orientation/professional plan initiatives are available from Public Employment Services.

In North Macedonia, the employment service agency's measure "Individual plan for employment" has some elements of skills audit as defined in the Council Recommendation. Profiling during interviews by employment counsellors in ESA units involves recording information on candidate's formal education and non-formal training, the candidate's skills, aptitudes and job interests. Based on the data thus collected, ESA calculates the candidate's index of employability and develops her/his "Individual plan for employment". In the context of validation, this plan could be developed to include advice for employment, possible vocations, and future career options, as well as advice for further training needed for certain career paths.

In Montenegro, it is reported that there is no well-established process to support skills audits except for some public institutions, such as the Montenegro Employment Agency, which supports individuals in developing their career plans. To provide advisory services to unemployed persons, the interview is used as the basic method to identify the transferable and other skills acquired via work or education. At the same time, the interview is a way of determining a career prospect and plan for professional reorientation or training.

5   Validation tools and methods

5.1   Tools for extracting evidence

Overall, it is reported that a broad range of tools for extracting evidence of skills and competences are used across the three countries.

In Kosovo, it is reported that all methods on which data were collected are frequently used in all sub-sectors of education. In North Macedonia, tests and examinations, observations, simulations, and portfolios are frequently used in IVET and adult education. Tests and examinations are the only method used in general education. In North Macedonia, during 2018, with support from the Lifelong Learning Centre and international experts, the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) developed a methodology for validation processes. This will be followed by training for relevant

stakeholders, and the development of a package of training materials. CAE is also developing guidance materials for portfolio as a tool for validation.

In Montenegro, it was reported that a wide-range of methods are used in CVET (although simulations and third party reports are not used). However, in adult education, tests and examinations, interviews, debates and dialogues, and third party reports are frequently used. In higher education, only tests and examinations are frequently used. Identification and documentation processes for unemployed applicants are conducted by the Montenegro Employment Agency (as part of their regular support activities). The practice is not the same in other sectors. More generally, assessment is regulated by the Law on National Vocational Qualifications, which states that the methods for assessment differ for each vocational qualification and are defined by the corresponding examination catalogue. The methods associated with certification will be developed in the secondary legislation to be issued by the Ministry of Education during 2018.

Table 5.1   Methods used to obtain evidence of skills and competences of the validation candidate

	Tests and examinations	Interviews, debates and dialogue	Declarative methods	Observations	Simulations	Evidence extracted from work	Third party reports	Portfolios
North Macedonia								
General education	Frequently used	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
IVET	Frequently used	Frequently used	Rarely used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Frequently used
CVET	*No validation arrangements*							
Higher education								
Adult education	Frequently used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Frequently used
Kosovo								
General education	*No validation arrangements*							
IVET	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used
CVET	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used
Higher education	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used
Adult education	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used
Montenegro								
General education	*No validation arrangements*							
IVET	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
CVET	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Frequently used	Rarely used	Frequently used	Rarely used	Frequently used
Higher education	Frequently used	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used	Not used

	Tests and examinations	Interviews, debates and dialogue	Declarative methods	Observations	Simulations	Evidence extracted from work	Third party reports	Portfolios
Adult education	Frequently used	Frequently used	Rarely used	Not used	Rarely used	Rarely used	Frequently used	Not used

Source: European Inventory (2018)

5.2 Use of standardised tools

Nationally regionally standardised tools/ templates (e.g. online tools, portfolio templates, etc.) are reportedly used in validation procedures only in the case of North Macedonia. These are nationally standardised tools that are not ICT based.

6 Summary

6.1 National approaches to validation (policies, strategies and priorities)

All three countries have validation arrangements in place in the education and training area (see table below).

Only North Macedonia has validation arrangements in place in general education. On the other hand, North Macedonia does not have arrangements in CVET and higher education whereas Kosovo and Montenegro do. This reflects how countries have put the emphasis on different sectors while developing their validation arrangements.

In North Macedonia arrangements are still in development and not fully functional as yet. Legislation remains to be adopted and tools and systems e.g. in quality assurance, still need to be implemented to enable the award of certificates. VNFIL has been integrated into broader national strategies for education and qualification system reform. In Kosovo, the main policy and legal framework is in place and secondary legislation is being developed. Implementation is expected to commence in 2019. In Montenegro, legislation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is compatible with the 2012 EU Recommendation, although implementation is partial. VNFIL is mainly offered in vocational education and training.

Looking at what can be achieved through validation of non-formal and informal learning, the award of modules, award of credits, and access to the labour market are the most common outputs and outcomes of validation across the three countries and the sub-sectors.

In none of the three countries reviewed are there specific arrangements that involve validation targeted at migrants and refugees. For the Upskilling pathway, there are no specific arrangements in place in North Macedonia, systematic arrangements are in development in Kosovo and in Montenegro arrangements are in place, but they are not systematic.

In the labour market, Kosovo does not have any validation arrangements, but arrangements are in place in North Macedonia and Montenegro. None of the three countries has validation arrangements in the third sector.

6.2 Developing and implementing validation

6.2.1 Basic features: the four stages of validation

In the three countries covered, all four stages of validation, are covered in the education sub-sectors where validation arrangements are in place, except for North Macedonia (general education) and Montenegro (IVET and higher education) where only assessment and certification are covered.

In the labour market, all four stages are covered in North Macedonia, whereas in Montenegro only identification and documentation are covered.

6.2.2 Stakeholder involvement in validation

In the education and training area, in all three countries governmental organisations have a role in coordination (within and between sectors) and design of quality assurance mechanisms. In North Macedonia and Kosovo they also design national strategies for validation, and set up standards.

Education and training providers are particularly important in North Macedonia as they also have responsibility for identification and documentation, assessment, and certification. The PES has a key role in North Macedonia, covering all functions related to validation, but in Kosovo, the role of PES is limited to design of national strategies for validation and setting up standards. In Montenegro, the role of PES is fairly broad. Employer organisations and trade unions are relatively important in Montenegro, but their role is not as prominent in the other two countries.

Regarding the labour market, in North Macedonia governmental organisations have a key role but in Montenegro, their role is limited to assessment and certification functions. In North Macedonia, education and training providers cover the same functions as governmental organisations but with some additional functions. In Montenegro, education and training providers only cover assessment and certification functions.

6.2.3 Funding

In the education and training area, the main sources of funding are national public funding and individuals. These are sources in all countries and all sub-sectors where validation arrangements are in place.

In the labour market, the main sources of funding are European and national public funding. This is the case for both North Macedonia and Montenegro. But private sources also feature in North Macedonia.

6.2.4 Information, advice and guidance

There is provision for information, advice and guidance (IAG) to candidates across all three countries and all education sub-sectors, where validation arrangements are in place. It is interesting to note that in Kosovo all IAG provision is a requirement, whereas this is not the case in North Macedonia and Montenegro.

There is also IAG provision in the labour market in North Macedonia and Montenegro. In North Macedonia, the IAG is about the process and is not a requirement. In Montenegro, IAG about the process is a requirement, whereas in relation to assessment it exists but it is not a requirement.

6.2.5   Links to national qualifications systems and frameworks

There are numerous links between validation arrangements and NQFs in all three countries. It is possible to acquire any qualification on the NQF through validation in North Macedonia and Kosovo (except in adult education), but it is not possible in Montenegro –where it is nevertheless possible to acquire some qualifications on the NQF. It is also possible to acquire modules or partial qualifications on the NQF in North Macedonia and Montenegro, but in Kosovo this is only possible in the adult education and training area. In Kosovo, it is most common to be able to acquire credits on the NQF.

In the labour market, in North Macedonia validation initiatives are not linked to the formal education and training area. In Montenegro, the validation results in a training specification, mapping what training needs to be completed in order to achieve a (full) qualification in an education sub-sector. Validation can also lead to recommendations for future study options.

For all countries and education sub-sectors, where standards (e.g. occupational standards or educational standards) are used for validation of non-formal and informal learning, these are exactly the same as those used in the formal education system. This is also true in the labour market.

6.2.6   Quality assurance

There are national/ regional quality assurance frameworks (QAFs) specific to validation in North Macedonia. By contrast, the QAF's that apply to validation in Kosovo are existing national/ regional general ones. In Montenegro, there are no compulsory national/ regional QAFs in IVET and CVET but there are quality codes or guidelines in place. In adult education, existing national/ regional general QAFs apply to validation and have to be followed, and in higher education, there are no QAFs; QA is devolved to the awarding body or institution.

The main strengths of the QA system for validation in North Macedonia and Kosovo are that there is support for providers to implement the system, and it covers all phases of validation. Being consistently applied across institutions is also a strength for North Macedonia. The strengths are a little different in Montenegro where professionals involved in validation knowing the system well is a strength in IVET and CVET, and QA being flexible and easy to change according to need is relevant to higher education.

6.2.7   Practitioner professional competences

In all three countries, there are mandatory requirements (in terms of qualifications, experience, training etc) on practitioners involved in validation. In North Macedonia, this involves both IAG practitioners and validation assessors having validation-specific qualifications (IVET and adult education) and relevant professional training. In Kosovo, requirements are that IAG practitioners and validation assessors have certain non-specific qualifications and relevant professional training. In Montenegro, requirements only apply to assessors, and involve non-specific qualifications (CVET, higher education, adult education) and minimum years of relevant experience (CVET, adult education).

6.3   Skills audits

In both North Macedonia and Montenegro, there are no skills audits as such, but career orientation/professional plan initiatives are available from Public Employment Services.

6.4　Validation tools and methods

Overall, a broad range of tools for extracting evidence of skills and competences are used across the countries. In Kosovo, all methods are frequently used in all sub-sectors. In North Macedonia, tests and examinations, observations, simulations, and portfolios are frequently used in IVET and adult education. In Montenegro, a wide-range of methods are used in CVET, but in adult education and adult education there is less range.

Nationally regionally standardised tools/ templates (e.g. online tools, portfolio templates, etc.) are used in validation procedures only in the case of North Macedonia. These are nationally standardised tools that are not ICT based.