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European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



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

COUNTRY REPORT:
KOSOVO

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1 Introduction

The Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) is an important instrument in the broad development policy of a qualified labour force in a country. In Kosovo it is at a relatively early stage, as it is implemented on a small scale. It has the necessary mechanisms and instruments, in terms of legal infrastructure and skilled human resources, to extend the process to benefit individuals in need of the VNFIL services. The VNFIL system which has been established in Kosovo aims to upskill the labour force appropriately and increase the employment rates, and it is defined as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

The Law No. 03 / L-060 on National Qualifications in the Republic of Kosovo, passed in 2008, aims to improve the assessment of qualifications, including preparations for RPL. This law was followed by the endorsement of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2011 and the development of the first Administrative Instructions issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in 2014 with the guidelines on the benefits and utilisation of the RPL. In 2017 a comprehensive and detailed policy document on the RPL was devised and set out the grounds for further work, such as the 2019 Administrative Instruction containing more details of the institutional accreditation processes and completing the legal basis needed for the implementation of the RPL.

During the last three years, several handbooks and guidelines were produced to train and prepare the whole network of RPL professionals, institutions, businesses and civil society organisations (CSOs). Several capacity-building activities and awareness-raising activities were organised with the support of development projects implemented by the DVV International (DVVI), Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency (LuxDev) through European Union (EU) funds (LuxDev/EU), as well as the EU and Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) project 'Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs' (ALLED) implemented by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

Therefore, the legislation for the RPL includes the general principles, responsibilities and clear procedures for the implementation of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, at all levels of the NQF, including not only vocational education and training (VET) but also higher education (HE), with the exception of general education (GE). Due to the country specifics, priority has been given to the VET sector over HE, and specifically to Continuous VET (CVET), in order to support the individuals' (mainly adults¹) entry into or progress in the labour market, given the high unemployment rates and the underdeveloped labour market. Furthermore, the RPL can be applied only by the institutions accredited by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA), in line with the clear legal framework which exists for the accreditation of institutions for the implementation of the RPL in VET, therefore the quality assurance (QA) mechanisms are also in place.

The map of the main stakeholders in Kosovo involved in the design, implementation and QA of the VNFIL processes is composed of various governmental institutions, but also other institutions which support the process of the VNFIL development. The key stakeholders are the: MEST – which has the key role to approve the policy and legal basis on VNFIL; NQA – which, as one of the key and most central institutions, is leading the policy-making design and implementation of the VNFIL system within VET, also due to their role as the main body responsible for the NQF implementation, and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) – which is responsible for the implementation of RPL in the HE sector. Other contributing stakeholders are the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK), the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the Ministry of Healthcare, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, etc., national and international Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI), public and private universities and VET providers, as well as CSOs. Additional contributing key stakeholders are projects and international development initiatives implemented by LuxDev/EU, ETF, DVVI, ADA, etc, who are providing support with their international experience and technical assistance.

¹ Adult Education is part of CVET in Kosovo, because even though the age group that can enter CVET are people of 16+ years of age who missed their chance to enter formal long-term education, such as general high school or vocational school, or those who need requalification most CVET learners are adults.

Hence, taking into consideration all of these developments and preparations, the system was ready and had all the legal infrastructure, the mechanisms for implementation, the QA of the process, the relevant human capacities, and the RPL implementation for individuals benefiting from the RPL started in 2022.

2 The national perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

In Kosovo, the process of designing the VNFIL system started with concrete steps in 2008 with the approval of the Law No. 03 / L-060 on National Qualifications in the Republic of Kosovo. According to this law and to the secondary legislation which followed afterwards, VNFIL in Kosovo is defined as the RPL. The VNFIL system which has been established in Kosovo aims at upskilling the labour force and increasing the employment rates.

One of the objectives of the Law on National Qualifications is to improve the assessment of qualifications, including preparations for RPL. As defined in Article 2 of the Law, *'The RPL refers to the process of evaluation of knowledge, skills and competencies that an individual has acquired earlier through formal, non-formal and informal learning. This practical knowledge can be used to give opportunities to the individual to advance or be exempt from a part of the course or credits towards the qualification'*. Similarly, in the 2013 Law on Adult Education and Training in the Republic of Kosovo, dated 21.01.2013, there is exactly the same definition of the RPL in Article 2 'Definitions'.

The National Qualifications Law was followed by the development of the first Administrative Instructions No. 31/2014 *'On the Recognition of Prior Learning'*, which determine the general principles, responsibilities and procedures to be applied in the implementation of RPL, including formal, non-formal and informal learning within the scope of the NQF. Then, with the support of the ETF, in 2017 a *'Policy Document on the RPL'* was developed, which comprises a very thorough and detailed roadmap for the development of the RPL in the country, focusing specifically on the implementation of the validation in VET covering both Initial VET (IVET) and Continuous VET (CVET). However, as CVET was given priority in Kosovo, the secondary legislation and guidelines for accreditation (and preparatory steps for accreditation) of the VET providers offering CVET have been developed first.

Compared to the 2018 European inventory on VNFIL in Kosovo, a number of developments took place also taking into consideration the hindrances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the Administrative Instruction No. 09/2019 on the Criteria and Procedures for the Accreditation of Institutions that Implement RPL in Kosovo was updated. This instruction details the principles, responsibilities of institutions, procedures for accreditation of VET providers, processes, criteria, financing and QA mechanism prescribed, complementing and completing the primary legal basis needed for the RPL implementation. This constitutes the main regulatory framework of the RPL².

In order to guarantee a quality-assured process, as prescribed in the Administrative Instructions of 2014 and 2019, the RPL can be offered only by the institutions accredited by NQA. A clear legal framework exists for the accreditation of institutions for the implementation of the RPL in VET. In order to be accredited for the implementation of the RPL, institutions must meet a series of specific criteria such as internal QA mechanisms, specific equipment, internal policy, staff requirements, etc. The accreditation procedure and criteria that must be fulfilled by the provider that applies for implementing the RPL in VET, as well as the costs of the application to be considered and validated, are all defined in the legislation in force. (2021, NQA, Annual Report)

Validation is being used to strengthen the upskilling and adult learning policies, as it is stated in the most recent MEST Education Strategy 2022-2026 (MEST, 2022), which recognises a set of challenges such as the limited capacities of the VET providers to offer the RPL and the limited capacities of the NQA to validate and accredit qualifications and VET providers. In the Strategy it is stated *'For this purpose, the RPL should start to be implemented and the capacity of VET providers to implement adult learning and the RPL programmes should be raised.'* (p. 74) Its Action Plan includes a *Strategic objective 3 on Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning* which under point 3.5 *Specific objective 3.5: Improving supply and increasing participation in adult learning* lists an indicator on a number of VET

² All of these key documents can be found on the website of the National Qualifications Authority: <https://njmp.rks-gov.net/Documents/Index?idType=2>

providers that implement the RPL. There is an accompanying *Action 3.5.5: Continuous professional development of vocational teachers in VET providers for implementation of adult learning and the RPL*.

Therefore, in the framework of the RPL arrangements, priority has been given to the VET sector over HE, and specifically to CVET in order to support individuals' entry into or progress in the labour market, given the high unemployment rates and the underdeveloped labour market. The official recognition of their skills and competences through the validation is expected to support their entry into the labour market and consequently the employment rates.

The period since 2018 has been mostly a preparatory phase for all stakeholders who were working on two parallel pillars: 1) legal and management arrangements as well as capacity-building measures regarding *the accreditation of the VNFIL/RPL providers*, and 2) legal and management arrangements as well as capacity-building measures regarding *the RPL service provision for individuals*.

Hence, besides the aforementioned 2019 Administrative Instruction, several handbooks and guidelines were prepared for the RPL implementation to prepare, inform, and build capacities of institutions, providers, practitioners, future experts, businesses, and CSOs. A number of capacity-building activities and awareness-raising activities were organised with the support of development projects implemented by the DVVI and LuxDev/EU.

Regarding the financing and covering of costs, the VNFIL system in Kosovo is designed in such a way that the institutions applying for accreditation are expected to cover the costs by themselves. The costs of accreditation as an RPL provider can be considered quite high. Setting the price of the RPL service for the individual is left in the hands of the RPL provider. It depends on many factors, such as the type of qualification, demand, facilities and equipment needed, etc. At this stage of development, there is no individual learning account system or similar finance schemes in place to cover the cost. The only support that could be given is the support for vulnerable target groups who are part of the registered unemployed jobseekers in the employment offices.

According to the RPL legal framework in force, i.e. the 2014 Administrative Instruction on the RPL, Article 6, and the 2017 Policy document on the RPL, the target groups of VNFIL/RPL services are:

- adults who would like to return to learning;
- job seekers requiring recognition of skills acquired at work or in their community;
- candidates aiming at improving their qualifications;
- candidates looking to requalify;
- candidates holding certificates that are not recognised nationally; and,
- candidates who are aiming at obtaining a qualification as part of the NQF.

According to the 2017 Policy document on RPL, the VNFIL/RPL procedures for individuals or beneficiaries are organised into four stages:

1. *Information and identification* where the potential candidate is informed and guided on the RPL benefits, procedures and requirements.
2. *Documentation and preparation* take place after the candidates have decided to undergo the RPL procedure and have to collect and document evidence of their acquired and existing skills, knowledge and competencies. A portfolio is prepared with CV, certificates and / or relevant evidence.
3. *Assessment* is carried out by a commission and takes place once the complete evidence is submitted. The assessment procedure can be performed only for a complete module, not for parts of it.
4. *Certification* is the last stage of the RPL process for an individual and establishes whether the candidate fulfils, partially fulfils or does not fulfil the criteria needed for the assessment and the RPL certification.

These stages and the tasks of the RPL professionals (coordinator, mentor and internal and external assessors) in the RPL provider, are detailed and explained thoroughly in the 2017 Policy document on the RPL and additionally, in the guidebooks prepared for them.

2.2 Validation in education and training

Currently, the key VNFIL policy framework does not limit levels of qualification that can or cannot be acquired through the RPL, and the 2020 NQF Handbook allows for the RPL for all types of qualifications up to level 7 of the Kosovo Qualifications Framework (KQF). The current RPL legal framework includes the general principles, responsibilities and procedures for the implementation of the recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning, at all levels of the NQF, including qualifications that can be acquired through VET and HE, with the exception of secondary GE. However, as stated in many reports, it seems that the GE and HE subsectors have other priorities for the moment and that VNFIL in the VET subsector is in high demand by the labour market. Therefore, the HE education subsector has not advanced further with policy and QA mechanisms for the VNFIL/RPL for HE qualifications. Similarly, GE was not ready to move ahead with the RPL, as the development of a learning outcome-based curriculum was initiated in 2011 and started the full-scale implementation in 2017 (NQA, 2019).

In the VET subsector, which is under the auspices of the NQA, the national Policy document for the RPL in VET (2017) was developed with the support of the European Training Foundation (ETF), in close consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including the MEST, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW), EARK as well as public and private providers. It explains in detail the steps to be followed and requirements to be fulfilled in order to establish quality VNFIL/RPL services within the RPL providers. This document was also used to support the NQA to develop or update their own VNFIL/RPL policies, instructions and guidelines for the providers and other organisations interested in accreditation as providers by the NQA, to accredit the qualifications/modules they would like to offer via the RPL, and to offer quality VNFIL/RPL services for individuals. The accreditation of an institution as an RPL provider and the validation of a specific qualification to be offered are two separate processes which can be done in parallel as they are both preconditions for the certification of individuals through the RPL.

Within the VET subsector, more focus was given to CVET due to the main target group of the VNFIL/RPL which comprises mainly adults. The NQA has accredited seven (7) Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) as VNFIL/RPL providers, four (5) of which are private and two (2) are public providers (in Mitrovica and Gjilan). Therefore, in terms of the public providers, the VTCs under the EARK have taken the leading role, as they provide training to registered jobseekers. The VTCs are the only providers that offer CVET and all the RPL awarded qualifications are based on the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and the certification is done according to the KQF. Below are the qualifications offered by the accredited RPL service providers:

- Welding in VTC Mitrovica (2021) (under EARK)
- Welding in VTC Gjilan (2021) (under EARK)
- Hairdressing in a private provider (2021)
- Hairdressing in a private provider (2021)
- Electrician in the Kosovo Energetic Corporation Training Centre (2022)
- Hairdressing in a private provider (2022)

- Bricklayer in a private provider (2023)

In Kosovo, the RPL service provision for individuals started in 2022 in one of the private providers.

Since 2013, in Kosovo, there are second-chance opportunities for adults to be reintegrated in education and training based on the Law on Adult Education and Training in the Republic of Kosovo, dated 21.01.2013. Article 2 of this law, includes a definition of the RPL:

Recognition of prior learning - the process of evaluating the knowledge, skills or wider competences which an individual has previously acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning. This practical knowledge shall be used to give possibility of advancement to a person or exemptions from part of a course or qualification or credit towards a qualification.

This law was followed by two MEST Administrative Instructions, the first one No. 12/2014 on the Age Exceptions on Enrolment in Education and Training for Adults and the second one, No. 6/2016 on the Conditions and Criteria of Candidate Assessment in Adult Education.

The purpose of the 2014 Administrative Instruction 'is to adjust the excluded age of attendees, which can benefit from the compensatory education, I (first) and II (second) level of ISCED — grades 1-9 and at the secondary higher education, III (third) level of ISCED in public/private schools.' These are therefore offers or qualifications in compulsory and general education for adults. However, Article 3 on 'Criteria for reintegration' limits the cases and, as a result, the opportunities for integration to special situations of very vulnerable groups:

1. Student, attendee who has lost only one school year, can be enrolled in adult education, compensatory education only in special cases, such as:
 - 1.1 Stay in hospital;
 - 1.2 Stay in prison;
 - 1.3 Stay in a shelter;
 - 1.4 Victims of violence, trafficking;
 - 1.5 Disabilities.
2. Registration of special cases is carried out after the candidate brings the relevant documentation to school.

The 2014 Administrative Instruction therefore excludes any other situation that resulted in adults dropping out of education and training.

On the other hand, the 2016 Administrative Instruction gives an opportunity to undergo the State Matura exams to all adult candidates who have received an equivalent diploma outside the Republic of Kosovo. Hence, referring to the Law on Adult Education and Training, extending the services for compulsory and general education for adults would be potentially an important development for the validation system.

2.3 Validation in the labour market

The VNFIL/RPL in the labour market in Kosovo is also closely linked with the developments in VET in terms of standards, qualifications and / or training offers. A new development comes from the EARK which has introduced the RPL as an additional Active Labour Market Measure (ALMM) for registered jobseekers to support their access to the labour market or their career development. In this regard, with the support of LuxDev, the related manuals have been reviewed and also a module within the existing IT system has been developed to facilitate the operationalisation and reporting of RPL as ALMM. The features of this new module are presented in chapter 12.

Furthermore, the 8 public VTCs, under EARK, provide non-formal training/qualifications and offer validation of knowledge and skills to candidates, in the form of an accelerated course, by testing the knowledge and skills of the trainees prior to enrolment. However, these validation processes at the VTCs do not yet lead to the formal certification of candidates. This validation track is, for the time being, therefore not formally recognised by the NQA. The VTCs and the NQA still need to find agreement on the procedures for non-formal qualifications to enable the RPL in this sub-sector.

Even though the approach to the VNFIL/RPL policy and implementation in Kosovo is generally inclusive to all categories of providers, the involvement of enterprises and other types of organisations in the

provision of RPL services is currently low, as they are required to apply for accreditation as recognised RPL providers. Once accredited, they can award RPL certificates included in the National Vocational Qualification (NVQs), similar to any other provider. Further developments still have to be observed in the near future, following the commencement of the RPL provision in the recently accredited institutions.

2.4 Validation in the third sector

Currently, there are no special VNFIL/RPL arrangements for third sector providers. CSOs are considered as any other potential RPL provider and, regardless of their legal status, will be able to offer the RPL services if they fulfil the accreditation criteria, go through the application process and implement the QA procedures set by the legal framework and implemented by the NQA. Currently in Kosovo, it is possible to implement the RPL/VNFIL only for one type of qualifications, the NVQs. Therefore, there are no different approaches that have been developed for other types of qualifications.

During the preparatory period for the VNFIL implementation in Kosovo, CSOs participated in all the awareness-raising and capacity-building activities. Many of the CSOs involved in training activities are therefore informed about the RPL procedures and have trained their personnel to undergo the accreditation process. However, currently, there is only one organisation that has applied for accreditation as an RPL provider.

Within the third sector, the RPL provision and the QA mechanisms are regulated by the Administrative Decisions (2014 and 2019) as specified above. All providers are obliged to comply with the process and arrangements prescribed in this regulation. However, it is too early to report on outcomes, as there is no experience yet of the RPL certification.

3 Links to the national qualifications framework (NQF)

The NQF in Kosovo was established in 2008 by the Law 03/L060 on National Qualifications and endorsed in 2011 by the Governing Board of the NQA, the responsible institution for the development and strategic management of the NQF in the country. It includes all types and levels of qualifications and certifications and is structured in levels. Based on the European Qualification Framework (EQF), the KQF is designed as an eight-level framework intended to encompass qualifications and modules (parts of qualifications) acquired in all types of learning settings, i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning and in different subsectors such as GE, VET and HE.

As per Article 4 on the Scope and Structure of the KQF, point 4, the framework includes:

4.2 Qualifications awarded at all levels of the education and training system, including pre-university and university education and training programmes, adult education and training and lifelong learning;

4.2. Certification of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, including recognition of prior learning and candidate achievements.

Two objectives of the KQF, under Article 5, are relevant and directly related to the mission of the VNFIL/RPL:

1.4. promoting the development of lifelong learning, including the continuous development of adult skills.

1.8. increasing employment and learning opportunities for individuals, providing the basis for recognition and certification of learning and achievement.

The KQF recognises six types of qualifications:

- HE qualifications: designed according to the rules of the Bologna Framework;
- GE qualifications: designed according to the Kosovo Curriculum Framework;
- national combined qualifications: combined modules based on National Occupational Standards with outcomes related to the Kosovo Curriculum Framework;
- NVQs: designed according to national occupational standards;
- qualifications based on international standards: designed according to national standards from a country other than Kosovo or internationally recognised standards which have not (yet) been adopted as national standards in Kosovo; and
- tailored or customised qualifications: designed according to the operational needs of a particular organisation, agency or enterprise.

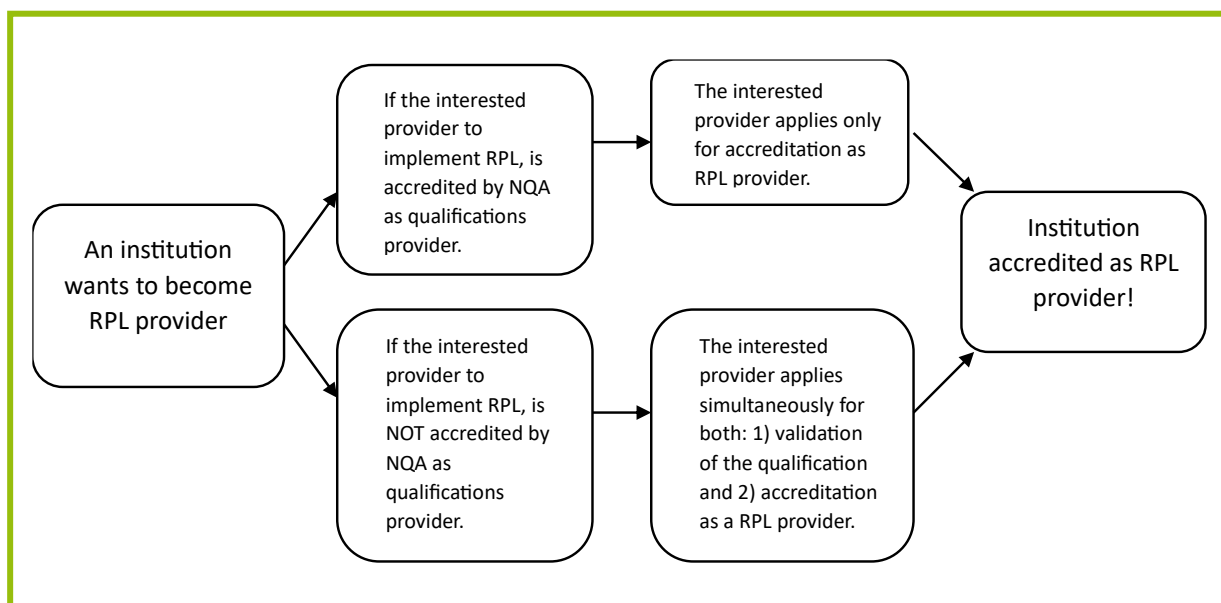
Currently, the validation arrangements refer only to NVQs of Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the KQF, which is in line with EQF. As stated earlier even though the existing national policy foresees that the HE qualifications and all types of qualifications can be obtained through the RPL, the QA procedures have only been developed for NVQs at the moment.

The VET and HE qualifications are developed in a modular structure. Therefore, all types of qualifications in the KQF other than GE qualifications are modular and have a credit value. One of the key objectives of the KQF is to enable the creation of a credit system, which allows for the accumulation and transfer of credits and learning outcomes between different learning contexts or systems, including between formal, non-formal and informal education and training settings. The credit system for the national combined qualifications, NVQs, qualifications based on international standards, and tailored qualifications is aligned to the ECVET system and 1 ECVET credit represents 10 notional hours. One

module needs to have at least 1 ECVET credit to be approved and registered in the NQF (Danuza, 2019).

The linkage between the KQF and the VNFIL/RPL implementation in the country is that according to the current legal framework in place, (i.e. Law on National Qualifications, Administrative Instruction No. 31/2014 on RPL and Administrative Instruction No. 09/2019 on the Criteria and Procedures for the Accreditation of Institutions that Implement RPL in Kosovo), the VNFIL/RPL procedures 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 the NQA for VET institutions, and the KAA for HE institutions, to implement the validation.

Schema of the accreditation process by the NQA



The Administrative Instruction on RPL (No 31/2014) foresees that validation can result in: entry into a qualification/programme, award of partial (module), and an award of full qualifications/programme(s). Additionally, in Article 7, point 4.2, the Instruction stipulates that the assessment (validation) is implemented according to learning outcomes and assessment criteria which are registered for modules or qualifications in the KQF. This is to say that the smallest unit for validation is a module, and micro-credentials are not yet foreseen in the system.

The certificates of the CVET qualifications that are awarded through VNFIL/RPL are equal to those acquired through the formal routes, up to level 5 of the KQF.

4 Standards and reference points

According to the NQF and the RPL legal framework in place, VET qualifications or modules can be approved and registered in the NQF only if they are based on occupational standards. Therefore, it is mandatory for all VET qualifications to have occupational standards as a starting point for the development of learning outcomes-based curricula and qualifications. (NQF Law, 2008; Administrative Instruction, 2014)

According to the Law on Vocational Education ‘Occupational standards are units to measure the extent to which an individual can meet the performance requirements of a particular profession or group of occupations in order to enter or advance within a profession or related professional field’ (NQF Handbook, 2020). In other words, a qualification, as a formal reflection of the professional skills of the qualified worker, is accepted at the national and international level and is based on the requirements of the individual to enter or progress within an occupation (i.e. based on the occupational standard). In turn, each qualification programme or curriculum is defined through a set of learning outcomes which indicate what the learner / candidate is expected to know and be able to do after successful completion of the module or the programme as a whole. The assessment for awarding VET qualifications must be carried out against the learning outcomes and the performance criteria which are specified in the qualification standard or curriculum. The VNFIL/RPL assessors evaluate competences referring to the qualification programme validated by NQA. Therefore, the qualification programmes are linked to occupations and the competencies are evaluated directly based on the learning outcomes identified in these programmes, developed based on occupational standards.

Therefore, occupational standards are considered as the backbone of each qualification as they are used as a primary source for identifying the modules and learning outcomes that should be included in each curriculum. Learning outcomes are the link between the qualification programme or curriculum and the occupational standard, as they describe in detail the skills and knowledge to be acquired by the learners at the end of the module.

Validated VET and non-formal qualifications, i.e. qualifications developed outside the formal education sectors, are included in the Kosovo Register of Qualifications (KRQ). To date, 193 VET qualifications have been validated and placed in the NQF, at levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 (ETF, 2023).

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

The map of the main stakeholders in Kosovo involved in the design, implementation and QA of the VNFIL processes is composed of various governmental institutions which either have sole responsibility for the process or share their responsibility with other institutions.

The role of the MEST is to approve the policy and legal basis of the VNFIL. In addition, it is also responsible for the implementation of the RPL in the GE sector and for the development of its QA mechanisms.

The NQA is an independent public institution established according to the Law No. 03/L-060 on National Qualifications. The NQA, as one of the key institutions, is leading the policy design and implementation of the VNFIL system in the country, also due to their role as the main institution responsible for the NQF implementation. The NQA is mainly responsible for the implementation of the RPL in the VET sector and for the development of its QA mechanisms. It accredits the VNFIL providers.

The KAA is responsible for the implementation of the RPL in the HE sector and for the development of its QA mechanisms.

The EARK is another important stakeholder in the RPL implementation as it deals first-hand with low-skilled individuals and vulnerable / marginalised target groups. The EARK applies a procedure similar to a skills audit called the 'Unemployment Card' for all registered jobseekers (unemployed or employed). During their contacts with the Employment Offices, the counsellors collect information on the registered jobseekers' personal data, qualifications, skills, additional training, family status, socio-economic status and other relevant data. The Unemployment Card is used by the counsellor to inform, guide and support the jobseekers about employment opportunities, career guidance, further qualifications or requalification options. However, further revisions of the Unemployment Card and capacity-building of the counsellors are needed to include the knowledge, skills and competences gained outside the formal system. (Danuza, 2019) EARK runs a network of VET Centres which deliver RPL as one of the active labour market measures.

Even though the governmental institutions have a key leading role, there are also other stakeholders who contribute more indirectly, such as the other line ministries (Finance, Healthcare, Trade and Industry, etc.) members of the Governing Councils of the NQA and KKA, national and international CCI, public and private universities, and VET providers. Additional contributions come from projects and international development initiatives implemented by the ETF, DVVI, ADA/ALLED, LuxDev, EU, etc., by providing support with their international experience and technical assistance.

The validation system was developed with the cooperation of all key stakeholders. There is definitely a good level of coordination between the main stakeholders in the field of the VNFIL, especially in the VET sector. One of the key established mechanisms of coordination is the Governing Council of the NQA which is composed of thirteen (13) members, approved by the Government of Kosovo, who represent ministries, social partners, and universities. The Governing Council of the NQA meets at least six (6) times a year.

6 The VNFIL service providers

The RPL can be applied only by the institutions accredited by the NQA. A clear legal framework exists for the accreditation of institutions for the implementation of the RPL in VET, which determines also the QA mechanisms. In order to be accredited as an RPL provider, institutions must meet a series of specific criteria such as internal QA mechanisms, specific equipment, etc. The accreditation criteria that must be fulfilled by the providers applying to implement the RPL in VET are defined in the legislation in force. The RPL implementing and/or applicant providers have to abide by the following key primary and secondary legislation:

- Law No. 03/L-060 on National Qualifications, 2008
- Administrative Instructions No. 31/2014 on RPL
- Administrative Instructions No. 35/2014 'on the Criteria and procedures for the Validation and Approval of National Qualifications and Accreditation of Institutions that provide qualifications in Kosovo'.
- Administrative Instructions No. 09/2019 'on the Criteria and procedures for the accreditation of institutions that implement RPL in Kosovo'

The most recent Administrative Instructions No. 09/2019, in Article 8 on Accreditation Criteria, specifies that applicant providers must demonstrate that they have: institutional structure and financial sustainability via a business plan or strategic development plan, financial report or financial proof, a document with internal policies and procedures for the RPL that contains the RPL process and procedures, approach and assessment and internal QA and monitoring mechanisms, procedures for candidates' right of appeal, confidentiality and personal data management, costing of the process and adequate personnel for the implementation of RPL, etc. These are just a few of the conditions for the applicant RPL provider³. The RPL providers interviewed state that the accreditation process is quite demanding in terms of the human resources and documents needed but they do not perceive the criteria as impossible to fulfil. The interviewed providers consider the RPL as an additional and needed service offer to be added to their mandate.

During the past three years (2019-2022), a lot of effort was made to inform all the potential RPL service providers about the RPL implementation. Preparatory steps have been taken by the NQA in cooperation with development projects LuxDev and ADA/ALLED to prepare the VNFIL/RPL service providers to start implementation, including the development of the Accreditation Management System (e-accreditation) to assist the RPL providers in the process of accreditation by the NQA.

The place of the VNFIL/RPL services in the organisational mandate and organisational development strategies of the providers interviewed is quite relevant. The private providers see the VNFIL services as a necessary offer to fulfil the labour market needs, that is why they invest in the accreditation costs. Similarly, for the public VTCs, the VNFIL/RPL services are embedded in their core mandate (strategic priorities) by their managing institution, EARK. The challenge, stated by the public VTCs already implementing the VNFIL/RPL services, is mostly related to human resources. The VTC staff qualified to offer and manage the VNFIL/RPL services are doing these processes in addition to their other tasks and without any financial support when they travel to other VTCs to be assessors.

³ Please see Chapter 9 'Quality assurance' for details of the RPL Accreditation Criteria, according to Administrative Instructions No. 09/2019

The RPL providers' e-accreditation system

In 2022, the NQA with the assistance of the LuxDev project launched an online platform Accreditation Management System (e-accreditation) to assist the RPL providers in the process of accreditation by the NQA. Through this platform, the institutions interested in acquiring the accreditation can now apply for it online. The aim of this platform is to facilitate the application process for the potential RPL providers, but also to make the assessment process more effective for the NQA staff.

The screenshot displays the official website of the National Qualification Authority (NQA) of Kosovo. The header includes the NQA logo and navigation links: Home, Documents, e-akreditimi (highlighted with a red circle), News, Trainings, Contact, and English. A banner image of a worker in a hard hat is accompanied by a text box stating: "If you have a profession but have no evidence to prove it, you can do it through the Recognition of Prior Learning." Below this, a paragraph explains that users must first create an account on the eKosova state platform by clicking "Register" to complete their application.

The main content area features two forms under the "e-accreditation" heading:

- Login Form:** Includes fields for Username and Password, a Login button, and a link for "Not registered? Register".
- Register Form:** Includes fields for Firstname (Emri), Lastname (Mbiemri), Username (Emri i përdoruesit), Municipality (Prishtinë), Institution name (Emri i institucionit), Institution address (Adresa), Email, and Password (Fjalëkalimi). It features a Register button and a link for "Are you registered? Login".

Source: Official website of NQA <https://njmp-eakreditimi.rks-gov.net/>

Continuous training for the staff of the NQA on the operationalisation of the RPL system is being delivered, followed by actions related to information on procedures for the providers and training for future RPL practitioners, accompanied by the development and publishing of relevant manuals for accreditation and evaluation of the RPL providers. Several informative sessions have been organised with all national VET institutions on the promotion and operationalisation of the RPL services and the accreditation process. Training programmes and materials have been developed for the RPL mentors, coordinators and assessors. In 2022, 90 RPL practitioners took part in the training sessions.

Based on the aforementioned 2019 Administrative Instruction, four (4) handbooks and guidelines were prepared for the RPL implementation:

- NQF Handbook, with a chapter on RPL (2020).
- Guidelines for the experts who evaluate the institutions for the implementation of the RPL during the accreditation process (2022).
- Guidelines for the interested providers that apply for accreditation for RPL implementation (2022).
- Guidelines and a programme for the coordinators, mentors and evaluators of RPL (2018).

Using these guidelines and handbooks⁴ and in order to prepare, inform, and build capacity of institutions, providers, practitioners and future experts, a number of capacity-building activities and awareness-raising activities were organised with the support of development projects implemented by the DVVI and LuxDev/EU.

Data on the VNFIL capacity-building

	2020	2021	2022
No. of capacity-building activities/workshops	1	2	6
No. of VNFIL practitioners trained	16	17	109

Source: NQA 2023

Furthermore, training sessions were organised for the directors of seven VTCs, as future RPL providers, on the implementation and operationalisation of the RPL as ALMM. A digital platform was developed to facilitate the operationalisation and reporting of the RPL as ALMM, and 58 staff members of the VTCs were trained to use this digital system in the near future.

⁴ All guidelines and handbooks are available on the NQA website <https://njmp.rks-gov.net/Documents/Index?idType=3>

7 Information and guidance

7.1 Information, outreach and promotion

As the arrangements and preparatory steps in terms of human resources needed were not yet in place, over the past three years there were no media campaigns to target different groups or potential beneficiaries of the VNFIL/RPL services. However, now that the legal basis is finalised and there are capacity-building activities for the implementing institutions and providers to start the RPL services for interested individuals, the NQA in coordination with LuxDev has planned a broad awareness-raising campaign to start very soon.

Also, the NQA supported by the LuxDev /015 Project 'Support VET Reform in Kosovo', organised information sessions with all potential VNFIL/RPL providers and stakeholders from the sector, CSOs, partner institutions, etc. informing them about the VNFIL/RPL arrangements, benefits and opportunities.

Data on VNFIL Information and awareness-raising

	2021			2022		
No. of awareness-raising activities/workshops	1			3		
No. of participants reached through the activities	29 VET Providers	0 Businesses	6 CSO-s	24 VET Providers	97 Businesses	15 CSO-s

Source: NQA 2023

7.2 Advice and guidance⁵

Based on the VNFIL/RPL legal framework, the provision of advice and guidance is an integral part of the VNFIL/RPL arrangements in Kosovo, and is the responsibility of the accredited RPL providers. Advice and guidance should be offered to the candidates by the RPL practitioners in the first two phases of the RPL process: 1) the information and identification phase, and 2) the documentation and preparation phase. For this, the coordinators and mentors are expected to be in close contact with the candidates to provide information, advice and guidance.

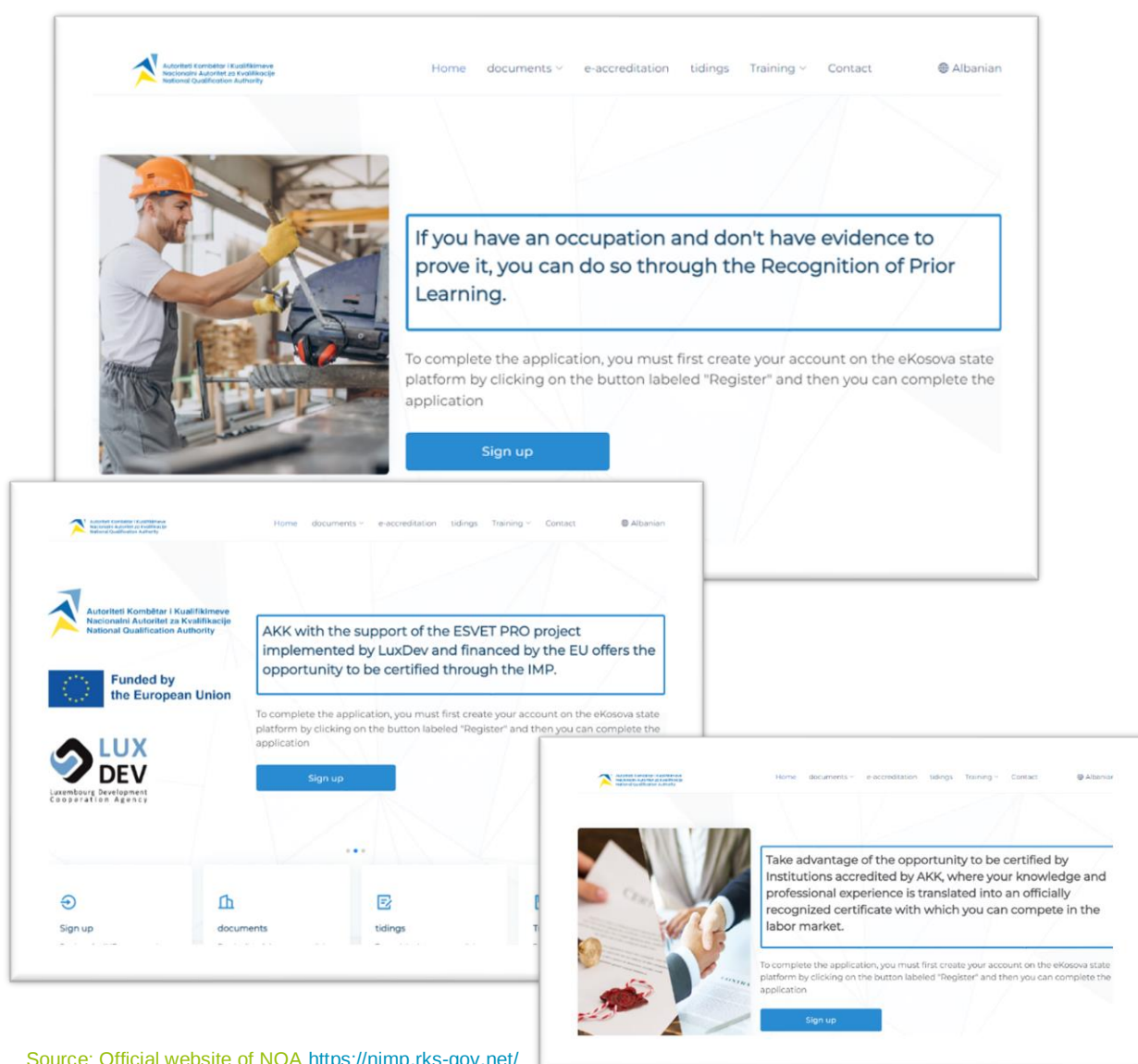
More concretely, during the information and identification phase the aim of advice and guidance is to inform candidates on the potential benefits of the RPL, the preconditions for registration in the RPL, requirements, procedures, timelines, obligations, costs, type of certificate, etc. Whereas, in the documentation and preparation phase, the aim is to support the preparation for the VNFIL process, identification and documentation of existing competences, preparation of the candidates' portfolio, linking the candidate's skills and competences with the VNFIL standards/reference points, self-assessment of competences. More details on the assigned roles and tasks of all the RPL practitioners will be given in the next chapter. (NQA, Policy and Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning in the Republic of Kosovo, 2017)

⁵ Lifelong/career guidance includes 'a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.' Guidance is in fact an umbrella that encompasses counselling as well as activities such as informing, coaching, teaching, assessment and advocacy (See, The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2014). Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: Glossary, <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/elgpn-tools-no.-2-lig-glossary/> and Council of the European Union, (2008). Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf).

Additionally, as part of the services of the EARK, in each employment office, there are trained personnel who provide information and guidance on the opportunities of the VNFIL/RPL services, as part of their offer to unemployed jobseekers and through the ALMMs.

Online pre-registration for individuals as RPL candidates

In 2022, the NQA with the assistance of the LuxDev project launched an online pre-registration platform for individuals who express an interest in a specific qualification. In the pre-registration form, the interested individuals have to enter data on their gender, age, region, qualification needed, etc. The aim of this pre-registration for individuals is to create an overview of the priority qualifications to be accredited in the NQF and introduced as RPL (or VNFIL) offers, and to match the individuals with the VTC in their region, if needed. Preliminary information is that more than 350 persons have already registered on the platform.



8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The team of validation practitioners in an RPL service provider includes the RPL coordinator, the RPL mentor, and the RPL evaluators (internal and external). In the current legal framework, there are no specific descriptions regulating the role of validation practitioners. The only document with the specification of roles is the 2017 Policy document where the key tasks are somehow combined with qualification requirements.

The key tasks and overall roles of each position are as follows:

1. *The RPL coordinator* is the key responsible person for: coordinating the RPL process, and the RPL QA mechanisms, communicating with the personnel involved in every aspect of the RPL, inside and outside of the provider, participating in the activities related to the professional development of the RPL network; informing the candidates regarding the description of the documents, testimonials and portfolio; supporting the candidates in all stages of the RPL process, through the provision of the necessary information, advice and instructions.
2. *The RPL mentor* is responsible for: mentoring the candidates during the process, supporting the candidates in terms of rights and responsibilities upon entry into the process; providing advice and supporting the candidates in the development of a portfolio with the necessary evidence on the expected results; communicating with other institutions to ensure access to technical expertise in order to assess the reliability of testimonies; ensuring that all modules and/or qualification criteria are met by the candidates before the final assessment is carried out.
3. *The RPL assessors* are responsible for the evaluation of learning outcomes, ensuring that the candidates are fully informed and that the process is transparent; ensuring that there are adequate conditions, tools, space and equipment for assessment; ensuring that the candidates own the results of the RPL process, and that the candidates are involved in the planning phase of assessment; promoting and inspiring confidence and a positive atmosphere for the candidate during the assessment; and providing accurate and constructive feedback related to the evaluation results in terms of qualification criteria and assessment. Furthermore the assessors should have no personal interest in the result of validation, but are advocates of objectivity and impartiality; act ethically, objectively and according to the code of conduct; are able to issue impartial, genuine, reliable decisions and in a timely manner regarding the results of the assessment; respect confidentiality according to the policies of the provider as well as based on applicable laws; do not have any conflict of interest with the candidates or the provider; and draft the final report about the evaluation process of the RPL, for each module, attaching evidence to support the results of evaluation.

The internal assessor is responsible for overseeing the RPL process and ensuring that it is carried out according to the qualification criteria, as well as according to the laws, policies and procedures and the agreement between the providers and has the main responsibility for providing the documentation related to the evaluation.

The external assessor has the task of ensuring that the knowledge, skills and competencies of the candidates match the criteria of working life and ensuring that the candidates understand the requirements of the operating environment of the profession in question.

8.2 Qualification requirements

The current legal framework does not specify qualification requirements for validation practitioners. There is one mandatory requirement in the Administrative Instruction No. 09/2019 – that the RPL practitioners have to be trained by the NQA.

The only document with specifications is the 2017 Policy document where the qualification requirements are the same in all sectors. The necessary knowledge, skills and competencies of the validation practitioners defined in the policy are as follows:

The RPL coordinator must:

- have knowledge of the education system;
- be able to advise and guide candidates;
- have knowledge about the deadlines and costs;
- have knowledge of the evaluation and assessment process;
- draft and approve the RPL guidelines and policies for his/her respective provider;
- have information regarding documents, testimonies and portfolios; and
- support candidates during all stages of the RPL process, with advice and guidance.

The RPL mentor must:

- be from the relevant professional field for which they offer mentoring to candidates;
- have knowledge of the evaluation process and the collection of evidence;
- understand the RPL process as a whole and be able to advise and guide;
- have knowledge of the VET system;
- have knowledge of the labour market;
- have knowledge of professional standards and validated qualifications, by including relevant learning outcomes; and
- be able to support candidates before and after the assessment phase, providing them with all necessary information, advice and instructions.

The RPL assessor must:

- have knowledge and broad understanding of the qualification criteria (and the modules within it) and the evaluation criteria;
- be able to connect the qualification criteria with real work processes;
- be qualified in the relevant field in which the candidate seeks to be certified;
- have knowledge of QA procedures;
- be able to evaluate the evidence provided (portfolio) and seek additional information regarding the expected results of the qualification (results of learning);
- have the appropriate knowledge and skills to implement the assessment methods appropriate for the RPL;
- have the appropriate knowledge and skills to assess the exclusion of modules;
- have the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out the evaluation of partial qualification; and

- have the right knowledge and skills to provide support and advice after the assessment has been completed.

8.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

According to the most recent Administrative Instruction 09/2019, Article 8 on Accreditation Criteria⁶, one of the criteria for the VET providers to be accredited as RPL providers is to have adequate staff for the implementation of the RPL. The staff involved in the RPL process should undergo mandatory training from the NQA, to be able to operate the RPL process.

Earlier, in the Administrative Instruction 31/2014, Article 14 on Training and Professional Development of the RPL implementers (i.e. practitioners) states that the providers should ensure that they support training and development of all the RPL practitioners in line with the work of the provider, so that they understand the main concepts, processes and benefits of the RPL, and are able to review and analyse RPL models, etc. It further states that this training should be registered and when necessary certified as part of the self-assessment of the RPL provider.

Therefore, during the period 2018-2022, the NQA has developed the *Guidelines and training programme for the coordinators, mentors and evaluators of RPL* (2018) and delivered several training sessions for 90 RPL practitioners (mentors, coordinators and assessors). Additionally, to assure sustainability in the provision of training, 18 senior trainers were trained. In the future, they will provide the further delivery of training to the RPL providers. When the implementation of the RPL commences in VET, the system will have to have enough trainers.

⁶ Please see Chapter 9 Quality Assurance for details of the RPL Accreditation Criteria, according to Administrative Instructions No. 09/20190

9 Quality assurance

According to the NQF regulatory framework in force, the VNFIL processes in HE and VET are subject to the same QA procedures as the formal learning routes, while the standards of QA in terms of quality criteria and preconditions should be specific and developed by the institution responsible for QA, i.e. the NQA for VET and the KAA for HE. The principles of QA apply also to the VNFIL/RPL regarding the presence of the internal and external QA mechanisms. The internal QA is the responsibility of the accredited institution whereas the external QA of the VNFIL/RPL services in the VET and HE subsectors is the responsibility of the NQA or the KAA, respectively.

With regard to VET, in 2017 the NQA developed the Policy document on the VNFIL/RPL where, among a number of principles and procedures described, there were also QA and monitoring/reporting mechanisms. Based on this document, in 2019 the MEST introduced the Administrative Instruction No. 09/2019 on the Criteria and Procedures for the Accreditation of Institutions that Implement RPL, but with a focus on providers of education and training, validation or certification for national professional qualifications of NQF levels 1-5 (Article 7).

This Administrative Instruction includes two articles on the mandatory QA mechanisms. The first is Article 8 (point 1.3) on Accreditation Criteria, where it is mandatory for the applicant institution to have a Document for Internal Policies and Procedures for the RPL that contains, among others, also a) Internal QA Mechanisms and b) Monitoring Mechanisms (see the box below).

Article 8: Accreditation Criteria

1. To be accredited an institution applying for the implementation of RPL must meet the criteria and provide evidence in accordance with Policies and Procedures for the RPL:
 - 1.1. Institutional structure and financial sustainability (business plan or strategic development plan, financial report or financial proof);
 - 1.2. Document for Internal Policies and Procedures for the RPL that contains:
 - 1.2.1. RPL process and procedures;
 - 1.2.2. Information and identification;
 - 1.2.3. Documentation;
 - 1.2.4. RPL approach and assessment;
 - 1.2.5. Certification;
 - 1.2.6. Forms of candidate's support;
 - 1.2.7. Portfolio's content and structure: identification and organisation of the required evidence;
 - 1.2.8. Determining the rules of the combination of qualification modules and the number of credits that can be achieved through the RPL;
 - 1.2.9. Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms;
 - 1.2.10. Monitoring Mechanisms;
 - 1.2.11. Candidate's right and appeal procedures;
 - 1.2.12. Confidentiality and personal data management;
 - 1.2.13. Cost of the process;
 - 1.3. Adequate personnel for the implementation of the RPL such as:
 - 1.3.1. RPL Coordinator (responsible for the coordination of RPL)

- 1.3.2. RPL Mentor (responsible for supporting candidates during the RPL processes);
- 1.3.3. Internal Evaluator (responsible for the evaluation of RPL in the institution);
- 1.3.4. External Evaluator (responsible for the evaluation of RPL);
- 1.4. Coordinator, mentor, internal evaluator and external evaluator of the RPL should undergo training from the NQA for the implementation of the RPL;
- 1.5. Policies and Procedures (regulations, guidelines, manuals, etc.) and databases that prove the quality assurance and verification of candidate's achievements;
- 1.6. Policies and Procedures (regulations, guidelines, manuals, etc.) for evaluation and quality evaluation management;
- 1.7. Policies and Procedures (regulations, guidelines, manuals, etc.) for certification and quality management certification;
- 1.8. Policies and Procedures (regulations, guidelines, manuals, etc.) for professional staff development;
- 1.9. Policies and Procedures (regulations, guidelines, manuals, etc.) access and evaluation of candidates with special needs;
- 1.10. Policies and Procedures (regulations, guidelines, manuals, etc.) for the recognition and transfer of credits obtained from the candidates;
- 1.11 Evidence that the assessment will take place in a safe environment and healthy environment;
- 1.12. Capacities for the assessment of specific qualifications such as:
 - 1.12.1. Necessary space for assessing qualifications and modules;
 - 1.12.2. Required resources (equipment and expendable materials) for the qualification assessment;
 - 1.12.3. Other special requirements for specific qualifications.
- 1.13 The qualification of mentors, internal and external evaluators should be professional and adequate for the relevant qualification;
- 1.14. The applicant institution must provide a legal contract made with staff for the period required for accreditation;
- 1.15. Institutions that are not accredited by the NQA for the provision, assessment and certification of national professional qualifications validated in the NQA, in addition to the criteria to paragraph 1 of Article 8 with all the sub-paragraphs, must also meet the criteria for validation and approval of national qualifications defined by the legislation in force;
- 1.16. Applying institutions must demonstrate the fulfilment of the criteria set by the NQA, through the self-assessment process and relevant documents.

Source: Administrative Instructions No. 09/2019

From the interviews with the RPL providers and EARK officials, it was stated that they are obliged to and they use feedback questionnaires for the beneficiaries, as part of their internal QA system for RPL. However, the NQA officials stated that even though it is a legal requirement, they are not always able to check this element of the implementation process, due to challenges with human resources.

The second is Article 21 on Monitoring, clearly specifying the procedure and the mandatory actions from both the NQA as external QA supervisor at the national level and the accredited provider.

Article 21 Monitoring

1. The NQA has the right reserved to monitor the accredited institution at any time with or without notice.
2. The accredited institution should submit to the NQA the annual self-evaluation report for the previous year by 31 January.
3. If the institution does not submit the self-evaluation report within the specified time limit, the NQA notifies the institution to submit the self-evaluation report within 30 calendar days.
4. If after notification the institution does not submit the self-evaluation report, the accreditation is revoked.
5. The NQA has the right to request additional evidence if needed.

Source: Administrative Instruction No. 09/2019 on the Criteria and Procedures for the Accreditation of Institutions that Implement RPL

Regarding the QA of the VNFIL/RPL services to be provided to individuals/candidates, the three aforementioned guidelines⁷ for the VNFIL/RPL accredited providers and the RPL practitioners which were produced and used for training address the assessment process, tools and methods; assessment criteria and learning outcomes; appeals procedure; advice and guidance; identification, documentation, and certification procedures.

While the developments in VET are highly positive, the KAA, on the other hand, has not progressed with the development of criteria for accreditation in HE, and currently there are no interventions planned in that sector.

⁷ Guidelines for the experts who evaluate the institutions for the implementation of the RPL during the accreditation process (2022); Guidelines for the interested providers that apply for accreditation for RPL implementation (2022); Guidelines and programme for the coordinators, mentors and evaluators of RPL (2018)

10 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

10.1 Funding

According to the legal framework in force, the VNFIL/RPL procedures for individual candidates are set through standard funding agreements between the RPL providers and RPL candidates, based on the implementation procedure for the assessment of modules, qualifications or programmes. Specific funding methods are not defined, except for being regulated by Article 16 (Taxes and fees) of the 2019 Administrative Instruction. It states that all the costs for: 1. Validation of qualifications/modules; 2. Costs for the review of the application for validation and accompanying documentation; 3. Fees and payments for the accreditation of institutions; 4. Costs of the application review for accreditation and accompanying documentation based on the function of the institution; and 5. Payment of hiring experts in the validation and accreditation, etc. are pre-established and take into consideration all the possible scenarios in terms of types of institutions and validation, accreditation or re-accreditation needs.

According to the Administrative Instruction 2019 on the Criteria and Procedures for the Accreditation of Institutions that Implement RPL, Article 16 on Taxes and Fees, the cost of the RPL accreditation for each institution is:

- EUR 300 first-time accreditation fee.
- EUR 130/location if the RPL services are performed in more than one location.
- EUR 1 for each candidate to be paid to the NQA when verifying the diploma and certificates.
- EUR 100/day for local experts, EUR 200/day for regional experts, EUR 400/day for international experts, part of the NQA's expert team in the accreditation process.

Based on Article 11.1, on the Composition of the expert team, the team shall consist of 3-5 independent experts (national or international) depending on the nature of the qualification or institution to be evaluated.

This accreditation cost of EUR 600 minimum⁸ can be considered quite high for many providers at the beginning of their experience with RPL provision. Therefore, the pricing of the RPL service for the individual is left in the hands of the RPL provider. It depends on many factors, such as the type of qualification, demand for the service, facilities and equipment needed etc. Candidates interested in applying for RPL at the accredited private providers will be responsible for covering the cost of the procedures themselves.

Currently, the VNFIL/RPL services offered to the unemployed jobseekers by the VTCs under EARK are covered by public funds and offered free of charge. According to the Education Strategy 2022-2026, there is public funding foreseen for the RPL in the budget planning by the MEST, as well as funding planned by the NQA as a regulatory body for the accreditation of the RPL providers.

10.2 Distribution of costs

Currently, there are only 6 providers accredited to implementing the validation, therefore, the cost of validation required from the individuals is not yet defined. However, as stated earlier, according to the regulatory framework, the RPL providers will individually calculate the cost of the RPL service according to the size of modules and qualifications to be assessed, experts engaged, equipment and consumables needed. In the case of the public VTCs, the cost of the RPL will be covered by public funding with the aim to support the unemployed.

⁸ The calculation is as follows: the first-time accreditation fee of EUR 300 + fees for min. 3 local experts at EUR 100/day each = EUR 600.

10.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

In the 2014 Administrative Instruction, Article 5, the expected benefits of the RPL for individuals, providers and employers are listed.

Article 5 Benefits of the RPL

1. Through RPL, providers should aim for the most possible benefits to individuals, providers and employers.
2. **Benefits for an individual include:**
 - 2.1 **Entry into a study programme as an alternative to regular entry requirements;**
 - 2.2 **Discounts or exemptions from modules in the training programmes, by reducing time spent in training and avoiding the unnecessary duplication of learning;**
 - 2.3 **Entry to the appropriate level of programme by identifying their level of knowledge and skills;**
 - 2.4 **Transfer from informal to formal learning;**
 - 2.5 **Increased opportunities toward the labour market;**
 - 2.6 **Increased self-confidence and motivation towards learning;**
 - 2.7 **Guidance on skills development;**
 - 2.8 **Identification of alternative ways to progress through RPL.**
 - 2.9 Benefits for providers include:
 - 2.9.1 Increasing relevance of qualifications/programmes for individual requirements, by making programmes more attractive for potential candidates;
 - 2.9.2 Adapting to the demands of the labour market;
 - 2.9.3 Increased access to VET through the participation of candidates with various work experiences;
 - 2.9.4 Improved students' retention, by means of identification of students' needs from the very beginning and support to guiding of beginners;
 - 2.9.5 Cooperation among stakeholders to create a better connection between education and training and employers.
3. Benefits for employers are:
 - 3.1 Knowledge and skills identification of employees, by enabling more effective planning of further development of skills and manpower;
 - 3.2 Official recognition of employees' skills according to national standards;
 - 3.3 Employees' motivation;
 - 3.4 Shortening of the time required for completion of teaching programmes, by reducing candidates' time outside the workplace.

Source: Administrative Instruction No. 31/2014 on Recognition of Prior Learning

Currently, as indicated in Chapter 10.4 below, only a small number of individuals have been certified through RPL. The RPL system is at the early stage of its implementation and benefits for individuals have not yet been documented. According to Article 8 of the 2019 Administrative Instruction, the monitoring of benefits shall be performed by the providers themselves. The NAQ, during their QA visits, has the task to control whether the monitoring is carried out. However, even though the RPL benefits are stated in the regulatory framework and acknowledged by all stakeholders through their engagement, there is currently not a national-level or centralised system in place to collect data or evidence of these benefits.

10.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

10.4.1 Validation trends

The past three years (2019-2022) were mostly preparatory years for the institutions responsible for the VNFIL development in Kosovo, with regard to the legal framework and capacity building of stakeholders. Furthermore, the limited capacities of the NQA resulted in low numbers of: the VNFIL providers, the qualifications offered and the individuals who have participated in the VNFIL activities. However, numbers are increasing, as the table below illustrates.

General data on the VNFIL implementation

General data on the VNFIL	2021	2022
No. of VNFIL providers	4	2
No. of VNFIL qualifications offered	4	2
No. of individuals certified through the VNFIL qualifications	0	24

Source: NQA 2023

10.4.2 Validation users

The work on the VNFIL/RPL database of individuals registered was expected to start in March 2023 and the complete elaborated data is therefore not yet available. According to preliminary data from the NQA, as the key institution managing the database, there are about 357 applicants, out of which 231 are males and 126 are females. The data provides information on the region where the applicants are from and the qualification that they would like to obtain through RPL. However, the data is still raw and not yet ready to be shared.

10.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

As stated in previous chapters, the regulatory framework of RPL is designed and is expected to offer services to disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, early school leavers and low qualified adults. The RPL services offered currently in the public VTCs are offered free of charge for the above-mentioned disadvantaged groups.

11 Validation methods

According to the 2017 Policy document, the VNFIL/RPL procedures for individuals are organised into four stages and the tasks of the RPL professionals (coordinator, mentor and internal and external assessors) are detailed and explained thoroughly in the 2017 Policy document and additionally in the guidebooks prepared for them. The regulatory framework does prescribe some of the methods to be used for each of the different stages, especially for the first three.

1. Information and identification,

'The role of the RPL coordinator, together with the mentor and the internal evaluator is to define also in what way the candidate will receive the support (e.g. face to face meetings, workshops, via telephone calls, internet and emails).' (Page 8)

2. Documentation and preparation

'Point 2. iv. Several methods can be used to collect the evidence of the candidate, including oral questions, written tests, tasks, practical demonstration of skills, any other combination of the above, and other types of assessments.' (Page 9)

3. Assessment

Point 2. The assessment methodology shall ensure the achievement of the assessment results related to knowledge, skills and competencies without tests or exams divided into the theoretical and practical parts (e.g., in order to demonstrate the practical skills, candidate can be asked to analyse her/his working methods, objectives for her/his decisions and expected results and in this way she/he can show her/his theoretical knowledge). (Page 11)

However, these prescribed methods are not exhaustive and can be expanded and adapted to fit different contexts, target groups and validation purposes. More examples of how to use these methods (such as interview method during the information and identification phase) can be found in the Guideline and Programme for the RPL Coordinator, Mentors and Evaluators, published in 2018 by the NQA, with the support of DVVI.

12 The use of ICT in validation

During 2021 and through 2022 with the support of the EU project implemented by LuxDev, the NQA has developed a digital platform for RPL. This platform aims at raising awareness and informing the interested institutions and individuals about the procedures and criteria in place. Therefore, two digital systems have been established: e-accreditation or Accreditation Management System for the RPL providers, assisting the RPL providers in the process of accreditation with the NQA, and the RPL Management System (RPLMS), the digital tool to identify priority profiles in which RPL services can be offered, an online pre-registration for individuals who express their interest in the RPL for a specific qualification. As stated earlier the VNFIL system and its provision in Kosovo should be considered to be still in the development stage, therefore the aim of this pre-registration for individuals is to create an overview of the priority qualifications to be included in the NQF and made available through RPL.

Furthermore, the online pre-registration of individuals mentioned earlier is connected to eKOSOVA national platform for all governmental services (<https://ekosova.rks-gov.net/>) which assures that information is collected from real interested individuals. It is also fed with information from other sources such as the services of the EARK for the unemployed skilled jobseekers who seek validation. Within the EARK information system, an information system module was developed to facilitate the operationalisation and reporting of RPL as ALMM, and 58 trainers of VTCs were trained to use the digital system. The data registered in the database is limited to: name, surname, and qualification needed, and no other sensitive personal information is collected. Similarly, there is also the EVETPRO website which gives a possibility to register for RPL ([please see https://esvetpro.eu/](https://esvetpro.eu/)).

Certificates awarded for the qualifications at the NQF must be confirmed by the NQA seal. The approval and stamp certify that the qualification in question is included in the NQF and that this qualification has been issued by an accredited institution through RPL. Certificates must include the following: Candidate details; Type of qualification in the NQF; Title of qualification/module; Date and place of issue; Level of qualification/ module; The value of the credits; The issuing institution. The VNFIL procedure is regulated by the applicable legislation, and the access to data on candidates is regulated by the policies on the confidentiality of personal data.

NQA keeps registers of candidates certified through the RPL, and recording the learning achievements are the institutions' responsibility. The records might be kept online with digital tools or offline. Certificates should be stored for a longer period of time by the providers on their database (online platforms or offline), together with evidence related to the evaluation process, internal evaluation (assessment methods and instruments including grading criteria, etc.), implementation and monitoring of the evaluation, registration and achievement statistics (a record of candidate achievements, including formative and summative assessment).

13 The position of validation in society

In the recent 5 years, the visibility of the VNFIL or RPL services in Kosovo has been increasing and the evidence of this is the introduction of the term and task of the 'Recognition of Prior Learning' in the most recent policy documents on education and employment.

The RPL is part of the Law (No. 04/L-205) on the EARK, Article 8: Duties and Responsibilities of VTCs, under which RPL is one of the tasks of these public institutions. Similarly, the RPL was part of the Sectorial Strategy 2018-2022 of the MLSW. This Strategy envisaged that all VTCs will be subject to the accreditation process for the RPL and will offer this service for the most demanded professions in the labour market. The RPL service was subsequently included in the list of ALMPs.

And lastly, as mentioned before, the RPL is part of Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026. The Strategy, aims at increasing the number of VET providers that implement RPL and at scaling up the continuous professional development of vocational teachers for implementation of adult learning and the RPL.

Due to the need for immediately qualified workforce, the interest from the employers and employers' organisations seems to be growing. As mentioned earlier, during the past three years, they were actively involved in capacity-building and awareness-raising workshops organised by the NQA. Their involvement was also influenced by the existing comprehensive regulatory legal framework, the transparent system of QA and the trained human resources though limited in numbers, within the institutions responsible for the VNFIL. Furthermore, these developments have created a reliable atmosphere for all the stakeholders, governmental organisations and agencies, trade unions, private and public education and training providers, third sector organisations, private and public employment services, including employers.

14 Recommendations

The VNFIL/RPL system in Kosovo sets a very good example for how planned and structural interventions can be developed gradually with the support of development partners and projects and with the ownership and leadership of the national authorities. Starting with the preparation phase and steps undertaken with regard to legal and by-laws framework, awareness-raising among all stakeholders, capacity building of human resources, and finally piloting – all this contributed to the creation of a shared understanding and vision.

Furthermore, the noteworthy developments include the e-accreditation process for RPL providers, as well as the digital platform for pre-enrolment for individuals with the aim to collect information on the demand for RPL qualifications. These interventions could be used to scale up the system. Another development is that the RPL has been included as one of the Active Labour Market Measures. This is a very unique solution which provides for access to additional funding and reaching out to vulnerable target groups who are usually excluded from the labour market due to their lack of qualification.

Nevertheless, these developments are accompanied by some challenges:

- Insufficient capacities of the NQA for the validation and accreditation process (including the verification and approval of the professional standards) are an obstacle to answering quickly to the dynamic changes occurring in the labour market; This can be addressed by strengthening of NQA and by the development of more automated information systems for those tasks that can be done independently by the providers and practitioners.
- Higher and more active involvement of the private sector (employers and employers' organisations) in the implementation of the RPL services for individuals can be advantageous, especially for the usage of their facilities and equipment.
- Higher and more active involvement of CSOs in the implementation of the RPL services for individuals can be advantageous, especially for reaching out to target groups which do not always have access to information or education and training.
- Accreditation of the public VET providers is considered a challenge by some stakeholders, due to the considerably high standards of the accreditation criteria, and specifically the criteria 1.1 which requires a financial sustainability plan. While for VTCs there is a specific budget envisaged for RPL as an active labour market measure, some vocational schools might struggle in mobilising dedicated funding. The setting up of the price for the RPL services is left at the discretion of the accredited RPL provider, possibly making the RPL service too costly to afford. Furthermore, sustainable financing of the logistical costs for the RPL practitioners (e.g. external assessors) and candidates coming from the vulnerable target groups, especially in the public system, remains a challenge. It is necessary therefore to offer more financial support for RPL services offered by the public providers.
- Implementation of the VNFIL/RPL in general education remains a challenge, as neither the secondary legislation nor policy for validation addresses it yet in GE, and no concrete steps have been taken. However, the MEST first needs to investigate the demand for such a service.

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List of interviewees:

Name	Organisation	Position	Yes/No*
Arber Salihu	National Qualifications Authority	Director	Yes
Milot Hasangjeka	National Qualifications Authority	Qualifications specialist	Yes
Donjeta Nimani	National Qualifications Authority	Officer for RPL	Yes
Jehona Rexha	Employment Agency of Republic of Kosova	Deputy director	Yes
Hajdin Berisha	Lux Development	Specialist	Yes
Rame Likaj	Consultant	VET expert	Yes
Arian Krasniqi	Kosovo Accreditation Agency	Officer	Yes
Luljeta Doroci	QAP Mitrovica	RPL Coordinator	Yes
Safet Ymeri	KEK Training Center	Director	Yes
Ferdeze Agaj	Employment Agency of Republic of Kosova	Deputy Head of the Quality Assurance and Certification Division	Yes

* Interviewees agree for their name, organisation and / or position to be referenced in this country report.

16 ACRONYMS

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
ALLED	EU/ADC Project Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs
ALMM	Active Labour Marker Measure
CCI	Chamber of Commerce and Industry
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CVET	Continuous Vocational Education and Training
DVVI	DVV International
EARK	Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo
ETF	European Training Foundation.
EU	European Union
GE	General Education
HE	Higher Education
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
KQF	Kosovo Qualifications Framework
LuxDev	Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework

NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
QA	Quality assurance
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VTC	Vocational Training Centre