

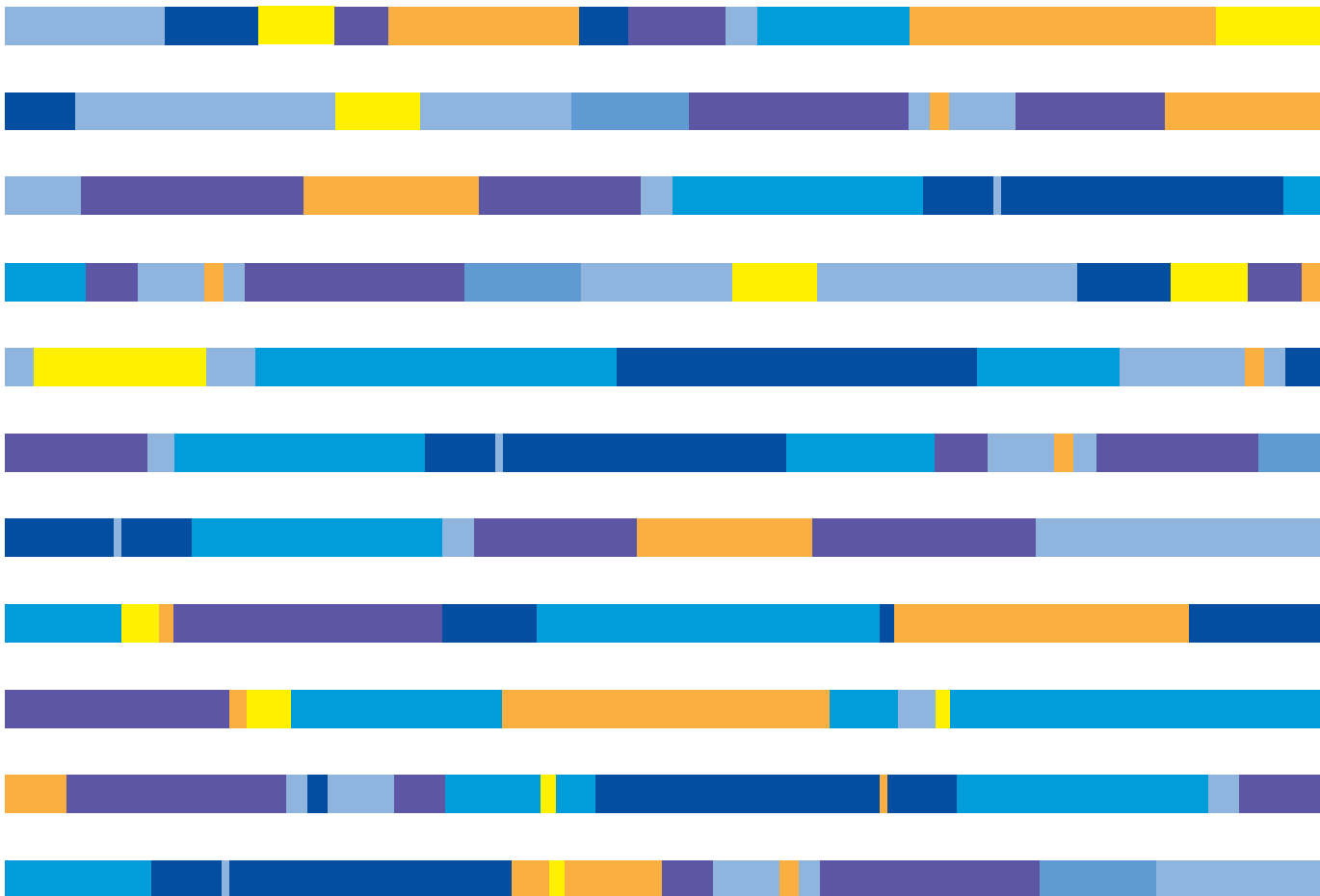


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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

COUNTRY REPORT:
CROATIA

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1 Abstract

In Croatia, the Croatian Qualification Framework Act, published in 2013, was the foundation for the creation of the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Almost a decade later, and based on the principal of university autonomy, Croatian Universities and University Colleges (public and private) have developed internal ordinances that enable students to go through a process of validation of prior learning. In adult education, the validation system is being framed with the new regulation and the forthcoming Ordinance on validation. The third sector can benefit from the Volunteering Booklet that allows for non-formally acquired skills and competences to be registered, but are not formally recognised. Validation practitioners are a professional profile not yet present in the Croatian validation system. There are good practices in awareness-raising activities related to validation (eg. Agency for VET and Adult Education).

2 Introduction

Since 2013, when the Act on the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) was established, validation has been incorporated into many strategic documents which would imply that on a system level, validation has gained in significance. The developments in the last five years are slowly, but steadily, setting the scene for the development of a framework for validation. Significant steps are also being taken to involve different stakeholders in the process. This applies to the National Council for Development of Human Potential which has been very active since its establishment in 2014 because it has developed several important recommendations for the development of the overall qualification framework system and also validation. However, the concept of validation remains on a declarative level rather than on a practical because the validation system has not been developed in 10 years since when it was mentioned for the first time in the CROQF Act. The development of the validation system is dependent on external financial resources, eg. European funds, and therefore it can be expected to be developed in the coming years since validation is incorporated in the National development strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021a), in the Programme Efficient human resources 2021.-2027. (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021b), the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period until 2027 (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2023) and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period until 2024 (2023).

The approach to validation is separated for adult education and for higher education leading to a consensus at national level. The new Adult Education Act (2021) defines the validation approach in adult education whereas the CROQF Act (2021) defines validation in higher education. The procedures are yet to be defined.

The revised CROQF Act provides a clear description of different types of qualifications (partial and full), their volume (e.g. as HROO (Croatian Credit System for General Education), CSVET or ECTS points), and allocation of full qualifications within the thirteen levels of CROQF and partial qualifications within 6 levels of the CROQF. These are the foundation for the establishment of the validation system. The revised Act also defines several procedures for the recognition and validation of units of learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the 2021 revised CROQF Act introduced additional changes to the legislation that were deemed necessary for the effective further development and implementation of the CROQF. These include the most important changes related to the allocation of responsibilities to existing agencies in the education and training

sector; the revised role of sectoral councils; procedures for assessing and approval of occupational standards and qualification standards; as well as the appointment and dismissal of the president and members of the National Council for Human Resources Development.

Since the 2018 Inventory, there were many developments within the CROQF Register because the Register's online database now contains a significant number of units of learning outcomes, occupational standards, qualification standards, programmes for acquisition and validation of units of learning outcomes, and programmes for acquisition of qualifications. All of these went through a thorough validation and approval process to ensure the quality of the proposed standards.

In 2021, a new Adult Education Act was developed that specifies that the method of application and the validation of prior learning will be prescribed in an Ordinance by the education minister, which is expected to be published in the first half of 2023.

At the higher education level, given the autonomous status of Universities, internal procedures for the recognition and validation of prior learning are being developed on the individual level by many public and private universities in the country.

There are good practices in awareness-raising activities related to validation. The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education has been organising Lifelong Learning Week (LLW) since 2008. The activities of the LLW are directed towards raising the awareness of the benefits of lifelong learning for the general public of all ages, including formal, non-formal and informal learning, and raising the awareness about the concept of validation.

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

The recent revision of the CROQF Act from 2021 built upon the revisions introduced in 2018. The revised CROQF Act regulates the placement of qualifications obtained from professional studies at the levels of CROQF in such a way that the levels of qualifications obtained at the end of professional and university studies are clearly distinguished while accepting their value and diversity.

In this sense, instead of 11 levels of full qualifications, as was the case in the previously valid regulation, the 2021 Act introduced 13 levels. The qualifications obtained from undergraduate professional studies are placed at the CROQF sixth professional level¹, and the qualifications obtained from undergraduate university studies are placed at the CROQF sixth university level². Qualifications obtained at the end of specialist graduate professional studies are placed at level "7.1.st" (specialist), and qualifications obtained at the end of university graduate studies and integrated undergraduate and graduate university studies are placed at level "7.1.sv" (university graduate).

Furthermore, the 2021 revised CROQF Act introduced additional changes to the legislation that were deemed necessary for the effective further development and implementation of the CROQF. These include the most important changes related to the allocation of responsibilities to existing agencies in the education and training sector; the revised role of sectoral councils; procedures for assessing and approval of occupational standards and qualification standards; as well as the appointment and

¹ In Croatian the correct CROQF level is "6.st" (st. meaning strucnistručni, ie. professional studies)

² In Croatian the correct CROQF level is "6.sv" (sv. meaning sveucilisnisveučilišni, i.e. university level studies)

dismissal of the president and members of the National Council for Human Resources Development.

The approach to validation is separated for adult education and for higher education leading to the consensus at national level. The new Adult Education Act (2021) defines the validation approach in adult education whereas the CROQF Act (2021) defines validation in higher education. The procedures are yet to be defined.

Validation of units of learning outcomes is defined as the assessment of acquired competencies, including the issuance of a certificate by an authorized legal or natural person, in accordance with predefined and accepted criteria and standards. The procedure for recognition and validation of prior learning on CROQF level six or higher is regulated by the individual ordinances of higher education institutions. Requests for recognition and validation of qualifications positioned on CROQ levels lower than level six can be submitted to the legal or natural person which is authorised to perform validation of units of learning outcomes and for issuing certificates for acquired units of learning outcomes. According to the Adult Education Act (2021), validation can be performed by the authorised adult education institutions which have undergone a quality assurance procedure and are marked with the highest grades. The application procedure for validating and recognising prior learning and an award of qualification at level five of the CROQF and lower, will be set out in the Ordinance on the recognition of prior learning due in 2023. The programmes for validation of learning outcomes will be prescribed or designed in accordance with the Ordinance and the methodology for designing validation programmes (Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education is responsible for creating the methodology).

There is no recent National Skills Strategy that would describe the role of validation in a more specific and detailed manner.

Legal Framework

As reported in the 2016 report on validation (Pavkov M., 2016), the Croatian Parliament adopted the **Croatian Qualification Framework Act** (Official Gazette 22/2013) in March 2013, which establishes the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) and describes its implementation at national level, as well as developing references to the European Qualifications Framework, the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area and through meta-frameworks to national qualifications frameworks of other countries. The CROQF Act together with the revised CROQF Act (2018, 2021) established the foundation for the development of a system for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning on a national level in Croatia.

The principles and objectives of the CROQF related to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning defined by the 2018 revision of the CROQF Act remained the same in the 2021 revision of the CROQF Act. They are referring to the development of a system of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The 2021 revised CROQF Act built upon the revisions introduced in the 2018 revised CROQF Act that related to the responsibilities of Sectoral Councils, the creation and the maintenance of the CROQF Register, the introduction of the Ordinance on the CROQF Register, and the Ordinance on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These are defined as the building blocks of the national qualifications framework, which, at the same time, are the building blocks and foundations for setting up the national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The development of qualifications standards, units of learning outcomes and occupational standards are also pre-requisites for the development of the national system of recognition and validation (Pavkov, M., 2016).

The **Ordinance on the CROQF Register** was first published in 2014 (Official Gazette 62/2014). It provided, together with the initial CROQF Act (2013), the legal foundation for the establishment of 25 Sectoral Councils. In 2021, a new and updated Ordinance on the CROQF Register was developed.

The **revised CROQ Act** (2018; 2021) provides a clear description of different types of qualifications (partial and full), their volume (e.g. as HROO, CSVET or ECTS points) and allocation within the levels of CROQF. These are a foundation for the establishment of the validation system. The revised Act defines a procedure for the recognition and validation of units of learning outcomes that is mentioned above in this section. The revised CROQF Act also presents all CROQF levels and provides a clear description of the amount of HROO³, CSVET or ECTS points that are required for each of the levels.

The 2021 revisions of the CROQF Act and the Ordinance on the CROQF Register were necessary due to the many activities and structures that were put in place since 2013. The ongoing practice demonstrated the need for restructuring the responsibilities of some stakeholders within the education and training system that were linked to the CROQF.

Structures and actors within the future validation framework

In the 2021 CROQF Act revision, the responsibility of **Sectoral Councils** to perform validation of learning objectives, occupational standards and qualification standards was shifted to the Evaluation Commissions as regulated in the Ordinance on the CROQF Register (2021).

Since the 2018 Inventory, a new Ordinance on the CROQF Register (2021) was introduced, building on the initial Ordinance from 2014 and on the **CROQF Register** created in 2017⁴. The CROQF Register is a system for the registration and integration of occupational standards with the qualification standards through units of competences and units of learning outcomes. The register is public and consists of three sub-registers: sub-register of occupational standards, sub-register of qualification standards and the sub-register of units of learning outcomes. The occupational standards sub-register contains occupational standards, which include lists of key jobs that are performed in one or more workplaces and associated competencies and sets of competencies for the respective occupations. The qualification standards sub-register contains qualification standards, links to programs for the acquisition of qualifications and a list of authorised legal entities for the awarding of a certificate of acquired qualification. The sub-register of qualification standards will be connected to the registers of educational and study programs in the near future. The sub-register of units of learning outcomes contains units of learning outcomes, links to programs for the acquisition and evaluation of units of learning outcomes, programs for the evaluation of units of learning outcomes and inventory of authorized legal and natural persons for the awarding of certificates on acquired units of learning outcomes. All approved standards are public and aimed at enhancing the development of new vocational curricula and formal adult education programmes based on learning outcomes, that is, units of competences that meet the needs of the labour market. Units of learning outcomes, occupational standards and qualification standards are assessed by Evaluation Committees and are included in the CROQF Register. As such, they can be used for validation purposes – for example, if an individual can prove that he/she possesses certain units of learning outcomes that were acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning, he/she can be

³ For more details about HROO please consult later sections in this report

⁴ Financed through the financial support of Erasmus+ programme.

awarded a partial or full qualification that is included/registered in the Register or a certificate confirming a person obtained units of learning outcomes from the Register.

The National Council for Development of Human Potential is a central strategic body for the development of the CROQF in the Republic of Croatia. The National Council assesses, validates and coordinates public policies, such as educational policy, employment policy, lifelong professional guidance policy and also policies related to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, having in mind their influence on the human potential development and achievement of Croatia's strategic goals and competitiveness. According to the new CROQF law, the responsibilities of the National Council have been changed. The National Council evaluates public policies, proposes measures of integrated and mutually harmonized policies, monitors and evaluates the impact of the CROQF and individual qualifications, and gives recommendations on improvements in linking education and the needs of the labor market, gives an opinion to the minister responsible for education and science on the recommendations of sectoral councils about enrollment policy, enrollment quotas and funding of qualifications from public sources, according to qualifications and according to counties. The Council also develops recommendations in regard to ongoing developments within the education sector and its relation with the CROQF.

As described in the 2018 Validation Report, the National Council for Development of Human Potential prepared **Recommendations for the strategic development of recognition and validation of prior learning (National Council for Human Resources Development, 2018)**. The recognition of prior learning is described as validation of prior gained units of learning outcomes and validation of competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The recommendations in the field of higher education refer to the need for the revision of the Act on scientific activity and higher education with the aim of enabling flexible access to higher education based on the recognition and validation of prior learning, and in line with the CROQF.

Strategic documents referring to validation

In March 2023, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the **Decision on the Adoption of the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period Until 2027** (National Plan) and the **Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Plan for the Development of the Education System until 2027, for the Period Until 2024** (Action Plan). The National Plan clearly states that in adult education, a system of validation of non-formal and informal knowledge and skills has not yet been developed. The National Plan defines a measure related to the development of adult education programmes and development and implementation of validation programmes for learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. This also relates to the development of the validation system. The National Plan foresees the need for the improvement of the validation system of prior knowledge at higher education institutions.

Validation is incorporated in the **National development strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030** (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021a) in the section devoted to the development of vocational competences. It is mentioned that a coherent system of validation of non-formal and informal knowledge and skills will enable better horizontal learning pathways through the lifelong learning system.

In the **Programme Efficient human resources 2021.-2027**. (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021b, p.14, p.58) that is a foundation for acquiring ESF funds on national level, it is stated that "investments from ESF+ will be used to establish a system of recognition of non-formal and informally acquired knowledge and skills,

which will enable greater mobility and vertical and horizontal learning pathways within the system". At the higher education level, validation and recognition of prior knowledge will be implemented for attracting non-traditional students to higher education programmes. The **Strategy for lifelong career guidance and career development in Croatia 2016-2020** (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2015) positions validation of non-formal learning in the context of career guidance services provided by, for example the Croatian Employment Service and Universities. Validation is also put in the context of NEETs (not in education, employment or training) as the potential tool for supporting this group of individuals back into the labour market. In that way, validation is connected to employment policies.

The **Implementation Plan 2021-2024 of the Ministry of Science and Education** (MSE, 2020) specifies one of the measures (Measure 17) as introduction of the quality assurance system in adult education, and introduction of the validation system of prior learning. This is aligned with the new Adult Education Act.

The **Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017-2021** (AVETAE, 2017) prepared by the Agency for VET and Adult Education strongly focuses on the promotion of the validation of prior knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal ways of learning, in particular for adult learners and therefore will be presented in more detail in the following sections of this report.

In Croatia, there are no **Individual Learning Accounts** and therefore CROQF and validation procedures to be developed are not linked to those accounts.

As reported in 2018 Report, the Croatian Employment Service (CES) defines and practices '**skills audits**' as described in the European Recommendation on Validation. The CES is defined in the Lifelong Professional Guidance and Career Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia 2016-2020 as the main body responsible for skills audits in Croatia. The Act on Employment Mediation and Unemployment Rights describes professional guidance as different professional procedures that lead to the identification of possibilities, interests and competences of the users, with the aim of decision making on education and employment, and management of individual professional development. The services are offered to unemployed persons and other employment seekers, secondary school students and higher education students.

As reported in the 2018 Report, the 'Counsellors for employment' are CES employees to whom registered unemployed people are referred to for the purpose of skills audits. Counsellors for employment focus on an occupational field and are responsible for certain industrial sectors. An electronic application is used to record the knowledge, skills and competences of unemployed people. The skills audit record consists of information on formal education, additional courses, seminars, specialisations, licences, certificates, professional exams, adult education programmes, foreign language skills (in reading, speaking and writing with an indication of the level of knowledge) – formal and non-formal (verified with diploma or not), IT knowledge and skills, driving licence, and additional knowledge gained by self-learning or through hobbies and any type of informal learning. The employment record of unemployed people, managed by CES Employment Counsellors, summarises all jobs held by the individual (their description and employer details), and entrepreneurship experience. The employment record is very detailed because the record can demonstrate the usage of skills, knowledge and competences that were gained outside the formal education system.

The skills audits performed by CES can be described as part of a three step process of the Upskilling Pathways. The CES performs skills assessments (step 1) and

presents the learning offer to the unemployed individuals (step 2). The third step (validation and recognition) is fulfilled if the unemployed person enrolls in formal adult education programme and obtains a certificate and/or qualification.

Within the private sector, the recruiting companies conduct skills audits (European Commission, 2018):

- Sirius - a centre for psychological counselling, educational training and research (Centar za psihološko savjetovanje, edukaciju i istraživanje) conducts skills audits for young people to assist with their career choices. Several private employment services (PrES) (the most relevant being: Adecco, Dekra, Selectio, Smartflex) offer psychological testing of job candidates for employers.

The audits provided by the CES are open to registered unemployed people, but also secondary school and university students in need of career guidance as well as to employers. The services provided by the University of Zagreb, Razbor and Institute Ivo Pilar seem to be open to everyone without specific preconditions. However, the audits and services offered by private actors are either open only for employers (in the case of PrES) or open for individuals, but fee-based.

Currently, there are no skills audit initiatives where private sector organisations collaborate with formal education institutions for validation purposes. This is because the validation system is not yet developed. This also implies that quality assurance measures are currently not in place.

3.2 Validation in education and training

The national system for validation was first developed in 2013 when the CROQF Act was introduced. Prior to the CROQF Act, four other existing acts relating to different educational levels reflected the validation possibilities within each educational level (VET, adult education, higher education). A new update of the Adult Education Act from 2021⁵ takes into account revisions of legal acts related to CROQF, CROQF Register, and other legal procedures. The aim is also to ensure and improve the quality assurance system in adult education by harmonising it with the needs of Croatian society and economy and the education policies of the EU.

The CROQF Act from 2021 and its previous edition from 2018, defines the procedure for validation and recognition of prior acquired units of learning outcomes (Article 15). It specifies that any individual can submit a request for recognition and validation of prior learning to the legal or to a natural person authorised to validate units of learning outcomes and award certificates of acquired units of learning outcomes from the CROQF Register. The procedure for application, recognition and validation of prior knowledge at CROQF level 6 and above is regulated by general acts of higher education institutions.

Adult education

Existing validation arrangements can be found on a sectoral level, as noted in the European Inventory report for Croatia (Pavkov M., 2018). The Adult Education Act (Official Gazette 144/2021 (NN 44/2021)) contains a provision in Article 2, which states that external validation of units of learning outcomes is an independent validation procedure carried out by independent examiners or groups of examiners who examine the adoption of units of learning outcomes of participants and/or applicants of the formal adult education programmes.

⁵ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_12_144_2460.html

This provision represents the necessary legal grounds for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Further detail on the legal framework supporting this Act can be found in the 2010 country report.

The **Adult Education Act** (Official Gazette 144/2021) defines validation of units of learning outcomes as the validation of acquired competences, including the issuance of a certificate of an authorized legal or natural person, in accordance with predetermined and accepted criteria and standards. The programme for the validation of units of learning outcomes (hereinafter: validation programme) as a regular formal programme in adult education, according to which units of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal way are validated (hereinafter: validation of previous learning), and the completion of which is confirmed by a public document. Validation programmes are implemented at CROQF levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 4.1 and 4.2. and at level 5 of the Croatian Qualifications Framework in the part that refers to vocational specialist training that were acquired through formal and informal education and informal learning. Validation programmes enable the validation of prior learning in accordance with the appropriate standard of the unit of learning outcomes from the CROQF Register.

The adult learners can prove units of learning outcomes that they previously acquired in a non-formal or informal way, according to the approved validation programmes. Validation programmes at CROQF levels 2, 3, 4, 4.1 and 4.2 and at level 5 in the part related to professional specialist training are carried out by the adult education institution, with a prior positive opinion awarded by the Agency for VET and Adult Education. Validation programme can be implemented by an institution that has been awarded a decision on the implementation of an education program that includes all units of learning outcomes that it wants to validate and that the institution has implemented with at least two educational groups, as well as a decision awarded by the Agency for VET and Adult Education on a very high or high level of quality (proceeding from the external quality assurance process of the adult education institution). The educational institution is obliged, within six months from the date of registration or revision of the units of learning outcomes or qualification standards in the CROQF Register to harmonise the validation programme(s) with the standard of qualifications or units of learning outcomes.

The Adult Education Act specifies that the method of application and the validation of prior learning will be prescribed in an Ordinance by the education minister⁶. The validation process will be based on the CEDEFOP four-step model: identification, documentation, assessment and certification of prior learning experiences⁷. The ordinance will enable validation of units of learning outcomes (microcredentials), partial qualifications and possibly full qualifications on lower level i.e. 4.1.

In 2023, a revised and updated **Ordinance on Standards and Specification in Adult Education Institutions** was published. Compared to the Ordinance on Standards from 2008 that recognised the possibility that exceptionally, without attending practical teaching and training, acquired knowledge and skills from practical teaching and training can be validated based on the written demand of an individual and based on evidence, by a commission of three members. In that respect, there was an opportunity for an the individual who had evidence of knowledge and skills gained from practical teaching and training, to shorten the time of the overall formal education programme. However, the revised Ordinance does not include reference to the opportunity for validation because this will be regulated in an additional Ordinance

⁶ at the time of writing of this country report, the Ordinance was not yet prepared

⁷ Information shared by the Ministry of Science and Education representative

proceeding from the revised Adult Education Act as mentioned previously in this section. The additional Ordinance is expected to be approved by the minister in 2023.

Vocational education and training

The **Act on Vocational Education and Training** (Official Gazette 30/2009, 24/10, 22/13, 25/18, 69/22) from 2018 does not foresee the possibility of validation of prior learning whereas the previous Act from 2009 stated that the competence acquired by formal and informal learning can be proven by taking a test, according to the occupational standards, or vocational qualifications. The 2009 Act stipulated that the procedure and the way of performing exams to validate non-formal and informal acquired competencies needs to be prescribed by the Minister. The revised Act from 2018 defines that the qualification obtained through VET is of a certain level, volume, profile and quality that is proven by the public document and which support integration into the labour market or continuation of education.

The revised Act further states that VET is based on the national curriculum for VET, sectoral curriculum, VET curricula and curricula of VET educational institutions. The sectoral curriculum is the framework which includes all VET curricula linked to qualifications at levels 2-5 of the CROQF of one educational sector with corresponding learning outcomes from the qualification standards. Credit points are awarded to the qualifications and the associated learning outcomes. One credit point shall be awarded to a trainee for an average of 15 to 25 working hours in the duration of 60 minutes necessary for acquiring the appropriate learning outcomes. Once acquired credits from a unit of learning outcomes of the relevant qualification standard are recognized as acquired credit scores of the learning outcomes of the same name and the content of another qualification standard. The sum of credit points of all learning outcomes of a given level of qualification of the appropriate level is equal to the volume of that qualification.

In that sense, and since the CROQF acknowledges CSVET⁸ points as an integral part of partial and full qualifications on levels 2-5, it will be possible to access the process of validation of prior learning for the VET qualifications that will be included in the CROQF Register. The forthcoming Ordinance on recognition and validation of prior learning is expected to address this. It is worth noting that the current system of adult education enables the acquisition of VET qualifications by means of formal adult education programmes and in that sense the Adult Education Act is applicable to VET programmes and qualifications acquired through adult education, including validation opportunities.

Higher education

The **Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity** (Official Gazette 119/22) foresees the possibility of validation of non-formal and informal learning for candidates for enrolment in the artistic sector in case of a talented and gifted individual who has not finished secondary education.

The 2018 Validation Report presented several existing practices of individual higher education institutions that developed internal Ordinances as guides for recognition of non-formal and informal learning of students (Polytechnic Sibenik, University College Algebra, University of Zagreb). Since the 2018 Validation Report, additional higher education providers (private and public) developed Ordinances on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Further examples are: University of

⁸ CSVET=Croatian Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

Rijeka, University of Split, Polytechnic Pozega, Polytechnic Bjelovar, University College Baltazar Zapresic, etc.

Box 3.1 University of Rijeka

University of Rijeka has developed an Ordinance on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in which it distinguishes between the certified non-formal education and non-certified non-formal education. The certified non-formal education is education that finishes by acquiring a document that is based on the crosscheck of the units of learning outcomes, ie. acquired competences. The non-certified non-formal education ends without crosschecking the units of learning outcomes.

The procedure for recognition and validation of prior learning is conducted for the aim of enrolment in the University programmes according to the conditions of the programme performer, including transfer from higher education programmes of other universities or other programmes within the University of Rijeka, as a continuation and/or return to the corresponding study programme. The second aim is validation of units of learning outcomes in the framework of the University programmes.

Prior learning will be acknowledged in cases when the learning outcomes (basic competences), volume (ECTS) and level (CROQF) are aligned with the specific units of learning outcomes that are acquired through the University programme.

The procedure for recognition and validation of prior knowledge can not result in reward of the full qualification.

The recognition and validation procedure can be conducted by organising an interview, preparing a written material or a project, by showcasing practical demonstrations, or by an oral or written exam. Other methods are possible, depending on the individual decision of each individual faculty.

The University of Rijeka is the first one in Croatia that has signed strategic partnership with Coursera, the programme Coursera for Campus (C4C). It enables students and university staff to acquire additional knowledge and skills through courses, specialisations, and professional certificates. It is possible to apply a finished Coursera course, specialisation or a professional certificate for the validation process in order to obtain ECTS credits that will be transferred to a learning programme at higher education level.

The Ministry of Science and Education participated, as one of the project partners in the Erasmus+ funded project SIDERAL (Social and International Dimension of Education and Recognition of Acquired Learning). The project supported Croatian higher education institutions in developing the systems of recognition of prior learning, with emphasis on recognizing the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education, a document prepared by the Ministry of Science and Education with support from the project working group were developed and piloted at the University of Rijeka. They contain recommendations for HEIs on recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning for access to higher education, as well as for credits during formal education. The revised Guidelines for Validation are expected to be approved by the Minister in the first half of 2023.

Trades and crafts sector

The **Trades and Crafts Act** (2020) (Official Gazette 143/13, 127/19, 41/20) builds on the process of validating informal learning in relation to craft occupations described in the Trades and Crafts Act from 2013.

The Act states that 'For the purpose of running some associated craft businesses for which adequate qualifications are required, an examination for evidencing necessary competences is taken in accordance with the programme prescribed by the Minister upon the proposal of the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts. The examination for evidencing necessary competences (vocational competence exam) can be taken by a person having completed at least primary school education.' The Act also states: 'The examination for evidencing necessary competences includes practical vocational knowledge and knowledge that is necessary for carrying out craft activities independently'. It goes on to say: 'After the examination for evidencing necessary competences has been successfully passed, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts issues a certificate'.

Concerning the master craftsman exam: to run some associated crafts businesses for which adequate qualifications are required, an examination for evidencing necessary competences is taken in accordance with the programme prescribed by the Minister upon the proposal of the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts. The examination for evidencing necessary competences (master craftsman exam) can be taken by a person having passed a journeyman exam (secondary level) in the occupation in question and having two years of work experience in that occupation, or some other secondary level diploma and three years of work experience in the said occupation.

Since the 2018 Inventory, no policy area or sector (general, education, IVET, CVET, adult education, labour market, third sector) is being prioritised but there are recent developments on all educational levels in terms of revising the legal framework that will enable inclusion of validation approaches on the systemic level. In that way, a comprehensive system of validation, that is linked to the CROQF will be established.

The considerations to validate learning outcomes and competences that were acquired through open educational resources have not yet been considered in Croatia.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

The 2016 and 2018 European Inventory Country Report for Croatia described a number of existing approaches for validation as developed by the private sector in different occupational sectors. As described in the 2018 Report, different sectoral legal frameworks define pre-requisites for performing certain types of jobs (brokers, investment consultant, tax advisor, pension fund manager, authorised actuary, insurance distributor and reinsurance distributor, management consultant, court interpreter, insolvency manager, real estate agents, tourist guides) and create the possibility to develop a broader set of approaches and methods for sectoral validation.

The aims and objectives of these initiatives are to validate and certificate the knowledge, skills and competences of individuals who are enabled to enter the labour market or create self-employment opportunities based on the certificates obtained.

The validation initiatives listed above are not linked to formal education sectors and they are not included in collective labour agreements.

The initiatives are funded by personal financial resources of candidates who approach the exam and the validation process.

Data on the number of individuals who took the exams and entered the validation process might be collected by the institutions/stakeholders who are responsible for the examination procedure. However, they are not publically available.

In a broader overview, it can be said that the four stages of validation are integrated in sectoral practices as follows: identification and documentation through collection of formal education certificates (eg. tourist guide – if a person has obtained a foreign language teacher qualification); assessment either as an informal test or acknowledgment of formally obtained knowledge due to which a candidate can be released of some tests; and certification in cases when the sectoral provider conducting the certification would develop specific procedures.

It should be noted that these sectoral validations are not linked to validation procedures that will be based on the CROQF Register (formal education and training) learning outcomes and qualifications.

3.4 Validation and the third sector

The Volunteering Act from 2021 (Official Gazette 58/07, 22/13, 84/21) recognises the volunteer's right for recognition of skills, competences and experiences acquired through volunteering. The volunteer can be awarded a Certificate on competences acquired during long-term volunteering (Potvrda o kompetencijama stečenim tijekom volontiranja) which contains information on the skills, competences and knowledge gained through volunteering practice. The volunteering organiser should enable or advocate the introduction of tools for recognition of competencies, skills and experiences gained through volunteering, in cooperation with educational institutions and employers. In practice the issuing of the Certificate of volunteering can be replaced by inscribing the volunteer experience in the Volunteer Booklet * (volonterska knjizica).

Box 3.2 Volunteer Center Zagreb and “Charter on employee volunteering”

There is a very good ongoing practice of the Volunteer Center Zagreb that has been working on the development of employee volunteering since 2007. As presented on the center's web-site, the intensive cooperation with business organisations on the topic of employee volunteering began in 2017 with the establishment of the Network for the Development of Corporate Volunteering, and from then until the crisis year of 2020, continuous work was carried out on the promotion and development of employee volunteering through Network meetings and the organisation of annual National Conferences on employee volunteering. The signing of the Charter on employee volunteering was initiated in 2019 when 23 organizations signed the Charter and thereby confirming the intention of a systematic approach to the development of employee volunteering. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, proactive cooperation was interrupted and was restarted in the spring of 2021 as part of the "Radius V" project. In September 2021, the 4th National Conference on Employee Volunteering was held, and the Charter on Employee Volunteering was signed by 5 more companies, making a total of 28 signatories of the Charter. On October 18, 2022, the 5th National Conference on Employee Volunteering was held, and the Charter on Employee Volunteering was signed by 2 more companies, making a total of 31 signatories of the Charter.

It can be said that from the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification), identification and documentation are reflected when an individual is issued a Certificate on competences acquired during volunteering or the competences are inscribed in the Volunteer Booklet.

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

Qualifications and qualification frameworks

The national qualification framework is based on learning outcomes, described through knowledge, cognitive skills, practical skills, social skills and respective autonomy and responsibility. 'There are eight levels of units of learning outcomes with corresponding descriptions representing minimal conditions for placing units of learning outcomes at respective CROQF levels'.

Recognition and validation of prior learning will be based on units of learning outcomes as defined in the CROQF Act. It can be assumed that the validation will result in the award of partial and full qualifications. However, this will be regulated by the forthcoming Ordinance.

The CROQF Act defines the following categories of qualifications:

- full qualifications: they are assigned a specific CROQF level and minimum preconditions have to be fulfilled for obtaining full qualifications at different CROQF levels.
- partial qualifications: there are six levels in CROQF assigned to partial qualifications. The precondition for acquiring a partial qualification is minimum 10 HROO, CSVET or ECTS credits, out of which at least 50% have to be on the level of the corresponding partial qualifications.

The Adult Education Act describes a micro-qualification as an adult education programme that provides:

- re-skilling (osposobljanje) – education for acquisition of units of learning outcomes (lower than 10 CSVET credits) at CROQF levels 2, 3 and 4; the precondition is previously acquired qualification at CROQF level 1;
- up-skilling (usavrsavanje) - education for acquisition of units of learning outcomes (lower than 10 CSVET credits) at CROQF level 4, the precondition is previously acquired qualification at least at CROQF level 4;
- vocational specialist upskilling – education for acquisition of units of learning outcomes at CROQF level 5, the precondition is previously acquired qualification at CROQF level 4.

Credit systems

The CROQF Act of 2021 defines the CROQF Register as 'the database of units of learning outcomes, occupational standards, qualification standards, programmes for acquisition and validation of units of learning outcomes, programmes for acquisition of qualifications as well as other useful data, with the aim of their integration and harmonisation'.

The Ordinance on the CROQF Register (Official Gazette 96/2021) regulates the content and management of the CROQF Register; the procedure for submitting requests for inclusion in the CROQF Register and the content and structure of the request form; the evaluation of submitted requests for inclusion and the procedure for including new entries in the CROQF Register; the work of Sectoral Councils (titles of sectors and Sectoral Councils, selection criteria and selection procedure for members of Sectoral Councils and the description of Sectoral Councils' roles and responsibilities); and the internal and external quality assurance system of the CROQF Register.

The CROQF Register is active and publically available since 2016 and consists of the following sub-registers:

1. The sub-register of occupational standards that is maintained by the ministry responsible for labour.
2. The sub-register of units of learning outcomes and sub-register of qualification standards for qualifications at levels 1; 2; 3; 4.1; 4.2; 5 (in the part related to specialist vocational training) that is managed by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education.
3. The sub-register of units of learning outcomes and sub-register of qualification standards for qualifications at levels 5 (in the part related to higher education); 6, 7.1 7.2; 8.1; 8.2 that is managed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education.

Registration of units of learning outcomes, qualification standards and occupational standards in the CROQF Register is the basis for creating the framework that will allow individuals to validate and recognise competencies and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Box 3.3 CROQF Register

In February 2023, the following statistical data can be extracted from the publically available database:

- 432 occupational standards
- 3558 units of competences
- 151 qualification standards
- 5541 units of learning outcomes
- 81 formal adult education programmes for acquisition and validation of units of learning outcomes

Article 15 of the CROQF Act defines the procedure for recognition and validation of previously acquired units of learning outcomes. The procedure includes the request for recognition, application, recognition and validation. The Article states that: ‘a request for recognition and validation of previously acquired units of learning outcomes can be submitted by any individual to a legal entity or a natural person accredited for validation of units of learning outcomes and award certificates of acquired units of learning outcomes, i.e. the institution, as well as the state administration body, professional chamber or institution which has a justified interest in validation procedure determined on the basis of special regulations, authorized to award the qualification, in accordance with the approved programmes for validation of units of learning outcomes from the CROQF Register. The procedure for application, recognition and validation of previous learning at level six of the CROQF and above is regulated by general acts of higher education institutions (more details on ongoing practice is provided in chapter 3.2).

The CROQF Act describes the recognition of the volume of qualifications and units of learning outcomes as HROO (Croatian Credit System for General Education), CSVET and ECTS. The volume will be determined for each qualification and a unit of learning outcomes, as the average of a total amount of time spent for acquiring a respective qualification, or a unit of learning outcomes. More precisely, the Act defines:

- One HROO credit as 15 to 25 hours of study in duration of 60 minutes, as required for acquiring respective learning outcomes;
- One CSVET credit as 15 to 25 hours of study in duration of 60 minutes, as required for acquiring respective learning outcomes;
- One ECTS credit as 25 to 30 hours of study in duration of 60 minutes, as required for acquiring respective learning outcomes.

The learning outcomes are set on eight levels of CROQF.

All of the above presents a solid framework for introduction of validation procedures based on the forthcoming Ordinance.

5 Standards

The Ministry of Labour and Pension System introduced the 'Guidelines for the development of occupational standards' in 2016 and an updated Methodology for the development of occupational standards and units of competences in 2021. The Guidelines define procedures for assessing the merits of the occupational profile by using the sectoral profiles which are made available on the portal of the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy dedicated to 25 CROQF sectors (Portal for labour market tracking). This portal brings together relevant data on the Croatian labour market from various sources; provides an overview of trends in 25 CROQF sectors by age, gender and regional origin; presents a demand for sectoral professions; and, provides an overview of educational programmes. The process of occupational standard development is also elaborated in the methodology. The occupational standards are an integral part of the CROQF Register and contain units of competences required for respective occupations. The competences are acquired through the educational programmes that are built of units of learning outcomes, which are entered into the CROQF Register and will become an essential foundation for the validation process.

The Ministry of Science and Education published the 'Guidelines for the development of qualification standards in vocational education and training' (2021) and the 'Guidelines for the development of qualification standards in higher education' (2022). The guidelines provide insight into the definition of qualification standards, their purpose, who develops them and who validates them. The process of the development is elaborated in detail and is linked to the Request for the inclusion of qualification standards into the CROQF Register. Once included in the CROQF Register, the qualification standard becomes the set of units of learning outcomes against which the validation process is conducted.

The qualification standard presents the content and the structure of the qualification and involves all data/information for the determination of its CROQF level, its volume (number of credits), qualification profile (learning outcomes) and data that is needed for ensuring an improvement of the quality of the qualification (minimum common learning outcomes that need to be included in each programme that is linked to the particular qualification standard). This information will be required for the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The CRQF Register Act describes the procedure for entering the occupational and qualification standards, units of learning outcomes and units of competences into the CROQF Register. The application for registration in the CROQF Register is as follows:

- Registration of occupational standards and units of competences is submitted to the ministry responsible for work.

- Registration of qualification standards and units of learning outcomes is submitted to national agencies as follows:
 - for qualifications in VET and adult education sector, mainly at CROQF level 2-5 to the Agency for VET and Adult Education
 - for qualifications from CROQF level 5 - 8 to the Agency for Science and Higher Education

The process of evaluating requests for registration of occupational standards, units of competences, units of learning outcomes and qualification standards consists of determining the fulfillment of formal conditions and the content of the standard, which also includes an assessment of the justification for initiating the procedure for registration in the Register. The assessment procedure of the formal conditions is performed by dedicated national agencies and the ministry responsible for labour. The assessment of the content of each standard is performed by an Evaluation Commission.

The Evaluation Commission for the evaluation of occupational standard or units of competences is a permanent body that has seven members out of which one is from the ministry responsible for labour, four members are experts from the labour market sector and education; and two members are representatives of the labour market.

The Evaluation Committee for the evaluation of qualification standards or units of learning outcomes is an ad hoc body composed of three members that are experts in a given field of expertise, out of which one member must be a representative of the labour market.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

As defined in the CROQF Act (revised version from 2021), the bodies and stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of CROQF are as follows: the National Council for Development of Human Potential, the ministry responsible for education and science, the ministry responsible for labour, the ministry responsible for regional development, Agency for Science and Higher Education, Agency for VET and Adult Education, Agency for Teacher Training, and sectoral councils.

It should be noted that Agency for Science and Higher Education, Agency for VET and Adult Education, and Agency for Teacher Training were assigned clear roles and more responsibility in the CROQF development and implementation with the last revision of the CROQF Act in 2021. Prior to that, the evaluation procedures for the evaluation of standards, as described in previous section, were implemented by Sectoral Councils.

The National Council for Development of Human Potential consists of 25 members representing different stakeholders such as: unions, employer associations, craft chamber, agencies mentioned in this chapter, university representatives, ministries of education and labour, employment services. The Council is an advisory body and a central strategic body for the development of CROQF.

The individual roles and responsibilities of the ministry responsible for education, ministry responsible for labour, ministry responsible for regional development, are clearly defined in the CROQF Act. Ministry responsible for education is responsible for the development of the procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning, for coordinating the quality assurance of qualifications and learning outcomes, monitoring and analysis of the implementation of the evaluation system,

etc. Ministry responsible for labour prescribes methodology for the development and validation of occupational standards. Both types of standards are fundamental for future validation procedures because the competences and skills from non-formally and informally acquired knowledge will be assessed based on the standards approved in the CROQF Register.

The main role of the Sectoral Councils is defined as ‘advisory and professional bodies ensuring the development of human potential in line with labour market needs within respective sectors’. The role of the Sectoral Councils with regard to setting up the national validation system is the following:

- analyse existing and necessary competencies within different sectors;
- propose recommendations for the development of the sector;
- give recommendations to the National Council on enrolment policy, enrolment quotas and financing of qualifications from public sources, according to qualifications and according to counties;
- make recommendations for changes in the National Classification of Occupations to the ministry responsible for work;

The Sectoral Councils are composed of a president and ten members: (one representative of ministries responsible for a respective sector; one representative of the CES; one representative of the agency responsible for science and higher education or agency responsible for vocational education and adult education or agency responsible for education and teacher training; eight sectoral experts to be appointed after a public call, taking account of proportional representation of the educational sector and unions representing the education sector, on the one hand, and unions representing the economic sector, employers’ associations and other civil society organisations which are active in the sector covered by the respective council, on the other hand). Titles of the Sectoral Councils and their responsibilities are defined in the Ordinance on CROQF Register.

7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

As reported in the 2018 Report, Croatia is still developing the national system for validation. Individual involvement in validation is therefore limited. However, there are some initiatives at national level that address awareness-raising and refer to existing sectoral validation practices.

The Ministry of Science and Education developed a special web-portal⁹ – see internet (www.kvalifikacije.hr), dedicated to the CROQF, where it also publicises information related CROQF legal framework, strategies, documents such as methodologies mentioned throughout this report, and other documentation. The portal is a central place for up-to-date information for practitioners, professionals and the wider public. This includes up-to-date information on the activities of Sectoral Councils and the National Council for Development of Human Potential, including agendas and minutes of regular meetings. Decisions of the minister responsible for education and their impact on the establishment of Sectoral Councils, and any changes that occurred in the composition of the Sectoral Councils, are made publically visible. Documents that

⁹ <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/>

were developed by the National Council for Development of Human Potential, such as different recommendations are also made available on the portal.

In the 2018 Country report it is described that with respect to sectoral approaches, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts publishes booklets and leaflets to promote the possibility of obtaining a Certificate of Vocational Competence and Master Craftsman Diploma through validating and assessing knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through non-formal and informal pathways. The information is also made publicly available through the Chamber's website and different events organised by the Chamber and other stakeholders.

As described in the 2018 Report, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education has been organising Lifelong Learning Week (LLW) since 2008. The activities of the LLW are directed towards raising awareness of the benefits of lifelong learning for the general public of all ages. Learning as such is presented in different forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning and validation as a concept is promoted through the LLW activities. Since the agency is very much involved in the developments of the legal acts in VET and adult education, that were revised since 2018, and also since it takes part in the development and implementation of national strategies in the education sector, as well as activities related to the CROQF implementation, the Lifelong Learning Week is also raising awareness about validation and options that will be possible to adult learners. This is in line with the rationale given in the Science, Education and Technology Strategy (2014) which stipulates that "validation of learning outcomes acquired through different ways of learning and education, the time needed for adult education is shortened and in that way significant monetary savings are achieved – for the individual and for the community. The barriers between the system of formal education and competences acquired through other forms of learning and education are also removed in that way."

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

As reported in the 2018 Report, information, advice and guidance are seen as an integral part of the procedure of the recognition of prior learning which is to be developed in line with the revised CROQF Act.

The Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts provides support to its members and other interested individuals before and after the sectoral validation (e.g. literature for the exam; description of occupations and qualifications; employment possibilities; professional further education and training; re-training possibilities).

Other sectoral associations also provide support before validation in the form of professional literature and guidance.

The Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017-2021 (AVETAE, 2017) prepared by the Agency for VET and Adult Education included the activity "informing about the possibilities of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal lifelong learning" as one of the strategic goals of the communication plan. The target groups identified as those to whom the information will be shared are the following: students in higher education, individuals with low skills (primary education or without qualification), and the NEET group (young people not in education and not in training). The stakeholders responsible for providing information will be the ministry responsible for education, ministry responsible for labour, higher education institutions, chambers of commerce, employers' associations, publishers of specialised publications, Croatian Employment Service and CISOK centres, adult education institutions, local and county level governments, syndicates, and development agencies. It is to be seen from 2018 onwards which concrete activities will be implemented by the Agency (such as the Lifelong Learning Week) and other stakeholders and what will be their impact on the target groups and wider population.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Since the recognition and validation system has not yet been developed on the national level, the profile of validation practitioners at national level is still to be determined in the framework of future legislation and in that sense the situation remains as it was described in the 2018 Report.

In the Recommendations for the strategic development of recognition and validation of prior learning (National Council for Human Capital Development, 2018) it is acknowledged that one of the requirements for the development of the system of recognition and validation of prior learning, is to build databases of sectoral experts who will participate in the examination committees for the validation of units of learning outcomes. Further details on the profile of examiners, their selection process, etc., are not given and it is expected that these will be defined parallel to the development of the overall validation system.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The approaches to training and support to validation practitioners will be developed in the future, following developments in the legislative framework related to CROQF and validation.

8.3 Qualifications and experience

The qualification requirements will be defined and described in the future, following developments in the legislative framework related to the CROQF and validation, as described in the 2018 Report.

The qualification standards developed using the CROQF methodology describe conditions for person that can perform assessment of units of learning outcomes.

Validation practitioners from the sectoral practices described in this report are practitioners with a high level of experience and expertise in the fields relevant to the sector in question. These practitioners are however not trained in additional skills such as methodological approaches to identify and assess non-formal and informal knowledge, skills and competences.

A sectoral example in terms of craft examinations insists that the examination committee consists of at least three members and must include individuals with adequate master craftsman skills, teachers from crafts' secondary schools or other vocational education secondary schools; with the professionals from crafts' businesses forming the majority.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

The European Social Fund has been used to finance development of Regional Centers of Competence in different sectors. The projects aimed at, among other activities, development of occupational and qualification standards that have or will undergo the evaluation procedure for the inclusion in the CROQF Register. Those standards will contribute to the development of the database which is a pre-requisite for the future implementation of validation procedures.

The costs of existing sectoral validation practices (as described in previous sections of this report) are covered by the individual and the practice has not changed since the 2018 Report. The costs can be covered in full by a one-off payment or as a loan-payment over several months. Sometimes, if the employer is willing to cover the costs of validation (partially or in full), the employee might be asked to sign a binding contract which specifies the time an employee is obliged to spend in the company (or craft) as compensation for the 'investment' in validation. If an employee decides to leave the company (or the craft) before the timeframe has ended, he/she has to return a certain portion of the costs to the employer. Since no research has yet been undertaken regarding this matter, it is difficult to refer here to specific numbers, sectors and number of such cases.

Validation arrangements are not included in collective labour agreements because the validation system is not yet developed.

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

Since there is little research and/or evaluation being undertaken to evaluate the benefits to individuals in terms of validation in the sectoral approaches as described above, it is difficult to refer to any quantitative outputs.

Overall, it is not possible to report validation trends since validation procedures and the validation system are currently in development.

9.2.2 Validation users

Currently, it is not possible to report the profile of validation users since validation procedures and the validation system are currently in development.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

Currently, it is not possible to report on the validation of non-formal and informal learning used to support disadvantaged groups since validation procedures and the validation system are currently in development.

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

Since the recognition and validation system is under development at the national level, the situation remains as it was in 2018. This section therefore mainly refers to the exams organised by the Croatian Chamber of Trade and Crafts for the purpose of running associated craft businesses for which adequate qualifications are required (described in detail in section 2). The competences are tested by written and practical examinations following the programme prescribed by the ministry responsible for crafts.

This section also refers to the existing validation approaches developed by the private sector. For those sectoral practices described in section 2, the examinations used to conduct the assessments are either written or oral.

The validation of previous work experience for acknowledging adult's competences in practical knowledge and skills, as defined by the Ordinance on Standards and Specifications in Adult Education Institutions, (section 2 of this report), is certified by a confirmation document issued by the employer. In this document, the employer describes what knowledge, skills and competences the employee possesses and has further developed.

10.2 Use of ICT in Validation

There is currently limited use of ICT-based assessment methods for validation purposes.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

The CROQF Act describes the dimension of quality assurance in CROQF implementation, which includes quality assurance of validation. The CROQF Register is the main quality assurance tool as described in this report.

The Ordinance on CROQF Register (revised version from 2021) defines that the quality assurance of programmes with the application of qualification standards and units of learning outcomes from the Register, is carried out in an integrated and complementary manner with existing internal and external quality assurance systems for general, vocational, higher and adult education, in accordance with regulations by which a specific sector is regulated.

The revised Adult Education Act (2021) defines validation of quality as a process of assessing the quality of the adult education institution's work, which is based on the external evaluation of the institution's work and the findings of professional, administrative and inspection supervision of the institution's work. The act defines that one of the goals of adult education is to ensure quality in education by applying CROQF.

The validation programmes that will be implemented for validation of non-formal and informal knowledge in adults, can be carried out by an institution that has obtained the following: a decision on the implementation of an education programme that includes all units of learning outcomes that it intends to validate and which the institution has implemented with at least two educational groups, as well as the AVETAE decision on a very high or high level of quality as defined in the Adult Education Act.

The Act stipulates that the system of quality assurance in adult education includes both internal and external quality assurance system. The effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system and the regularity of the implementation of the self-evaluation process are verified in the external evaluation process. The external evaluation is performed by AVETAE. On the basis of the completed external evaluation procedure, the AVETAE issues a report, the integral part of which is the proposal on the quality level assessment proposal. The institution's quality assessment after the external evaluation procedure of the institution can be: very high level of quality, high level of quality, satisfactory level of quality, and unsatisfactory level of quality. The decision on the assessment of the institution's quality level is made for a period of five to seven years.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

There are currently no mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the take up and success of validation practices.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

The Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017-2021 (AVETAE, 2017) prepared by the Agency for VET and Adult Education strongly focuses on the promotion of the validation of prior knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning, in particular for adult learners. The validation of non-formal and informal learning is described as an important motivational factor for active inclusion of individuals in lifelong learning. In that sense the Strategic Framework formulates Priority 4 as “Increasing the consciousness about the importance of non-formal and informal ways of learning, acknowledgment and validation of knowledge and skills acquired in those ways.” The Framework defines actions and in particular those activities aimed at communicating with different target groups that should lead to the achievement of Priority 4 and its four strategic goals.

However, since validation procedures and the validation system in adult education still need to be developed, the promotion of validation opportunities per se remains limited. The credibility of the promotional activities depends on the existence of the legal framework and guidelines that set the initial framework for validation procedures that can be promoted to wider public.

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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

This report is part of the 2023 update of the [European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). The inventory provides a comprehensive overview of validation practices across Europe, covering 32 systems in EU-27 Member States and EFTA countries.

The European inventory is the product of a long-standing cooperation of the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF on the field. The inventory was endorsed by the [Council recommendation of 2012](#) on validation and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.

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