

Overview of the Methods and Tools Used for
Validation and Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes
in the South East Europe Region
(Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia)

Study conducted for *dvv international* head office SEE, Sarajevo

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Table of Contents

0. Executive Summary and Policy Pointers	3
1. Background: Aims and Definitions.....	5
1.1. Context and Objectives – Validation/Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes of Individuals for Poverty Reduction.....	6
1.2. Terms and Concepts.....	7
2. Country Practices in South East Europe: Emerging Evidence.....	14
2.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina – A Number of Not Recognised Non-formal Learning Activities.....	14
2.2. Kosovo – The Most Advanced System Design of the Five Countries under Study	19
2.3. Macedonia – Policy Planning	24
2.4. Montenegro – Adequate Initial Steps are Being Taken	28
2.5. Serbia – The Only Country with a Pilot Actually Implemented (in 2012)	31
3. Systemic Analysis, Policy Pointers and Possible Policy Options.....	45
3.1. Why Awarding Qualifications? Why Now?	45
3.2. The Link with a Qualifications Framework.....	46
3.3. The Role of the Informal Economy – Unemployment and Underemployment.....	48
3.4. The Validation/Recognition System is not a Competitor to Formal Education and Training ...	49
3.5. Validation/Recognition System in South East Europe is at its Initial Stage	50
3.6. Validation/Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes May Help Address Poverty... Under Certain Conditions	52
3.7. Using Qualifications in Recruitment Processes	53
4. A Summary of Possible Next Steps in Practice.....	53
4.1. Making Validation/Recognition Happen, Even if on a Small Scale	53
4.2. Addressing Systemic Issues.....	56
Reference.....	59
Acronyms	61

0. Executive Summary and Policy Pointers

This report discusses validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in five countries of South East Europe: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. It explains these concepts and emphasizes that what matters is the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals, as opposed to the accreditation of institutions and providers which is a completely different subject. Many activities are currently taking place in these five countries in terms of adult learning and accreditation of programmes and institutions delivering adult learning activities, often called non-formal education; hence the confusion. However, not much is happening when it comes to validation of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. This report also stresses that key benefits for individuals who engage in the validation of their learning outcomes, whether they are acquired non-formally or informally, arise when there is societal recognition of credits and qualifications – for example – that are awarded at the end of a validation process. The currency, in the labour market and in the formal education and training system, of the awards delivered after a process validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a key element for building a reputation and reaching all potential end users of the system (individuals, learners, employers, trade unions, organisations).

All in all, there seems to be a good understanding of the key issues in the five countries under study. Promising projects and pilots are taking place almost everywhere. The time has come to move from a set of practices to a real system in these five countries and the work of *dvv international* in this area is timely. A regional approach could even be considered, as there are commonalities across these five countries. Achieving a real system has taken a considerable amount of time even in most advanced countries. Countries which launched experiments in the 80s, and sometimes earlier, are still struggling, 40 years later, to come up with an effective system: key components are still missing such as making sure that an operational information and guidance system is in place, or that a cultural change is effected so that people accept that learning also occurs outside of the formal learning system.

Achieving a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals will most likely take time in the five countries under study, even if most of these countries **already have** a legal framework and a policy **regarding lifelong learning**, which includes **adult learning**. Careful attention will most likely need to be paid to the following policy pointers, which are outlined in no specific order of importance:

- Improve the consensus building process around the value of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes; passing a law, or amending existing laws, so that a right to validation of all learning outcomes is granted to all citizens is always a good step to consider. Nevertheless, a law always receives wider acceptance if it follows some sort of consensus among key stakeholders. At this stage, it is above all a vision that the five countries would need;
- Create a sense of ownership; actors and stakeholders always feel more empowered and committed to the development and success of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes if they have been involved in the process from the outset;
- Actors and stakeholders must elaborate and agree upon the standards, in this case the assessment standards first and foremost, so that the awards delivered to successful applicants to a validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process are not questionable;
- Help promote the cultural shift so that it becomes widely accepted that people learn outside of the formal learning system, that learning happens everywhere and all the time and that non-formal and informal learning can be a source of wealth for a country, a municipality, an enterprise or a family;

- Promote the use of qualifications in recruitment processes (by employers hiring for a job and university recruiting new students, typically);
- Promote the analysis of the labour market as the starting point of all education and training policy; from the labour market derive needed competences, qualifications, assessment, and additional top-up training if need be;
- Develop suitable assessment approaches (portfolio of competences, simulation, observation, tests and examinations); also, develop assessment approaches to reassure actors and stakeholders that awards delivered after a validation process of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are not undeserved (standards, quality assurance...);
- Promote policy learning; there are many good practices in the European Union, on many levels (VET and access to the labour market, access to university studies and exemption of all or part of the curriculum, assessment approaches, use of learning outcomes, qualifications and qualifications frameworks...); the five countries could highly benefit from this vast experience accumulated over several decades; and
- Promote partnerships; among the most efficient approaches, there are often those which make different actors, from different walks of life, to team up, share objectives and approaches and reach a common goal (an education institution, an enterprise and some public or not-for-profit organisations, typically).

All this will require an effective communications policy to:

- Explain what individual learning outcomes are about (in short, the competence-based approach);
- Explain what a qualification is and what it means or should mean (a mirror of competences);
- Simplify the vocabulary for lay people (avoid using terms such as non-formal and informal learning and focus on competences: what people know or can do);
- Explain the difference between accrediting programmes and institutions/providers, even if those are providers of non-formal learning; and validating the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals (accrediting a programme or an institution, even operating in non-formal adult learning, is not validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, far from it);
- Promote informal learning – learning from experience – since it is also a huge reserve of untapped human capital; the concept of non-formal adult learning is indeed widely understood and used but the term “informal” learning is barely used;
- Explain the potential of cutting on education and training costs (direct costs for individuals and the State; and indirect costs, or opportunity costs (forgone earnings etc.), for individuals) by using validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes prior to going into any education and training programme, and therefore shortening those programmes; and
- Explain that the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes approach is not about awarding undeserved qualifications, but about creating new routes to qualifications so that competent people are given a chance to prove what they know and can do.

Finally, to make it happen; to make validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes a reality:

- Start on a small scale, make it work, attract curiosity;
- Work from bottom up so that implementation is not hindered but the usually heavy administrative procedures; call on partnerships;
- Award certificates – qualification would not be possible in this case unless the Ministry of Education is involved – that are recognised by all partners in the partnerships;
- Work on making these certificates known and useful for the holders (i.e. the successful applicants) so that they get a job, a promotion or gain access to higher-level certificates or a qualification;
- Minimise the fees; communicate on the shortening of the process, compared to longer and more expensive formal education and training, and on the potential benefits (direct or indirect such as better self-esteem, ability of people to speak up in their community...); and
- Target validation-ready individuals so that the project harvest the low hanging fruits and build a reputation that will create a snowball effect.

This report aims at presenting an overview of the methods and tools used for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes in five countries of South East Europe: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia², Montenegro and Serbia to be precise.

The main conclusion is that there is not a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning of individuals in any of the five countries yet. Nevertheless, there are some practices that can be described and analysed at the time of the study. They are the focus of the analytical part of this study. This report will also attempt to open up the discussion rather than criticize the absence of a system. In particular, it will spell out relevant concepts, put them in the context of poverty reduction, and propose some ways forward.

This report is composed of four sections. Section 1 provides the background of the work, including definitions of key terms and concepts, insisting on the concept of *recognition* that is at the core of the approach. Section 2 describes the existing country practices, where relevant, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Section 3 analyses validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the context of poverty reduction, stressing in particular the place of qualifications frameworks and the need for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for the sake of equity. Section 4 offers some ways forward to the five countries under study – at the systemic level and at a more pragmatic level – if validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes systems should eventually come to life.

1. Background: Aims and Definitions

The piece of research behind this paper is based on telephone and/or email interviews with key stakeholders – and sometimes actors – in the five countries under study in South East Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). Since there seems to be some confusion as to the meaning of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, Section 1 proposes workable definitions of key terms and concepts, in addition to providing the general context of the study. The terms are usually widely accepted, but not necessarily fully consensual; this point will be addressed below wherever it is relevant.

² Macedonia for short.

1.1. Context and Objectives – Validation/Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes of Individuals for Poverty Reduction

One of the missions of *dvv international* is to provide recommendations and support to fight poverty. The five countries under review in this document are often considered as having the highest proportion of inhabitants below the poverty line, or at risk of being so, in Europe. As they are contemplating accession to the European Union, the issue of poverty reduction deserves to be at the top of the policy and research agenda. This paper is an attempt to propose solutions along those lines. The idea at the heart of these solutions is to make individual competences³ visible and to award qualifications based on what people know or can do – from non-formal and informal learning typically, the latter also being known as experience – regardless of how they have acquired these competences; in other words, not necessarily/only by attending classes in the initial formal learning system (Werquin, 2010).

In fact, the fundamental assumption made in this paper – and which justifies this review – is that one of the main solutions to poverty reduction is to help people generate revenues. This starting point sounds like stating the obvious but the consequences of this claim are immediately relevant to the key concepts at the core of this paper:

- Generating revenues often requires owning a recognised qualification; and
- The five countries under study seem to have a large proportion of competent⁴ but unqualified⁵ workers.

After providing **the definitions of the key terms and concepts** (Section 1.2), and therefore stressing the difference made just above between the terms “competent” and “qualified”, the remainder of this paper will try to show how validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can be among the possible solutions to tackle poverty. However, for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to be a solution, several other conditions must be met; among which the following should be at the top of the priority list:

- The existence of a holistic approach by which different stakeholders in charge of different systems gather to implement consistent solutions: typically the world of education and the world of work need to talk to each other; also social security systems and other benefit systems need to converge to provide the right set of incentives to individuals (to move from the informal to the formal economy, for instance); and
- A cultural shift so that stakeholders, actors and people accept the idea that one learns even outside of the classroom, and that all learning outcomes have value and can be given currency in their society, provided that a fair assessment shows evidence that pre-defined, preferably widely accepted standards are met.

At a first glance, the above conditions are not met in South East Europe. Having said that, it must be stressed that those conditions are not fully met anywhere in the world, especially the second one. All countries are still continuously making progress on the road to recognising that all learning has value (France, Ireland, Norway, South Africa; see Werquin, 2010, for a survey), and that most of this learning should be given currency through validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The point is that other countries started [way] earlier than the five under study (see Werquin, 2012, for the French case, with the Law of 1934). One of the main conclusions – and recommendations to some extent – of this paper will be that, despite being difficult, this endeavour has to be undertaken as soon as possible, because it will take time to be accomplished and because

³ The recurrent – and somewhat useless – debate about the definition of the term “competence” will not be addressed here. In this paper, competences are understood as either, or the addition of, knowledge, skills, attributes, values that can be used, and therefore assessed, in a given context; typically in the context of an occupation.

⁴ In short, they know and/or can do (see below for more).

⁵ In short, they do not possess any document describing/proving the competences they have (see below for more).

validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes usually has many disbelievers and detractors. But countries have no choice. This process is also directly linked to questions of equity in education, another point that this paper will try to demonstrate.

Finally, and for obvious reasons given the statements made above which would involve typical target groups (poor people, working poor and, of course, unemployed and under-employed people), this paper addresses the adult population only, including young adults out of the initial education and training system. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes requires that individuals have acquired competences through non-formal and informal learning; otherwise there is nothing to validate/recognise. Young people still at school or in universities are less likely to have extensive experience, and/or to have participated in prior non-formal learning activities that are not already captured in the assessment that takes place – for the delivery of qualifications – in the initial formal learning system they belong to.

In fact, just for the sake of clarity and comprehensiveness, it is worth mentioning that validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes can also be a potential solution for addressing the issue of teenagers that are about to become early school leavers. However, this aspect will not be addressed in this document except only to say that for validation and recognition to be effective tools for teenagers, different policies and programmes need to be implemented. A close collaboration between different stakeholders such as teachers and employers, and a strong commitment to help teenagers identify all sorts of learning outcomes are required from stakeholders and actors in the initial formal learning system. For example, the vocational preparation of teachers could be revisited so that they learn how to teach pupils and students to self-analyse their learning and to take stock of the competences they have acquired. There could also be some *learning to learn* elements in the school *curriculum*. The five countries under study do not show any signs of adopting such approaches. On the contrary, practices such as the *two schools under one roof* system in Bosnia and Herzegovina – which means that children from different ethnic groups do not get to meet/bond – are not very conducive, to say the least, to creating early experiences with different values, cultures and languages which are all potential sources of non-formal and informal learning.

1.2. Terms and Concepts

This document aims at describing and analysing the situation regarding validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. It also aims at providing policy pointers for further thinking and action. All this requires a good understanding of the terms and concepts used throughout this paper, and in international literature and *fora*. There is in fact a growing literature on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and the vocabulary remains non-consensual. The complexity is partly accentuated by new players constantly trying to sound original by introducing new terms. Existing terms used in this paper (validation and recognition) are not perfect but they do make sense (see below). Others such as valuation, accreditation⁶ will not be used in the context of this paper. At best, they just add uncalled for complexity; in fact, they are often the result of misconceptions. If the central/official rhetoric is unclear, from UNESCO for example, then countries that have only a recent experience in this field may feel somewhat confused. This seems to be the case in the five countries described in this paper. This confusion is not conducive to taking the necessary steps to implementing a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

This paper does not claim that there should be one term and one definition for each concept. Vocabulary evolves as knowledge grows, and this is perfectly natural⁷. For instance, terms like Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (RNFIL) *peacefully* coexist. Canada has also coined its own term – Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

⁶ Valuation, in the sense of giving value, will not be used. Assessment and currency will be used depending of the context. Accreditation will be reserved to designate institutions and bodies that are allowed to award qualifications.

⁷ In the early 80s, formal learning was only classroom based learning in a school for children (Werquin, 2007). It is now widely accepted that formal learning can take place pretty much everywhere – at the workplace for example – and for everyone, including adults.

(PLAR) –. However, this paper does claim that there is only one way to understand what validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is about, and how it can be a potential solution for poverty reduction; and this should start with a clear understanding of key concepts.

A clear difference⁸ should be made, for example, between two widely used terms: *competence* and *qualification*. A competent person is capable of doing something, and/or knowledgeable in a given field. A qualified person is someone who possesses a document that confirms that s/he is capable of doing something; and/or knows something. A competent person may not be qualified. Therefore her/his competences are not visible, and this is a major issue when it comes to generating revenues through engaging in labour markets that are heavily structured, at least in the formal economy, and where the highest, most stable revenues, as well as social protection, are found.

Competence vs. Qualification

A competence is what an individual knows (knowledge) or can do (skills). It is not necessarily documented. It is documented when individuals hold a qualification corresponding to this competence; that is often the case when the investment in the competence is made in the initial formal education and training system. It is not documented, typically, when individuals have acquired this competence through non-formal and informal learning. Therefore, there is no significant official return on the investment in a competence when this competence is acquired outside the formal learning system.

A qualification is a document, awarded by an accredited institution, most of the time in most of the countries in the world, on behalf of the Ministry of Education. A qualification describes what the owner knows and can do in a specific field of action, and therefore makes competences visible. It is almost always a visa to a regular job and although it is not a sufficient condition to get a job it is certainly a necessary one.

Formal vs. informal learning: a continuum of learning contexts

Formal learning is organised (at school, at university or at the work place typically). It is therefore always intentional and it has learning objectives. Informal learning is experience. It is never intentional and does not have spelled-out learning objectives. It takes place by the mere fact of experiencing the world around us and it can happen at home, at the workplace or through participation in voluntary activities typically. Non-formal learning is in between the two, and its definition varies depending on the country and the context⁹. It is often associated with adult learning (Africa, Germany; South East Europe...) but it could also be side learning that takes place alongside a formal learning programme. For example, it is well known that, in attending formal learning sessions or validation of non-formal and informal learning programmes, adults learn about themselves, learn about working in teams, learn about social customs. This learning is additional to the initial learning objectives. It was not planned but it did occur.

Interestingly enough, this means that there is a continuum of learning contexts, from the most formal to the least formal that is called informal; with non-formal learning somewhere in between. Only three categories of learning were given a name (formal, non-formal and informal) but there is not such a thing as a three-point scale where only three benchmarks would be marked on the continuum of learning; and all this varies in time and space. Countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia should definitely decide for themselves what kind of definitions, concepts and shared understanding they need in the short and medium term. This is part of a pragmatic policy, regardless of the international injunctions¹⁰.

⁸ It is important to stress that this use of the vocabulary is probably valid in UK English only. It is different in French, in German and probably in US English too.

⁹ See Werquin (2007) for more.

¹⁰ The same applies to national qualifications frameworks. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was never meant to be a template and countries should decide on their national qualifications framework according to their needs, and then use the EQF as a translation device; and not the other way around.

When it comes to defining non-consensual terms such as the different categories of learning, what matters is that definitions are reasonably and mutually exclusive. In this sense, a set of definitions that say that formal learning is always intentional, that non-formal learning is intentional and that informal learning can be intentional is not very useful. Such an approach with fuzzy overlapping concepts creates blurred borders that do not help the analysis and implementation. Policy makers need to convey clear messages. If informal learning is wrongly said to be potentially intentional, for example, it inevitably leads to the creation of a fourth category called *random learning* (see the definitions wrongly proposed by Eurostat and the European Commission) to bring non-intentional learning on board. It is claimed in this report that informal learning is non-intentional – it is experience – and it has to remain so. The country descriptions below will show that informal learning is nowhere in the landscape. Non-formal learning is a widely accepted concept, but informal learning remains unaddressed.

It is also important to realise that definitions are meant to evolve over time and that no definition can be carved in stone. As said above, definitions have considerably changed over the last two decades and what matters is that experts and policy makers use the definitions they need when and where they need them, and that they accept they may be subject to change. For example, rather outdated definitions of the different types of learning include whether formal, non-formal and informal learning [usually] lead to a qualification. As it is clear from the definitions proposed above, this characteristic has not been retained here; and should never be retained. If systems are implemented throughout the world for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes so that they possibly lead to a qualification, then this characteristic cannot be included in the definitions. Ideally, any form of learning could lead to a qualification. If recognition systems aim at awarding qualifications, whether the learning context is formal or not, then “leading to a qualification” should not be a distinctive characteristic of any of these concepts.

The last point regarding definitions is that there may not be any need for internationally agreed definitions. What matters is a general understanding of the different concepts and definitions used. What is even more important is that definitions are chosen according to local and current needs and objectives. In any case, the distinction between formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning is only valid for researchers; and probably for decision makers too. In real life, no one can clearly state what s/he learnt formally, non-formally and informally. For example, children learn a language at school, but also when speaking with their parents, when reading on their own, when playing with their friends. No one can clearly identify how those literacy skills were acquired. The distinction is relevant for research and policymaking purposes.

Finally, by definition, formal learning can also be termed as formal education. The debate is still open however about non-formal learning, which can sometimes be called non-formal education, when it is relatively organised as in adult learning programmes, for example. In the case of informal learning, it seems obvious it cannot be termed informal education. To be on the safe side, just as lifelong learning is the widely accepted term, it seems wise to use formal, non-formal and informal learning in all instances.

Box 1. Definitions Provided to Interviewees

(Extract from the questionnaire sent to participants)

For a good understanding and better communication among all of us, we would like to insist that we call validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes the technical process by which people (or applicants) are assessed against pre-existing, more or less widely agreed standards and are given credits, exemptions of academic prerequisites to access formal studies, partial qualification or full qualification according to their performance during this assessment¹¹. It is therefore essential to understand that validation does not necessarily involve formal learning (whether vocational training and/or academic education). It may imply some additional formal top up training/education or some additional experience if the assessor(s) – often time a committee – decide(s) the applicant does not fully meet the standards and needs further learning or experience in order to be awarded credits, exemption or qualifications; but, again, not necessarily.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes means that the credits, exemptions, partial or full qualifications are widely accepted by the society: the exemptions by all (or most) universities or the full qualifications by all (or most) employers typically. Recognition often requires that standards are widely agreed and therefore prepared collaboratively with all stakeholders. It also requires an efficient communication policy and, in many countries, a cultural shift so that the society accepts that learning takes place also outside a classroom.

In other words, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are about assessing the knowledge, skills and competences of the people so that they are, for example, allowed to enter the formal learning system (university typically, or a vocational preparation) without academic prerequisites or to apply for a job that requires a qualification. This requires a system by which all credits or qualifications have the same currency¹², whether they have been acquired in the formal learning system (school, vocational system, universities...) or as a result of an assessment of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of the applicants. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are about creating new routes to existing qualifications, with the same parity of esteem and the same currency.

During the interviews with stakeholders in the five countries under study, the definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning was not an issue. In the five countries, non-formal learning seems to refer to adult learning in a relatively organised environment; a sort of second chance for education¹³. The most often heard term is in fact non-formal education. The definition of validation and recognition however proved to be rather unclear, with the notable exception of Kosovo where official texts present clear and sensible definitions of the key terms. To be on the safe side, the content of Box 1 was sent to all potential interviewees in an attempt to clarify the picture.

Validation vs. recognition

In this paper, validation designates a process by which individuals (applicants) are assessed in order to determine whether they meet some [preferably widely agreed] predefined standards. If a typical applicant meet the standards, then s/he can be awarded a partial or full vocational or academic qualification, some credits toward a qualification, the right to take an examination in order to be awarded a qualification, the exemption of academic prerequisites to enter the formal learning system (university typically), the exemption of all or part of a *curriculum* in the formal learning system... As it is obvious from this list, validation leads to many outputs. This list is composed of the most often seen outputs in countries that have set validation systems in motion. Needless to say, there are as many systems as there are countries. What usually makes the differences is:

- Whether countries accept to validate learning outcomes from the labour market or from private activities, or both.

¹¹ And according to their wish of course.

¹² In the labour market typically.

¹³ This is true in many countries but most of them also have an adult learning sector for developing high-level labour competences among adults, develop adult citizenship skills, create a political consciousness etc.

- Whether countries may award the full qualification at the end of the validation, or whether it is merely a right to seat for an examination in the formal learning system.
- Whether what is awarded (qualification, credit or exemption) is fully accepted in society, but typically by employers.

Country practices vary considerably along those lines, especially when it comes to the last point about acceptance in society. This naturally leads to the definition of recognition. There are many definitions of this term as it refers to learning (see Werquin, 2010a, for a survey). Recognition must be understood here as *societal recognition*; in other words, whether what is delivered to successful applicants to a recognition process has currency and is useful in the society they live in; in particular in the labour market and in the lifelong learning formal system.

To that extent, it is recognition that matters, over and above validation. This is the reason why the term validation is not used for describing the main objective of the process. Validation is merely a technical process by which an assessor or a group of assessors (academics, experts, professionals...) decide whether the applicant meets the predefined standards for obtaining credits, exemption of academic prerequisites, partial or full qualification or any other of the many awards that countries deliver at the end of recognition processes to successful candidates.

What matters is societal recognition of credits/qualifications awarded after validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals

It is of paramount importance – especially for policy makers – to realise that an assessor or a group of assessors may well validate the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of an applicant without the society accepting that the corresponding award has any value or currency. What matters to applicants is that the award delivered to them is recognised by the society they live in and, most importantly among the key stakeholders in this society, the employers in particular. The concept of societal recognition is not specific at all to recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The same rule applies in the formal learning sector: qualifications awarded to successful candidates in the formal learning sector (upper secondary system, university, or TVET sector for example) must have currency and be valued by society, and by employers, for these qualifications to be useful to graduates. The fact is that, by definition, the input process (how, where, with whom and for how long an individual learns) in the system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is unknown. Therefore, societal recognition must be among the top priorities of any system recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes; otherwise the entire recognition system could collapse for lack of trust from stakeholders.

At a first glance, it could be said that this is exactly what is happening in the five countries under study. The entire system relies so much on the qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education, following a learning period in the initial formal education and training system, that nothing else will seem to ever be considered of any interest in the short or medium term. The distinction between recognition of learning outcomes and recognition of qualifications does not even appear to be fully understood. The former is at the heart of this report and it refers to previously acquired learning outcomes that are not already recognised in a qualification or in credits, for example. The latter is not specific at all to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It refers to whether qualifications awarded to people are accepted and have currency in society: this is an issue in many countries even within the formal learning system. To give an example, there is evidence that certificates awarded by international vendors sometimes have more currency than qualifications delivered by the national Ministry of Education.

Validation precedes recognition, because validation is a technical process and recognition is societal

The order in which these two concepts appear is also revealing. To say that recognition comes before validation or vice versa makes sense in both cases. But the term *recognition* does not carry the same meaning in the two sequences. In the first case, the term recognition simply means that individuals are allowed to apply for a validation process. Their formerly acquired competences are recognised as carrying sufficient meaning for individuals to be able to apply for a validation process. Most countries have relatively formal processes for this initial recognition of the right to apply: it is called eligibility. The eligibility condition – or right to apply – is often based on a given number of years an activity is performed (whether it is remunerated or not, as in volunteer work, for example) in the field relevant to the credit or qualification the applicant is aiming for. To be eligible in France, for instance, potential applicants have to be able to show evidence of having performed an activity for at least three years in a field that is relevant to the targeted qualification. As it is said above, *validation* is then the technical process by which applicants gather evidence about their learning outcomes, are assessed and awarded credits or a qualification at a level corresponding to their performance during the assessment.

When recognition comes after the validation process, it is obvious that the term refers to societal recognition; in other words, whether the awarded qualification has currency in the country or region where the successful applicant lives. Societal recognition is what matters. The question of whether or not validation comes first is irrelevant to a great extent because the meaning of ‘validation’ does not really change. What is important is to be clear about what is meant by ‘recognition’ (see Werquin, 2007, for more details).

The term *formal* applies to both the learning context and the validation process

What makes more sense from the point of view of researchers and policy makers is the fact that the adjective “formal” applies to both the learning context and the validation process. As seen above, learning can take place in more or less formal contexts, from very formal (school and university for example) to very informal (self learning and experience). The same holds for the validation process. It ranges from barely formal, as when applicants just need to take stock of their prior learning for self-consumption, to very formal in the case of regulated occupations that demand a highly formalised quality assured assessment process. There is strong evidence that young retirees often engage in the preparation of a portfolio of competences, usually, to analyse where they stand in terms of learning outcomes; and or to gain legitimacy when helping their grand-child(ren) with their homework for instance.

Misconceptions regarding the meaning of certain terms and concepts

In the course of the study, evidence showed that several terms were used inadequately. For instance, there is still a widely accepted belief that learning is formal when it leads to a qualification, when it is certified. This cannot be true for at least two reasons:

- If countries want to establish systems for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals, this means that non-formal and informal learning will eventually also lead to a qualification. The certification component should not be therefore a distinctive feature of formal learning; and
- In the world of formal adult learning – i.e. organised and structured (see above) – almost 90% of the training periods do not lead to a recognised qualification. In other words, there is already a large proportion of the formal learning that is not certified.

Also, some of the terms used probably come from wrong translations. For example, the term “previous knowledge” is sometimes used. This report claims that knowledge either exists (or competences) or not. If we say that there exists *previous* knowledge that means that knowledge is not there anymore and cannot be validated during the assessment. *Knowledge previously acquired* sounds better. However, the term is somewhat redundant because knowledge is always acquired previously. And of course, we cannot say that there is validation of future knowledge!

By the same token, the most widely accepted term – i.e. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – is also redundant to a certain extent because no one can in fact say that they can recognise future learning! Nevertheless, this term is more fitting. It dates back to the time when non-formal and informal learning outcomes were considered for entering a new formal learning programme above the beginner level. *Prior* here means prior to entering the new learning programme.

Another apparent case of misuse involved the terms *informal learning* and *work experience* which are not the same thing; the former is broader than the latter since it involves all life activities. The beauty of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is precisely that it gives currency to all learning outcomes – provided they meet the assessment standards – and can be converted into a qualification. A good example is Portugal where the initial efforts made by the Centres for New Opportunities (CNO) were to consider any kind of non-formal and informal learning outcomes to award academic qualification to individuals.

There is sometimes confusion between *equivalency* and *validation* of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The term *equivalency* has more to do, in the field of education and training, with the recognition of qualifications awarded by another institution, most of the time abroad. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, as it should be clear by now, involves awarding credits/qualifications based on the assessment of learning outcomes that were never certified by an education and training institution beforehand, either in the country or abroad.

Necessary condition

In addition to deciding on the definitions of key terms and concepts for validation/recognition systems to ever fly in South East Europe and beyond, it is essential that the awarded credits/qualifications be recognised by society: the employers, typically, or by formal education and training institutions. If this does not happen, actors in the field of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes would award qualifications that have no currency. This would be costly not only for the system and the individuals, but it would threaten the reputation of validation/recognition systems which may never recover from a bad start.

2. Country Practices in South East Europe: Emerging Evidence

Section 2 presents a synthesis of what can be seen in the five countries under study¹⁴ from the point of view of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. When recommendations, or ideas for potential solutions, are very specific to one country, they are also provided in this section. The more general ideas for possible next steps are provided in Sections 3 and 4. A summary of country practices is presented in Table 1.

It is important to note upfront that two of the five countries are currently recognised candidates for accession to the European Union¹⁵: Macedonia and Montenegro. The European Council has offered the three others the prospect of EU accession¹⁶ in the medium to long term (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia)¹⁷.

2.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁸ – A Number of Not Recognised Non-formal Learning Activities

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia. The country proclaimed independence in 1992, which was followed by a war until 1995. It is the second largest of the countries under study. It is a member of the Council of Europe (not an EU institution) since 2002. Its GDP per capita is 8, 100 USD (2011 estimate). It has a population of 3.8 Million inhabitants (called Bosnians), composed mainly of Bosniaks (48%), Serbs (37%) and Croats (14%). The three respective languages (Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian) are all official languages.

Today, the country has the reputation of maintaining high literacy, life expectancy and education standards. It has one of the oldest universities in Europe (1531). In the 1940s, the University of Sarajevo became the city's first secular higher education institution. Bosnia and Herzegovina also has several private and international tertiary education institutions (American University, Sarajevo School of Science and Technology...). Primary schooling lasts for nine years. All forms of secondary schooling are said to include an element of vocational training.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been offered by the European Council the prospect of EU accession in the medium to long term.

A complex political situation that renders decisions difficult in general in the field of education

It is not the purpose of this document to describe/analyse the political organisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in general. However, it is clear that the existence of several political entities within the country has an impact on the potential birth of a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which requires adequate governance of the national qualifications system¹⁹. As seen above, the whole purpose of a validation/recognition system is to give currency to all learning outcomes, however acquired. This endeavour demands, among many other things, mutual recognition, across political systems, of credits achieved and/or qualifications awarded. The international literature shows that even highly centralised systems are sometimes struggling to accomplish that all qualifications awarded in the initial formal learning system are universally recognised, by all stakeholders (labour market actors, other qualifications providers and the society at large): it is not rare that a qualification awarded by a university is barely recognised in others, even

¹⁴ Some arguments, and international examples or practices, are sometimes repeated from a country to another to facilitate the reading, and give readers the possibility to read each section independently.

¹⁵ Together with Croatia, Iceland and Turkey.

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/international/enlargement/index_en.htm

¹⁷ Together with Albania.

¹⁸ **Special thanks to Bojan Bajic, Aida Fatic, Igor Lukenda, Sasa Madacki, Biljana Miladinovic, Sinisa Marcic, Marko Nisandic, Natasa Prodanovic, Alenka Savic and Edin Zahirovic for their help in gathering precious information and data.**

¹⁹ Not to be confused with a national qualifications framework: the qualifications system is a broader concept, of which a qualifications framework may be a component, which includes all aspects of a country's activities that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and "operationalising" national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications. (Coles and Werquin, 2007).

within the same country. In the case of qualifications awarded after an assessment of competences learnt non-formally and informally – i.e. outside the formal learning system – all countries, even the most advanced ones, and with a fairly centralised unified political system, are struggling even more. One of the main reasons for this is that the belief persists that one learns only in a classroom. In political systems with a lack of uniformity, wide acceptance – and therefore recognition – of credits and/or qualifications achieved based on the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes will clearly prove to be a challenge. Such acceptance does not exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the political system is probably part of the issue.

Bosnia and Herzegovina today consists of two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the *Republika Srpska* (RS) and the Brcko District. In addition, Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs – who are recognised as constituent peoples of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina since July 2000 – elect cantonal Parliaments. Therefore, it seems to exist a rather complex multi-layer political situation by which the decision making power is shared – with some overlaps and discrepancies – by the State, the two political entities and the cantonal Parliaments. Having such a cumbersome vertical and horizontal structure of mandates and responsibilities means that a law is adopted at one level but not at the other. Typically, international institutional capacity building programmes may promote some reforms that would lead to laws actually voted at the Federation level but not at the Cantonal level. Ten Cantons share responsibility with the Federation, but they do not necessarily adjust their laws accordingly. They may therefore work under older laws. This discrepancy is not easy to address because there is some uncertainty about where exactly the cantonal mandate stops and where the Federation's starts. This creates a grey area that prevents actors from taking the necessary steps to harmonise the legal landscape. It also creates room for misinterpretation of the law.

This piecemeal legal framework has a clear impact in terms of the potential birth of a system meant to recognise qualifications awarded after a validation process of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, because decisions made nationally have to be then accepted at other levels (societal recognition). Also, even if one political entity succeeds in implementing a validation system of non-formal and informal learning, there would not necessarily be recognition of credits and qualifications awarded by another political entity.

In fact, the matter of education is not dealt with at the State level, but at the political entities' level (RS, Federation BiH and Brcko District). In the RS and the Brcko District, the authorities are directly responsible for making decisions about education. In the Federation, decisions are centralised. However, there is no guarantee that agreements will be achieved. Considering that validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a new and complex matter, there are reasons to believe that an agreement will be even more difficult to reach.

Suggestions for improving the promotion of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes

A claim that will be made on several occasions in this report is that validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is too much of a complex issue, drawing on so many deeply anchored societal beliefs, to believe that it will be solved with a unique one-size-fit-all solution. Different solutions have to be tested and the key will emerge from amending programmes and strategies until they become reasonably satisfactory.

In addition, suggestions for good practice or pilot studies should not always be at the practical level, they should also be incorporated at the systemic level. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, if the political system is not somewhat harmonised, validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may never reach the end users.

A possible solution to the problem could be to take the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes out of the education sphere. There are plenty of justifications to transfer the responsibility to other government entities such as the Ministry of Labour, for instance. In countries where the education and training authorities are scattered all over the territory, taking the matter out of the hands of the Ministry of Education helps to simplify the implementation of an

operational system, be it on a small scale. If the Ministry of Labour is in charge, this may have advantages as well as drawbacks. The main advantage is that it will promote the validation of competences that are needed in the labour market – the assumption is that the Ministry of Labour is in the best position to gather information from the employers about their needs – and therefore the awarded certificates will get successful applicants a job. The drawback is that the awarded certificates may not have value in the formal learning system, unless the Ministry of Education is also involved upfront, together with the Ministry of Labour. This approach has proved difficult to implement in many countries due to the absence of collaboration between the two ministries.

Another possible solution, which is relevant whatever the shape of the political landscape, is to create an inter-ministerial agency, with complete autonomy and some relative authority. South Africa is considering it at the moment, together with some other solutions (Keevy, 2012). In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this would seem a rather promising solution. Given the highly fragmented political situation, the harmonisation could come from the side, rather than from the top.

In addition to revisiting the system governance, a promising complementary approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be to pilot local programmes on a small scale. Making things happen and catching the interest of other stakeholders than those involved so far may create a snowball effect. Trying to change the political situation so that qualifications awarded everywhere in the country are given the same currency everywhere else seems rather complicated; starting from a small scale successful practice could prove to be an easier approach. In any case, if strategies and policies should be piloted so that qualifications are given currency in the entire country, one idea could be that this is addressed under the auspices of a bigger player such as the European Union.

Emergent assessment approach of prior learning outcomes

In practice, little evidence of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals can be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the complexity of the political landscape, one potential reason for the country to lag behind in the implementation of a validation and recognition system may be the lack of historical trust in, or wide acceptance of, learning-by-doing. The concept of assessment outside the formal learning system – which is the key concept associated with validation and recognition²⁰ – does exist in some scattered educational or training activities: examples can be found in the field of English language and computer science. Before future learners are enrolled in a traditional training course, they are assessed so that they enter the course at the right level. In some cases, a certificate is even delivered so that potential learners can postpone their entry in the course, for instance. The interesting point is that, the individuals undergoing the assessment do not need to immediately sign in for the course in order to be assessed. It would take very little to change this practice into something more general whereby the certificate awarded could be communicated to the wider world – employers generally, or other training or qualifications providers – so that the certificate can have currency for other purposes other than simply entering a course at the institution that performed the assessment. Such a certificate could then be given currency for a longer period of time and in other institutions other than the one for which the training provider performed the assessment in the first place.

Many other similar institutions could, for example, have an agreement so that whoever assessed in their network creates some right everywhere in the network, to start the ball rolling. The same goes for computer science training. Again, the issue at the moment in Bosnia and Herzegovina is that the landscape – in terms of political structure, policy and legal framework – is not conducive to such endeavour; but this approach would bypass the political problem because the initiative would come from the ground, where the needs are. Nevertheless there are reasons to be optimistic in Bosnia and Herzegovina because the history of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes shows that it was never acquired once and for all, and countries have to start somewhere. The two fields of languages and computer sciences look like a very promising avenue for planting

²⁰ Because, again, qualifications are associated with successfully passing an assessment of learning outcomes rather than the final approval stage at the end of a learning programme, module or episode.

some seeds. The history of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes proves that a good system sometimes needs some champions²¹ – often time isolated, private but nevertheless enthusiastic – to push the policy/legislation lines forward. It may sound like the Don-Quixote approach but it is often a successful one.

Many non-formal and informal learning activities are taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, non-formal and informal learning is happening “extensively”²², mainly under the auspices of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It happens in summer academies or summer schools, in training sessions... But, in those instances, there is never any validation of the learning outcomes of these fairly²³ organised learning episodes. There is no qualification, nor credits, awarded whatsoever at the end of the learning period. The reason is that there is no central agency that could or would register these training episodes and their outcomes. The argument made by all the central agencies is that they need to know the lecturers in order to validate. This is clearly a major hindering factor since it denies the whole concept of learning outcomes so much at the forefront of all EC documents in the field of education. In the learning outcomes approach, what matters is what people know or can do, and not at all how they have acquired those competences. This point has been made several times in this document but it must be stressed again: requesting that the lecturers are known means that this is a pure input type model, which is considered outdated by EU standards.

Finally, the worrying part for the learners, in the case of these non-formal learning periods, is that local actors or stakeholders cannot even recognise these learning activities, and their outcomes, because they have no visibility. Therefore, the learning outcomes are not portable.

There are reasons to be optimistic in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The positive points are that:

- There is evidence of assessment after some adult learning episodes. The assessment is mostly traditional – assessment against the *curriculum*, rather than assessment of competences regardless of whether applicants have followed the course – but it shows there is room for creating a culture of assessment.
- There are some organisations providing certified training in certain areas (English, ITC as seen above) and they are natural candidates for implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.
- There are some changes in the legislation introduced in the early months of 2012. The new law allows diplomas earned after undertaking adult learning activities to be written in the official labour-book. This means recognition by current and future employers. The next step would be to create public awareness about this development, because so far the new law is not publicly advertised. Another issue is that – due to the administrative structure mentioned above, whereby the responsibility for education is with the Cantons – such diploma is valid only within one Canton, out of the 10 Cantons in the federation, which all together make only half of the Bosnia and Herzegovina territory.
- International organisations are doing an important job in raising awareness. Staffs of local Bosnian providers are invited to critical seminars. A study visit organised by *dvv international* in Brussels in 2012 on the topic of adult learning did address the EC plans in terms of the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This was an opportunity for stakeholders to realise that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not yet fulfil the obligations listed under the EU Accession Agreement regarding validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

²¹ The term “Don-Quixote organisations” was mentioned in this context.

²² Quote from one of the interviewees.

²³ The term non-formal learning seems perfectly adequate here. By the definitions provided in Section 1, some of these training episodes could even be termed as “formal”: they are organised, highly structured, intentional with learning objectives.

A strong push from the European Commission...

It seems there is a strong political will for Bosnia and Herzegovina to access the European Union. And validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is at the top of the policy agenda in the field of education in the EU. There is therefore some rhetoric being developed at the moment and some stakeholders are truly considering validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a possible option for the country. However, the rhetoric is neither articulated, nor implemented. It seems this rhetoric is clearly a result of the push from the European Commission, with some elements concerning national and European qualifications frameworks. A fair conclusion seems to remain that there is no apparent genuine belief that validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a potential solution or a priority.

... but almost nothing about validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the Instrument for Pre-accession

In the context of a possible EU accession, Bosnia and Herzegovina is already benefiting from some instruments (IPA). The list²⁴ of all the programmes being implemented or to be implemented under IPA pre-accession assistance shows little about education and even less about validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The Programme Fiches for the different sectors show everything that is planned by the EU. Some of these Programme Fiches are implemented via service contracts between the EU and international consulting companies, or via grants to national and international organisations. The fiches addressing education issues seem to focus mainly on tertiary education. Among the most relevant, there are:

- The Programme Fiche about “Strengthening human resources and institutional capacities for better employability”²⁵ (2011, EU contribution: 3 500 000 Euros (i.e. 95% of the total budget). The objective is “to improve and develop human resources and institutional capacities in entrepreneurial learning and higher education, including quality assurance in Higher Education and a system of validation of qualifications which equally recognises all forms of learning.” It is a rather broad approach with a mix of labour market needs, higher education, recognition of qualifications, and validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

- The Programme Fiche 8 for the “Support to Education Reform”²⁶ (IPA National Programme 2008 Part II). It is about capacity building that will include enhancing competences in setting and maintaining development of new occupational profiles, standardisation, certification and recognition of diplomas/certificates. This approach is even broader and not directly relevant here because it does not address validation or recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Nevertheless, it rightly focuses on the recognition of qualifications; the necessary starting point before assessment and validation programmes are set in motion.

Also in the context of the partnership with the EC, but not listed in the Programme Fiches mentioned above, there is the programme entitled “Human Resources Development” (HRD). Its overall objective is, over a period of 24 months from September 2011 on, “to strengthen staff capacities and increase efficiency of the labour market through the institutional and strategic development of the concept of lifelong learning based on relevant statistical data in order to contribute to the overall development of society and the promotion of economic and social cohesion.”²⁷ Its Component 1 on “Adult education in the context of lifelong learning” is the closest possible approach to the core of this report that can be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina because it clearly states: “It will be ensured that new legislation makes it possible to integrate formal and non-formal learning opportunities. Moreover, new legislation

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/bosnia-herzegovina/index_en.htm: See Component 1: Institution Building (at the bottom of this page; Last consulted: 2 November 2012)

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/bosnia_and_herzegovina/ipa/2011/9_ipa_2011_education_final.pdf

²⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/bosnia_and_herzegovina/ipa/2008/ipa_2008_part_ii_08_education_en.pdf

²⁷ <http://www.hrd-bih.eu/index.php/en/>

should also allow for the recognition of prior informal learning.”²⁸ The only available report²⁹, although very promising, remains very broad.

There are some other links to relevant studies and reports but in the local language³⁰.

Finally, the questionnaire circulated in the context of the Bologna Process (BFUG, 2009) also clearly indicates that there is nothing about validation or recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2.2. Kosovo³¹ – The Most Advanced System Design of the Five Countries under Study

The partially recognised Republic of Kosovo declared itself an independent state in 2008. It has a population of 1.7 million inhabitants, mainly Albanians (92%), and Serbs. The largest Serb enclave, in the north of the country, is largely under the control of institutions of the Republic of Serbia or parallel structures financed by Serbia. The GDP per capita is 3 000 USD (2010 estimate). Despite not being a member of the European Union, Kosovo uses the Euro as its *de facto* currency.

Kosovo has been offered by the European Council the prospect of EU accession in the medium to long term.

A convincing rhetoric about adult learning established early in the 2000s

In 2004, the Adult Learning Strategy for Kosovo (2005-2015) was the result of a collaboration between key stakeholders in human resources development (education, labour, trade and industry, employers, and trade unions). The objective was to determine how adult learning could be better adapted to the market transition with specific reference to economic development and social cohesion. It is one of the earliest strategies explicitly addressing adult learning in South East Europe (ECMI, 2006). The core of the strategy was to increase knowledge and competences for a market economy, a systemic approach to develop adult learning, and an increased value of learning, and promotion of a learning culture among its objectives. It acknowledged the mismatching of skills to jobs as a problem in Kosovo and identified increased knowledge and competences for the market economy as a solution. However, it failed to identify lack of qualifications and a poorly qualified workforce as part of the problem. Nevertheless, together with the development and implementation of an information, counselling and career guidance system, an occupational classification system, an integrated national qualifications system, modular course provision and the development and implementation of a quality assurance system, the Strategy proposed the establishment of a system to recognise and validate competences acquired by adults through non-formal and informal learning, as well as the development of flexible formal and non-formal adult learning opportunities.

Some years later, in 2008, a *Confintea* report coordinated by *dvv international* (2008) pointed to the lack of a systematic comprehensive approach in the field of adult learning. In particular, the report mentions the lack of a systematic comprehensive approach to the relations among the different forms or learning (formal, non-formal and informal). It goes on with underlying the lack of national qualifications system standards and of recognition of prior learning.

In 2010, the Kosovo Progress Report, by the European Commission (EC, 2010), reported some progress in the field of education concerning the alignment with European standards. However, this progress was mainly in the tertiary education system. Relevant to this report is the positive comment made by the European Commission that the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) had been established, with an acting director appointed, as well as four staff and its board. Despite this however, and the fact that the Council for Vocational Education and Training (CVET) became operational, there

²⁸ www.hrd-bih.eu/index.php/en/about-the-project/70-component-1

²⁹ www.hrd-bih.eu/index.php/en/related-documents/finish/3-documents-english/9-inception-report-hrd-project

³⁰ For example: www.acips.ba/bos/uploads/istrazivanje/zajednice_bos.pdf; www.dvv-soe.org/LLLA/UOO_BOH.pdf (See reference including relevant strategies and draft framework laws); www.cpu.org.ba/files/Ljudski%20kapital.pdf

³¹ **Special thanks to Aferdita Jaha, Teuta Danuza and Xhavit Rexhaj for their help in gathering precious information and data.**

is no mention of validation or recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in this report. Instead, Kosovo was encouraged to step up efforts to modernise vocational training institutions, in particular to train students in line with labour market demands, European standards and Kosovo qualifications framework. Finally, the very valid point was made that qualifications requirements in the VET sector are not sufficiently linked with those of general and higher education.

A mix of all the necessary ingredients

Nowadays, in comparison to the other countries in South East Europe, it seems that Kosovo is rather well advanced on the road to implementing validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. First of all, there is a law on adult education, which is not always granted in the four other countries. There is a clear strategy for the medium term (i.e. 2011-16; Kosovo, 2011). There are clearly identified target groups (women, early school leavers and school leavers without a qualification, teachers, workers in the informal economy) and general objectives (meeting labour market needs, reducing informal economy). The general objective of providing the people in Kosovo with a second chance for education – for early drop outs or school leavers without a qualification – is very present in the official rhetoric; as it is the case in the other countries under study. The teachers however, seem to be a rather unusual target group. They deserve special attention as it seems they have never been assessed before being assigned classes.

Finally there is a national qualifications framework (NQF) and a National Qualifications Authority (NQA). The NQA is an independent public body established in December 2009, after the Law on National Qualifications (Law 03/L-060). The NQA has overall responsibility over the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by defining the levels in the Framework, ensuring compatibility with the European Qualifications Framework, establishing criteria and processes for the approval of qualifications proposed for inclusion in the NQF and accreditation of Vocational Education and Training providers, facilitating progression and transfer between different learning pathways, and assuring quality in VET accredited institutions.

The NQF was prepared by the NQA, with the support of the EU KOSVET V project, funded by the European Union. It is the result of a long consultative process with all relevant stakeholders. A draft version of the NQF was approved in February 2011. Amendments were then made in order to reflect the lessons learned from tests carried out on the ground, from July to September 2011. The Governing Board of the NQA approved the NQF in December 2011. The Board is composed of 13 members approved by the Assembly of Kosovo. Different ministries, social partner organisations and public universities are seating on its board. The NQA has six executive staff: a director, an expert for standards, an expert for qualifications, two experts for quality assurance and one administrative assistant (www.akk-ks.net/en/akk/about-us).

The current role of the NQA will make it soon very familiar with issues that are germane to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, such as: establishing standards for general and vocational qualifications, managing the approval of new qualifications, developing procedures and criteria for validating qualifications, and locating them in the NQF; and drawing equivalences between qualifications offered in Kosovo and those offered in other countries.

From a technical point of view, it seems clear that Kosovo has figured out very clearly the importance of setting in motion a system that guarantees that qualifications are recognised in the first place, starting from qualifications awarded in the formal learning system. From there, it is easier to build a system for recognising qualifications that are awarded after validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in practice

When it comes to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes per se, it seems the NQA is fairly advanced. In fact, it supports the development of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL³²) in practice by:

- Setting policies and guidelines about RPL;
- Raising awareness about RPL among stakeholders such as institutional partners involved in formative recognition processes, or learners themselves as potential applicants;
- Providing information and guidance to providers on how to implement RPL;
- Implementing the national qualifications framework and modules/standards on which RPL depends;
- Implementing the certification system that will include recognition for modules;
- Strengthening the quality assurance in the assessment processes, including for RPL;
- Initiating processes to develop national capacity to implement RPL; and

This list shows a clear understanding of the best way to create a conducive environment to the implementation of a system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The purpose of RPL in Kosovo includes:

- Enabling access to relevant education and/or training;
- Customising learning activities to the needs of the learners;
- Reducing the time spent in future learning activities;
- Enabling access to labour market opportunities through certification/qualification;
- Converting old certificates with poor credibility into recognised qualifications; and
- Placing future learners in the formal learning system at the appropriate level upon entry in a programme.

The RPL process is organised so that applicants gather and present evidence of their knowledge and skills. The evidence may be collected in different ways, for example through portfolios, or through assessments (such as written, practical or/and oral tests). Learning modules approved for inclusion in qualifications and registered on the NQF will provide an assessment framework, which will include RPL.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has set a process in motion for organising validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes with its Regional Centres for Employment (RCEs) and its Regional Vocational Training Centres (RVTCs). The procedure varies slightly:

- Procedures with the RCE: registration at employment offices, evidence of experience, application for qualification; and
- Procedures with the RVTCs: registration database, entrance test, modular testing, final test.

It is difficult to evaluate what is being done exactly without field visits but the approach seems state-of-the-art. One may wonder though, why the procedures are different according to the body learners will apply to.

³² RPL is the term used by the NQA.

In any case, none of the above has been implemented yet. Kosovo is not done yet with finishing the legislative work. In the meantime, the NQA is compiling administrative instructions. The plan is to start around the second quarter of 2013, and by the end of 2013 for the Teachers Professional Development (TPD) (Kosovo Education Strategic Plan, 2011).

The legal framework

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined by the Law on National Qualifications as “the process of assessing the knowledge and skills or wider competences that an individual has previously acquired through formal, informal or non-formal learning. This knowledge shall be used to give the possibility of advancement to a person or exemptions from part of a course or qualification or credit towards a qualification.”

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) will provide a structure for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This ambition has been an important driver in Kosovo for integrating a Credit System in the NQF. Modules that are components of qualifications will provide the framework for assessing the knowledge and skills that learners have developed. The approach to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is therefore clearly linked to the establishment of a national qualifications framework.

The NQA is clearly committed to the development of a system for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. For instance, one of the criteria for accreditation as an assessment institution is that a provider must demonstrate that it offers arrangements for ensuring access to assessment and certification for applicants other than those following specified learning programmes, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This is perfectly in line with the most advanced system elsewhere in Europe. The NQA has even developed “Guidelines for RPL” to support providers in their efforts to implement RPL.

Linking the national qualifications framework and validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes

The NQF is regulated through mechanisms intended to ensure compliance with the arrangements and requirements laid down for the qualifications system and to ensure that the system delivers qualifications at an acceptable level of quality. The mechanisms for achieving these objectives are focused on:

- Validation and approval of qualifications proposed for inclusion in the NQF;
- Accreditation of institutions responsible for assessment and certification of NQF-approved qualifications;
- Quality assurance of accredited institutions and the delivery of validated qualifications.

An Administrative Instruction on “Criteria and Procedures for the Validation and Approval of National Qualifications and the Accreditation of Qualification Awarding Institutions in Kosovo” has been issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. This provides the framework for the validation and approval of qualifications for registration in the NQF.

The credit system in VET provides a framework for accrediting prior learning including learning in non-formal and informal settings. The NQF provides a structure for the recognition of prior learning, whether formal or not. The NQA is in the process of creating an Administrative Instruction regarding the validation of qualifications through recognition of prior learning.

Quality assurance in RPL

At present, providers vary in terms of the quality of their assessment and processes for the internal verification of the assessment. The NQA will support providers to strengthen the quality assurance of assessment, and this will help to build the reliability of the credit system. In the past, the quality and regularity of external monitoring of assessment by VET providers has varied, and there has been insufficient institutionalised capacity available. A key responsibility of the NQA is therefore to strengthen and support the development of external quality assurance including of private and non-formal VET providers.

Financing of RPL

Currently, the plan is to finance RPL from a range of sources, depending on the providers and purposes of RPL, including financing by the state, international partners and RPL applicants themselves. Sustainable funding sources will need to be found, particularly where RPL has the potential to contribute to interventions for social inclusion and employment or is linked to government initiatives for increasing skills supply in particular sectors.

A clear rationale: labour market needs and productive/competitive workers

In addition to a well spelled out policy and strategy about implementing a system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, Kosovo has also clearly identified the rationale for doing it. It is said that Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Tertiary Education should adequately meet the needs of the labour market. Raising the quality of VET and of Tertiary Education is a priority of the Government. The objective is that occupational skills, professional skills and individual competences in general after undertaking learning in the VET or Tertiary Education systems are at the desirable level.

At the moment, this is still a challenge ahead of Kosovo to create a skilled and flexible workforce which can compete in local, regional and global environments.

Some elements of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the IPA

When it comes to the impact of the potential access to the European Union, among the few Programme Fiches that [even partly] describe activities relevant to lifelong learning and the functioning of the labour market in general, there is the one on “Education and Employment” (Code 02.26). It says nothing about validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Despite a large proportion of the budget falling on the EU (10 ME out of a total budget of 11.7 ME) which usually places recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes rather high on the education and labour market agenda, there is not a single sentence about those approaches.

There is also a Programme Fiche on “Education and Cultural Diversity” (2011/022-939) which, despite focusing on the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) and supporting measures for socially excluded groups such as the Roma, mentions non-formal learning only once. It is in the context of education being identified as a priority within the framework of economic development that Kosovo requires IPA support to improve the skill levels and employment prospects of the workforce, particularly by enhancing the performance of education systems and by facilitating the transition from education to employment, entry of young people to the labour market and support of their skills set through support for non-formal learning, participation, volunteering and mobility. And this allusion to non-formal learning does not even refer to validation/recognition, and the whole paragraph does not make the case for a more qualified workforce (Total budget: 9.5 ME, EU contribution: 7 ME).

There is finally a Programme Fiche on “Support to Employment and Education” (2009/021-145; Total budget 10.9 ME, EU contribution: 10.3 ME) that is very relevant to the objective of *dvv international* in the current endeavour: “to address poverty and inequality through improvements in education and

employment with particular attention to the quality of education, training and skills development". However, the fiche does not mention one single time validation or recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

2.3. Macedonia³³ – Policy Planning

Macedonia is one of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, from which it declared independence in 1991. It is one of the smallest countries in the World (148th by size and 146th by population). It became a member of the United Nations in 1993. Its GDP per capita is 10 000 USD. It has a population of two million inhabitants, composed of mainly Macedonians (65%) and Albanians (25%) that use their own language.

In addition to the Macedonian language, the Albanian language became official after the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001. The other ethnic groups are Turks (4%) and Roma (3%). Unlike other European countries, Roma people – especially young people in cities such as Bitola – have largely adopted the Macedonian language, potentially facilitating [adult] learning activities. Macedonia has a rather standard education system that comprises pre-school education, primary, secondary and tertiary education. Compulsory education includes secondary education.

Macedonia is a recognised candidate to the European Union.

An adult learning system and a validation/recognition system under construction

In Macedonia, adult education was first promoted by the Workers Universities, which are focused on labour market oriented competences. At the time of the drafting of this report, they seem to be experiencing sustainability issues, but they remain the pioneer in adult education. However, there is no operational adult learning *system*. The development of non-formal adult education is in its initial phase. Even the concept of adult learning is quite recent: it is only in 2008 that the Macedonian Parliament passed the Bill on Adult Education; even if the preparatory work started in 1997 (*dvv international*, 2011). For the first time in 2008 – and learning from the experience of other countries that have had a law for decades, it may take some time before Macedonia may enjoy an operational adult learning system –, this law regulates in a comprehensive manner the organisation, structure, financing and management of the adult learning system, within the perspective of lifelong learning. Separate provisions related to primary and secondary education for adults are included in the laws on primary and secondary education (IBE, UNESCO, 2011). This law on adult education provided for the establishment of the Council for Adult Education and the Centre for Adult Education. The latter does not seem to have hired staff in the very specific field of validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes yet.

Nevertheless, the Centre for Adult Education has just been charged with the task of establishing a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Very little is happening at the moment in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals, as the Centre for Adult Education is awaiting the next round of IPA documents which are in the final phase of preparation: e.g. the draft revised IPA Operational Programme that was under preparation at the time of the visit. In fact, it seems the push in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals only comes from the EU, in the context of the IPA. There is no demand whatsoever from stakeholders and labour market actors. There seems to be no awareness, and even less interest, in validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Macedonia. To avoid confusion, it must be stressed that this does not mean non-formal and informal learning is not taking place, but that validating/recognising the corresponding outcomes is not a priority yet.

³³ Special thanks to Maya Avramovska, Ljupco Despotovski, Stojan Doncevski, Konstantin Hristoski, Biljana Mojsovska and Natasa Petkova for their comments and/or their help in gathering precious information and data.

Clearly, the Centre for Adult Education is accrediting institutions throughout the country – this process started in January 2012 – but accrediting institutions is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals to happen³⁴. In fact, it is not even an indicator that individual validation will ever take place.

There are on-going discussions about the national qualifications framework

The Centre for Adult Education is mainly focusing on the accreditation of programmes delivered by VET providers in what is called the non-formal education sector. There are three steps in this process: the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) checks that the provider meets the administrative requirements, then the VET Centre – with the help of the CAE – checks that the content of the programme is relevant to the occupations that the training is aiming at, and finally the Ministry of Education organises an inspection visit to check the learning material, the teaching force and all the components related to the pedagogy. At the end of this process, the Ministry of Education awards an accreditation number to the provider for each accredited programme. The missing part is clearly the assessment of the individuals' learning outcomes. None of the three steps ever involves checking that learners are assessed at the end of the training programme being under scrutiny for accreditation. It is therefore difficult to introduce the concept of assessing learning outcomes acquired outside of this programme, which is the idea behind validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This approach, not focused on whether participants are assessed, has consequences on the qualification process. What participants in the programme receive after completion of the programme is merely a certificate of attendance. At the time of the drafting, there were talks within the Centre for Adult Education – in the context of the capacity building process organised as part of the Twining with GIP-International – about moving toward giving more attention to the assessment process and to the nature of the certificate awarded at the end of the training programme.

The most promising avenue is the likely establishment of a national qualifications framework in the medium term. Discussions are being carried out at the moment. Unfortunately, from meetings that took place at the Centre for Adult Education, the approach seems to be to use the EQF as a template. The qualifications framework approach in Macedonia is too much in its infancy for observers to be able to form an opinion about what will happen; but the national qualifications framework may resemble the European Qualifications Framework, for instance, in having 8 levels. However, the EQF was designed as a meta-framework, a sort of translation device, but it was not intended to be a template for countries to necessarily mimic it. The point is that a national qualifications framework should above all serve the purpose of the country itself. Once it is established, it can be aligned with the EQF, but not the other way around. By mimicking the EQF too closely, Macedonia may miss some of its own idiosyncrasies and leave out of the framework learning outcomes or competences that should be in it. This is true in terms of level: choosing 8 levels, as in the EQF, is not necessarily a good choice for Macedonia³⁵. This is also true in terms of relevant descriptors. A typical question is how to address completely competent workers who are illiterate in terms of practical skills³⁶.

A vertical organisation structure in the labour market

Macedonia seems to be the type of country where there is a wide gap between the different levels of a work organisation. The country clearly possesses extremely competent, white-collar, highly qualified workers and blue-collar, poorly qualified workers, but the two intermediary categories usually described in the literature (white-collar, low-skilled and blue-collar, high-skilled workers) seem rather scarce. It is probably true that this is also the case in the four countries under study, but the phenomenon was especially accentuated in Macedonia (Sondergaard and Murthi³⁷, World Bank 2012).

³⁴ See Section 1 for details about what validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes really is.

³⁵ Ireland has 10, Scotland 12, France 5.

³⁶ This issue is very often found in Africa.

³⁷ "Macedonia [...] saw a sharp increase in the demand for medium-level professional skills... and a rise in unskilled manual employment".

"There has been a shift in occupational structure away from skilled manual occupations in some countries (e.g., Poland, Russia, and FYR Macedonia)".

As a consequence, the organisation of work is rather vertical with little or no autonomy at the level of blue-collar, low-qualified workers. Typically, blue-collar, low-skilled workers are not involved in key decisions: they take their instructions from white-collar, high-skilled workers and have no say or, may not want to have a say, in the matter. In short, there is a clear division of labour.

Therefore, there are probably few incentives for workers to try to reach one level up because that would not suffice to get them an occupational promotion. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, on the other hand, is precisely aiming at making workers better qualified, and therefore more independent in their jobs.

In addition, and more technically, the assessment process usually organised in the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is rather encompassing. The process aims at assessing the full range of competences. It is very likely that a typical applicant, if such system would exist, would not meet the standards in terms of the required competences to achieve a full qualification. A clear solution to this problem, and this is something many countries are considering seriously, would be that Macedonia investigate the possibility of delivering partial qualifications³⁸. Applicants would be assessed on the practical skills, for instance, and would obtain a document that would certify that they are competent for specific tasks only. This is a very interesting path to follow because there is strong evidence that even fully qualified workers do not use all their competences in the exercise of their job. It is also consistent with organising the provision of education and training in modules.

Some interesting elements of prior learning assessment

Workers Universities have developed their own criteria for assessing prior learning (since 1995-97). Applicants must have two years of experience relevant to the competence(s) for which they seek validation. They are assessed by a commission composed of three members. Workers Universities and Open Civic Universities for lifelong learning use the craftsmen's facilities for the purpose of the training as well as for the assessment of prior learning outcomes, since they do not possess all the capacities for various vocations.

The documents awarded after the assessment process are accepted by the Chamber of Craftsmen, which is also responsible for the adequate performance of crafts activities. There is a law (Law for Craftsmen Work, 2004) that regulates this approach. According to its Article 11, the competence for performing certain crafts is assessed by a commission organised by a municipal or regional Chamber of Craftsmen of the Republic of Macedonia.

Several Secondary Vocation Schools throughout Macedonia also organise non-formal vocational training and assess prior learning outcomes.

A recent attempt at piloting validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes: renovation of vernacular houses

In the context of the collaboration between the EU and outsider countries, there is a programme based on the twinning between the EU and non-EU countries. "Twinning for Capacity Building" is an EU-funded aid programme established in 1998 in which EU Member State governments and public sector organisations work with their counterparts in Pre-Accession countries and in the European neighbourhood on partnership projects. In this context, France, through its Ministry of Labour and its agency for international cooperation (GIP-International), is managing a *Twinning* project with the Centre for Adult Education on "Adult Education in Macedonia". In this context, an attempt was made to organise practical vocational training for adults. The region of Skopje is scattered with vernacular houses (see Namicev, 2007, Museum of Macedonia, Skopje for a survey) that need renovation: the idea was to train adults on the spot and create positive externalities³⁹, through tourism for instance. Many of the houses are inhabited and all required renovation (light improvements), reconstruction (heavy duty building work) and/or rehabilitation (making those houses fit for living, by providing

³⁸ On the model, perhaps, of what the Workers' Universities and Open Civic Universities are doing for example.

³⁹ Positive consequences that were not intended in the first place.

running water and electricity, for example). The idea was to use the opportunity to maintain local traditions and use local construction materials while providing inhabitants with more decent housing and participants in the pilot with state of the art training and qualifications.

An approach with a broader vision could even link such training activities to the creation of an industry sector devoted to making some areas attractive to tourists, thus paving the way for a green economy by equipping vernacular houses with the most recent cost saving and environmentally safe devices and appliances (to collect rain water, generate solar energy...).

Beyond providing inhabitants with better living conditions, such a pilot project would have two main advantages in the context of the capacity building approach of the *Twining* activities:

- Renovation, reconstruction and/or rehabilitation of vernacular houses in Macedonia require the use of different techniques that touch upon different sectors, either structural (foundations, roof work, wood support, brickwork...) or finishing (wood flooring, light brick laying, sills, thresholds, rendering...), which would provide many opportunities for organising training sessions; and
- There is strong evidence that a good fraction of the workforce in Macedonia somewhat masters some of the skills involved in renovating/reconstructing/rehabilitating vernacular houses, but they do not hold the corresponding qualifications that would give them a regular job. Such a project would be a great opportunity to pilot recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and to assess the feasibility of the necessary steps to make recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes a reality accepted in the Macedonian society.

This pilot project provided an opportunity to, in addition to formal training, pilot an approach based on recognition of non-formal and informal learning that is transferable and sustainable. Transferable because there is nothing specific in the industries involved in renovating, reconstructing or rehabilitating vernacular houses; and sustainable because the proposed method is reproducible at no additional cost whenever there is a reasonable large number of unqualified skilled workers that aimed at a qualification.

The project proved very difficult to implement primarily because all the local partners involved in the project (municipalities, architects, construction companies) could not think of this exercise as a training project. All stakeholders were thinking in terms of economic activities, business and renovation. Therefore the discussion very rapidly turned into an exchange about how much the workers should be paid. None of the local stakeholders were really interested in discussing the qualifications potentially awarded, or even in mentioning the initial assessment of their existing competences so that they would be trained at their level.

One anecdote was very telling: when the group in charge of the *Twining* project proposed names for the certificate to be awarded, the title “technician” was immediately rejected by the Macedonian administration. The reason was that a “technician in Macedonia is someone who has four years of formal secondary vocational education”. Stakeholders do not seem to be ready to accept that there are other ways of earning the title of technician even if creating other routes to qualifications is at the heart of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

These two pilot projects may not be organised on a large scale but they are relevant to this study: promoters start from an analysis of the competences that are needed. They then assess individual applicants before they undertake learning activities so that they start learning and are trained at their current level. Applicants do not learn what they already know and are not discouraged either because they are taught at a level way above their own.

Qualifications awarded outside of the Ministry of Education do not have currency

In the context of the *Twining* project mentioned above, there are also literacy courses that are organised throughout the country. The experience was also very telling. In order to make visible the investment by the participants, it was decided to award a certificate to those meeting some standards. In Macedonia, the certificate of primary education is compulsory for:

- Obtaining the driving license; and
- Registering with the Public Employment Service (PES).

There is clearly a rationale for this, which is creating incentives for individuals to engage in education. However, such measures often lead to a vicious cycle, as people without the economic resources to engage in education cannot make a living because they cannot either drive or register with the PES to obtain information and career guidance. The point here is not to open a debate about the legitimacy of such rules, but to point that when the Centre for Adult Education tried to check whether the certificate delivered at the end of the literacy courses would be equivalent to the qualification awarded at the end of formal primary education – so that people could be able to obtain a driving license and/or register with the PES – the response was negative. It seems that no certificate awarded outside of the Ministry of Education will ever have the currency of the qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education.

The pilots organised in the context of the *Twinning* project are practical experience of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In both cases, everything seems to be benchmarked against what is awarded by the Ministry of Education.

Possible ways forward in Macedonia

It seems clear that the Ministry of Education is the main, and only player, for awarding recognised qualifications. This is not necessarily an issue as such. It is an issue when, as it seems to be the case in Macedonia, the Ministry of Education prevents all the other actors and stakeholders to deliver qualifications that have currency in society. It is an issue when the VET centre is focusing only on young people in the initial formal VET system, leaving aside adult learning and second chances for qualifications later in life. It is an issue when the accreditation of VET providers is evaluated only on the basis of administrative conditions, when pedagogy and meeting the needs of ends users (employers) are not considered.

All those practices may lead to a situation where the conditions are not met for the creation of synergies, sharing of practices and mutual enlightenment. The example of Montenegro (below) shows that, when the same actors are in charge of initial VET and continuing VET, then there are synergies that are created to, for example, write learning-outcomes-based *curricula*. Of course it is only in the VET sector but it covers the full lifelong learning spectrum, which is quite an achievement. This will help create the standards for assessing adult applicants to a validation/recognition process, once it exists in Montenegro. For the time being, in Macedonia, the unique entry point is the formal initial learning system, whether vocational or academic. This is not conducive to the establishment of a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. At the time of the study, there was no joint output between the VET Centre and the Centre for Adult Education in Macedonia. Nevertheless, synergies may develop and it can only be an advantage to speed up the ongoing process.

In addition, there are reasons to be optimistic, essentially because there is evidence that the Macedonian labour force is competent, even if not necessarily qualified. The issue is to make these competences visible, so that they are used efficiently for the development of the country. This will imply that the recruitment process of workers is clarified and somewhat rationalised. At the moment, it seems that it is highly based on private networking and has little to do with actual qualifications/competences.

2.4. Montenegro⁴⁰ – Adequate Initial Steps are Being Taken

Montenegro is one of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia. It became totally independent in 2006 when a referendum led to its separation from Serbia. It is also one of the smallest countries in the world. It is a member of the United Nations. Its GDP per capita is 11 500 USD (2011 estimate).

⁴⁰ Special thanks to Anne-Marie Charraud, Ljiljana Garic, Olga Nikcevic, Anita Mitrovic Milic and Ivan Percin for their help in gathering precious information and data.

Despite not being a member of the European Union, Montenegro uses the Euro as its *de facto* currency. It has a population of 625 000 inhabitants, mainly composed of Montenegrins (45 %), Serbs (29 %), Bosniaks (9 %), Albanians (5 %) and Croats (1 %). The unique official language is Montenegrin. The others are recognised as regional languages (Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian).

Education in Montenegro is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Sports. Compulsory education starts at the age of 6, and lasts for 9 years. Teenagers may continue with 4 years of academic education or 3 years of vocational preparation (trade schools). There is one public university (University of Montenegro) and two private.

Montenegro is a recognised candidate to the European Union.

The key terms are gaining currency

When it comes to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the term that seems the most widely used in Montenegro is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The term *learning outcomes* is understood but does not seem to be used; the term *competence* is used instead, which is agreeable to a large extent (Werquin, 2011). Stakeholders and actors are getting acquainted with the difference between *validation* and *recognition* in the context of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and in the context of qualifications in general (see Section 1.2).

Diploma vs. certificate

The clear, and operational, distinction that seems to have currency in Montenegro is the difference between formal education and non-formal education. The former is delivered and assessed by the Ministry of Education and Sports, which awards a diploma to successful candidates. It is the traditional formal learning system for young people in the initial formal education and training system. The latter concerns all the rest, for the adult population in particular, and it leads to the awarding of a certificate. The change of terminology from diploma to certificate is a usual practice, in many countries (Spain is an example), to signal a difference, mark a territory and also generate – on purpose or not – an unequal parity of esteem in society. Nevertheless, there seems to be a good understanding of the interest of validating and recognising learning outcomes from non-formal education as well.

However, the clear difference that is made between diploma and certificate may prove to be an issue in the long run, when concepts and approaches such as the national qualifications framework or the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are considered for implementation in Montenegro. What a qualifications framework usually does is to classify qualifications, but they are classified by level (standards or achievement may vary from 1 to 8 on each descriptor, for example, in the EQF) rather than by context of learning (formal, non-formal or even informal). By the same token, advanced countries in the field of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes usually try to discard the difference among the various contexts of learning (formal, non-formal or informal) so that there is parity of esteem and equity (Norway is an example). The assumption behind this decision of harmonising all qualifications – sometimes not consensual (France is an example) – is that what matters is what applicants know or can do, and not how they learnt it. In almost all these countries anyway, the approach has pervaded to the formal learning system where *curricula* are now outcome-based, a.k.a. competence-based *curricula*. The approach is to start from the needs, typically competences for the labour market, and to work backwards.

The case of Montenegro is interesting because it is a classical example of a situation where one encounters recognised qualifications (diplomas) and less-recognised qualifications (certificates).

The strength: a joint effort to develop all standards

The interesting choice that was made in Montenegro is to put the same VET Centre in charge of developing the standards for both the diplomas and the certificates. The two divisions of the VET

Centre in charge of respectively developing the standards for both the diplomas and the certificates seem to be working well together. The joint endeavour of developing standards for employment activities and for training will undoubtedly create synergies and shed light on the necessary links that ought to be made between those two facets of the future lifelong learning system in Montenegro. The link that will necessarily exist between the standards for assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes and the current standards in the formal education and training initial system will help promote validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

A weakness perhaps that could be noted is that Montenegro is not really thinking in terms of developing standards for certification. It seems that what is assessed is what has been taught and there is little or no portability of the output of an assessment, either within the country or abroad. The lack of consistency from one institution to another may be costly, and certainly create issues when/if Montenegro access the EU. Having said that, it seems the Ministry of Education is powerful enough that qualifications awarded on its behalf have currency in the entire country, as it is the case in the neighbour Macedonia for instance.

The paradox

There seems to be a paradox however when it comes to the purpose of implementing a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not implemented at the moment in Montenegro. Nevertheless, when the question is addressed, even hypothetically, it seems that what is considered is giving to successful applicants the right to seat for an examination to enter the formal learning system that would lead to a diploma. But there is no such a thing as an examination system for adults that would lead to a diploma...

It seems that the way the validation/recognition system is anticipated in Montenegro will only lead to helping bridge the diploma and the certificate. Concretely, people with a certificate would be allowed to try their luck at studying in the formal learning system in order to earn a diploma. This is a paradox because there does not seem to be a provision that would allow adults to prepare for a diploma. Such systems exist in several countries (*Externenprüfung* in Germany or *Prueba Libre* in Spain) but, in these countries, the provision is organised so as to deliver formal learning to adults who have had all their learning outcomes, whether formal or not, recognised. In Montenegro at the moment, there is only non-formal education for adults, nothing else in terms of supply. And non-formal education leads only to a certificate, not to a diploma. There is not a formal learning system that would allow adults to obtain a diploma. The only option in sight is to send them back to the initial education and training system, but there is clear evidence that in general adults do not do very well when sent back to school with young people.

Possible ways forward in Montenegro

It seems Montenegro has a set of regulated occupations for which people need a license in order to practice. This is typically the sort of situation where validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a very useful approach because it allows for the qualification of people in a shorter period of time than the formal learning system. As in most of the other countries under study, this approach will be part of a general strategy to help people move from the informal to the formal economy.

In the context of the IPA, there is also a *Twinning* Project between France (Ministry of Labour, GIP International) and Montenegro. This project is focused on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, based on the French approach to Validation of Experiential Learning Outcomes (VAE, *Validation des acquis de l'expérience*). There is nothing concrete for the moment. The initial agreement for collaboration was terminated in 2011. There is a second agreement that should begin soon and last until 2015.

2.5. Serbia⁴¹ – The Only Country with a Pilot Actually Implemented (in 2012)

Serbia, officially the Republic of Serbia, is the largest of the countries under study and the largest of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia. It became totally independent in 2006, when Montenegro decided to obtain its independence. It is a member of the United Nation and the Council of Europe (not an EU institution). Its GDP per capita is 15 500 USD (2011 estimate, without Kosovo). It has a population of 7.1 Million inhabitants, composed of mainly Serbs (83%), Hungarians (4%), Bosniaks (2%) and Roma (1.5%). The unique official language is Serbian.

Education in Serbia is regulated by the Ministry of Science and Education. Compulsory schooling starts at the age of 7, and lasts for 8 years. After that, teenagers have a choice between the academic path or vocational preparation for the labour market. There are large public universities in Belgrade and other large cities in the country. The University of Belgrade is the largest and the oldest (1808). Serbia has a rich tradition of contributing to the field of science and technology.

Serbia has been offered by the European Council the prospect of EU accession in the medium to long term. It is an official candidate for membership to the European Union since 2011.

A clear rationale and several objectives

Serbia has targeted the entire population but has certainly some specific target groups in mind (the unemployed, poorly educated or qualified individuals, people living below the poverty line...). The rationale for implementing a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is therefore clearly related to the labour market in general (easier access to a job and therefore to an income, initiating independent entrepreneurship, prevention of work disability). Nevertheless, there are also economic justifications in the field of lifelong learning such as reducing learning costs, increasing individuals' self-esteem and self-confidence to engage in further learning, and promoting a more positive attitude towards learning in general.

At the individual level, the detailed objectives, and expected benefits, are manifold in the Serbian approach:

- Avoiding that people learn what they already know;
- Assessing the relevance of the learning outcomes from previous learning experiences;
- Evaluating which competences (knowledge, skills, attributes) are to be improved;
- Tailoring the qualification route to individual needs (personal learning plans); and
- Successful (re)integration into society.

A very active VET sector, in connection with the NQF

The Institute for the Improvement in Education (ZUOV) has recently been given the responsibility for the development of a model for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes by the Law on the Foundation of Education. In general, this institution is responsible for monitoring, improving and assuring the quality and development of the education system. It does so by leading research programmes, providing counselling services and being involved in different kinds of development processes.

In Serbia, the development of a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is clearly part of the establishment of a national qualifications framework in vocational education and training (VET). This approach has just been piloted.

⁴¹ Special thanks to Neda Bokan, Jelena Ivancevic, Jelena Jakovljevic and Katarina Popovic for their help in gathering precious information and data.

The Project IPA 07 on the Modernisation of the Secondary VET System in Serbia has a component dealing with continuing adult education within which one of the possible models for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is developed and piloted.

The Project IPA 07 about the Modernisation of the Secondary VET System in Serbia has offered an opportunity to pilot the foreseen model for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The VET school in Zrenjanin, about 50 kilometres north of Belgrade, was selected to carry out the pilot because it was willing to undertake the project, had the capacity to do it and had some students belonging to the typical target groups. The pilot was conducted also with the help of the Department for Continuing Adult Education (a.k.a. Regional Training Centre).

The model was suggested and developed by the expert of the IPA project in cooperation with the Institute for the Improvement in Education (ZUOV). The director and teachers of the school implemented the model with the coordination and support from ZUOV. The Institute presents this activity as a “learning exercise”. The objective is to learn from the findings and to adapt the validation and recognition procedures and methods accordingly. The activity started in January 2012 and was meant to be completed in December 2012.

The pilot in VET in detail – A comprehensive approach

This pilot is interesting because it is the first known attempt to organise validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the five countries under study. It is therefore important to spell out the different steps of the implementation process:

1. Selection of domains

Two profiles (or jobs) within two vocational fields were identified as suitable for piloting the awarding of partial qualification: baker (food processing) and waiter (services).

This does not mean that RPL will only lead to partial qualifications, but that it will be the most likely case in practice at the beginning. It is an interesting way of testing the value for individuals to have only some competences recognised, as opposed to all the competences corresponding to a given employment. Those partial qualifications are designed as having high currency, since they will be called qualifications and be registered as such. This approach was not necessarily consensual in Serbia, but it proved useful in the conception of the modular system that would provide the training.

2. Deconstruction of the two profiles in a number of autonomous modules

The key point of the deconstruction was to spell out the requested vocational competences behind the job. The competence profile was described and associated to training modules.

3. Field visit

The visit was organised to discuss the selection of the target groups and the overall process. Some key questions were addressed on this occasion:

- What would be the available target group(s)?
- How can each target group be resourced?
- What would be the shape of ideal groups in the first place (size, type...)?
- How would the process look like?
- What difficulties could be anticipated?
- What would be the motivational factors for the potential participants?

The answers are provided below.

4. Determine the conditions for each module and for assessment

A flexible path was created, which included formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning (experience) on the job, as appropriate. Sound assessment tools were created. They were based on the competences achieved. Trainers and assessors were previously trained.

5. Identification and mobilisation of the target groups

Five target groups were identified in the first place:

- Students at risk (no interest/capacity to attend full qualification);
- Young drop-outs from VET schools;
- Adults not having a full qualification (former drop-outs from the field), but working in the area;
- Adults working in the area as unqualified workers, but having some work experience and being motivated to achieve a partial qualification; and
- Adults from a related domain willing to re-qualify.

Only the last three target groups were retained and mobilised as resources were scarce and these three target groups were more in line with the purpose of the pilot and the overall strategy of Serbia.

6. Ensure resources for the pilot

The school provided most of the resources for the pilot. The project provided some complementary funds for the celebration and the media coverage during the awarding ceremony at the end.

7. Ensure guidance and counselling service

Learning and training plans for the participants were developed. The material for training was prepared.

8. Actual assessment

The pilot was carried out under the supervision of the Institute for Improvement in Education and the experts of the Project. Since the objective was to award partial qualifications in the first place and in practice, the school undertook the following steps:

- Initial diagnosis for the requested module(s);
- Validation and recognition of prior learning (competence test, identical to final traditional test), and awarding of the certificate if passed;
- In case some top up training is necessary, design of the individual learning path (what competences should be acquired and through what type of activities and timelines);
- Individuals follow and complete their individual learning path;
- Final evaluation; and
- Award of partial qualification to successful applicants.

9. Observation and analysis of the process

The process was carefully monitored to evaluate the successful, and the less successful, components of the pilot.

10. Recommendations

The last step consisted of formulating recommendations to decision makers. The step involved providing recommendations on the process of awarding partial qualifications in the I-VET and C-VET sectors in Serbia. The objectives were:

- To make the best possible use of the existing legal opportunities;
- To extend the pilot to other contexts, i.e. to formalize for better communication, to make available to others and to promote the possibility of organising validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in other places, and/or for other domains.

At the time of the drafting of this report for *dvv international*, this step has not been completed. Among the expected conclusions, there are the following:

- The pilot is quite a success;
- The pilot has received considerable support from main stakeholders; and
- The model should not remain unique and others should be developed; for instance, the new models could be less demanding in terms of staff time and require less financial resources.

In short, the definition of the process for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in Serbia is still open.

Validation/recognition leads to partial qualification only, in line with the organisation of the Serbian VET system⁴²

Secondary vocational education programmes are organised and implemented as an interdependent combination of subjects, modules, professional practice and work. Vocational education, and qualifying and training of adults as a segment of vocational education, are implemented through modules as the basic programme and organisational units. The reasons for modularisation in secondary vocational education in general, and especially in vocational education of adults, are numerous. Modularisation provides:

- More flexibility in the planning and organisation of education;
- Better economic efficiency of education;
- Better adaptability to the needs of the labour market and the concrete working environment and jobs;
- Better vertical and horizontal transferability;
- More adequate ways of bridging the gap between school (academic) qualifications and competences and knowledge acquired through experience;
- Greater adaptability to individual needs and possibilities for learning; and
- Greater possibilities for learners to design their own learning pathways and acquire competences.

Modules are specific/particular segments of learning that lead to the achievement of defined outcomes of learning or work competences. Modules can be independent or part of wider programmes or

⁴² See Despotovic and Pejatovic (2004)

organisational entities. There are units or packages of learning that lead to vocational competences and to work skills and qualifications.

The concept of occupation, that is qualifications, is the frame for modularisation, and the precise description of the occupation is the basis for creating a module. In the educational system, occupations are presented as clusters of modules – sets of functional and organisationally connected packages, or learning units. The same modules can be a part of different clusters of occupations, and that is a way to provide horizontal and vertical passing in the educational system.

Two equal concepts of modularisation and two methods for creating modules exist in the system of vocational education:

- General modularisation, leading to integrated qualifications, that is qualifications in a certain occupation;
- Fragmented modularisation, leading to partial qualifications and training for individual jobs and working functions.

In the case of full qualifications, modules are created by dividing occupations into smaller, complex but differentiated parts, according to the criteria of jobs, roles, functions or work competences in certain occupations that could be acquired, assessed but not recognised individually. Modules are verified only as a part of a wider set that leads towards an overall qualification, i.e. occupational competences. This type of modularisation is being implemented in the school system and is mainly intended for young people, although the possibility to pass individual modules is also given to adults in regular schools, and is available in institutions for adult education.

In the case of partial qualifications – i.e. those awarded after validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes – modules are created by dividing occupations into less complex but differentiated parts, or they are the expression of the labour market' and enterprises' needs for specific work competences and training for individual jobs, and specific functions and roles which can be acquired separately and recognised (certificated) individually outside the general qualifications system.

This type of modularisation has been implemented in schools and institutions for adult education. It is the expression of efforts to satisfy the needs of the labour market and the continuous, technical and technological innovation and restructuring of the enterprises.

An approach deeply anchored in the EU's – with some time lag due to a weak legal framework

The whole concept of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Serbia is in line with the establishment of a national qualifications framework and it is entirely based on the European Qualifications Framework principles.

However, there is still no legal basis for establishing a national qualifications framework. It seems that there is also a lack of capacity in terms of the number of staff and financial resources available. This prevents the organisation of a quality assurance process in the implementation, which is required from the point of view of Serbian institutions. According to the consulted stakeholders, there is a risk that providers, and possibly individuals, will misuse validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

Finally, to explain the time lag in the implementation of EC tools, there is also the lack of a credit system in VET in Serbia. It seems it will be developed through future IPA projects.

Fragmented practices, within the university system or in some ministries

To some extent, universities are also involved in validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. And so, universities are somewhat anticipating the future strategy for education, which is in preparation. For instance, the University of Belgrade has a bylaw that stipulates

that the Senate and the Educational-Scientific Council decide respectively which non-formal educational activity can be organised at the University. However, it does not say anything about assessment, validation or recognition. Informal learning outcomes are recognised only in the frame of some master programmes for applicants that are employed by companies, when their everyday job in those companies is relevant to the master programme.

There are also many organisations that deliver language courses, with some element of recognition of prior learning. If a student passes the test in these organisations, then companies and universities accept their language certificate.

The Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce, Workers Universities, and the National Employability Service are all very active in the organisation of non-formal learning. They know which enterprises recognise the learning outcomes of their successful learners. The Ministry of Health is also partly involved in recognition of prior learning outcomes in the framework of courses needed for obtaining a license to practice.

By way of conclusion, it seems Serbia does not yet meet all the necessary conditions for the successful implementation of a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (legal framework not ready, pilot in VET not fully analyzed...). Nevertheless, the pilot organised in the context of the IPA is the only actual experiment that has been conducted in the five countries under study. It seems based on a correct analysis of the situation (rationale, objectives, expected benefits...); and above all, this pilot is based on a process that seems to be relevant to South East Europe:

- Validation is considered a complement to formal learning, and additional top-up training is recommended and organised for unsuccessful applicants in the assessment process; and
- Partial qualifications are awarded, which means, among other things, that specific local labour market needs can be catered for, that applicants do not have to enrol in a long and complex assessment when they just need a partial qualification to exercise only some tasks as part of a larger job, and that additional top up training can be delivered in an effective way (i.e. just for missing competences).

Table 1. Summary⁴³

	Bosnia and Herzegovina BA	Kosovo KO	Macedonia MK	Montenegro ME	Serbia RS
Terms used and meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The terms validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning seem to be accepted - The concept of learning outcomes appears to be less known - There is little visibility of the term validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, often confused with non-formal education - Validation is often confused with certification after what is called non-formal education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - All the usual, useful concepts and terms seem to be known and understood (assessment, non-formal and informal learning outcomes, experience, previously and/or informally acquired competences, mobility of learners and workers, employability...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The term validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning seems to be accepted, but not widely used/understood - The term validation has recently mainly been used to designate accreditation, by the CAE, of VET providers and non-formal adult education programmes, therefore creating some confusion when the word validation alone is used - The concept of learning outcomes has just been introduced thanks to the recent focus – with a strong political European push – on the establishment of a NQF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - Competences (rather than learning outcomes) - Non-formal education (no trace of informal learning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - Non-formal education

⁴³ There is not one column for the five countries together because it would not be relevant: there is not a regional concerted effort.

<p>Stakeholders involved - Who? - What is their role?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>dvv international</i> in the context of capacity building in the field of adult learning (marginal) - IPA pre-accession assistance (Component I - Institutional Building) (marginal) - Many [often national] NGOs delivering non-formal education (participants are often assessed; but their learning outcomes are neither validated nor recognised). - Some programmes are recognised (e.g. Care for Elders, Caritas's SEC; Social Educational Centre, recognised by the Institute for Adult Education of RS) but not the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Qualification Authority (NQA): . Setting policy and guidelines; . Rising awareness . Providing information and guidance to providers . Implementing the NQF and modules/standards . Strengthening the quality assurance in assessment . Capacity building . Accrediting institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CAE has just been promoted the Authority in charge of: . Implementing a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of <u>individuals</u> in the context of the IPA . The CAE does no more than waiting for further document/instructions in the context of the IPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Education and Sports (historical role in awarding qualifications) - Ministry of Labour and Welfare (because competences are needed in the labour market) - VET Centre (for the drafting of the standards) - The PES (for the establishment of the NQF) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In VET: Institute for Improvement of Education (ZUOV), in charge of the development of a model for validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes - Universities also, to some extent
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<p>International and European donor organisations</p> <p>- What do they do?</p> <p>- Which tools and methods do they use?</p>	<p>- EU in the context of IPA (marginal)</p> <p>- <i>dvv international</i> delivers a certificate recognised by the Institute for Adult Education of RS: “Training for trainers for educational work with adults”</p> <p>- GIZ certificate within its project “Support to adult education in BiH” is recognised by the MoE of Zenica-Doboj and Sarajevo Cantons, and by the Institute for Adult Education of RS</p> <p>- But these are recognised programmes; and there is no international donor clearly identified in the field of validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals.</p>	<p>- EU: KOSVET VI, Oct 09 to Oct 11, 1 898 000 euros; but proportion for RPL unclear</p> <p>- EU: TPD, quality assurance, accreditation, NQA and NQF, Jan 09 Jan 11, 1 922 000 Euros, but proportion for RPL unclear</p> <p>- Many other donors that may touch on RPL but not possible to say: USAID for young people; France, Turkey, Finland, Austria in different fields somewhat relevant to RPL (see Kosovo, 2011)</p>	<p>- The push clearly comes from the EC</p> <p>- There are many donors in Macedonia – especially in the field of adult learning where <i>dvv international</i> is a key player since 1997⁴⁴. <i>dvv international</i> has been very active in particular in the field of “validating” adult education programmes and accrediting providers. However, no donors have been identified, even partly, in the very specific field of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals, which is the heart of this study.</p> <p>- One notable exception is the GIP (France) which pilots some projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Vernacular houses; and . Literacy courses <p>- Macedonia has a large number of NGOs: one for every 400 inhabitants</p>	<p>- French GIP-International and, therefore EU (Twinning)</p> <p>- There was a Twinning Project with Slovenian partners (not on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, but on a large review of the education and training system)</p>	<p>- EU, through the IPA (Programme in 2012) on the modernisation of secondary VET</p>
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⁴⁴ For example: Days of Lifelong Learning (2002 on), European Language Portfolio (2005-08), Active citizenship (2010 on), E-learning project (2009 on), CONFINTEA (2007 on), Capacity Building of the Adult Education Centre (2009 on).

Target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No [potential] target groups clearly identified (because no implementation, not even planned) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adults in general - Women - Early school leavers - Disadvantaged minorities - Unemployed people - Teachers (TPD): they seem to be a key issue, as they work without any qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GIP pilot in literacy: people with less than 6 years of formal education - Vernacular houses: workers in the trades relevant to the construction industry (wood, stone...) - Both extremely marginal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adults that have follow the non-formal education track - Adults with a certificate (and not a diploma) - Potential workers in regulated occupations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In VET, and for the IPA pilot mentioned above: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Adults not having a full qualification (former drop-outs from the field), but working in the area . Adults working in the area as unqualified workers, but having certain work experience and motivated to achieve a partial qualification . Adults from related domain willing to re-qualify
Legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a Law on Adult Education in RS that regulates non-formal education - 2 cantons adopted the Draft Law on Adult Education: Una-Sana and Sarajevo Cantons - But there is not a specific law on the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals - No additional section in existing laws - Cumbersome legislative framework in the field of education in general (with the RS, the Federation and the 10 Cantons sharing the Authority) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . A clear rhetoric . A strategic plan . A law - The most advanced system in the region, although not yet implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is abundance of texts for setting the scene for legal frameworks relevant to “validation” of non formal adult education⁴⁵, but - There is no legal framework for the validation of the learning outcomes of individuals after non-formal or informal learning⁴⁶. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None - Recent reform of the national qualifications framework (31/12/2110) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In VET, yes - The University of Belgrade has a <i>Bylaw</i> that regulates that the Senate and the Educational-Scientific Council decide respectively which non-formal educational activities can be organised at the University and at a faculty respectively.

⁴⁵ E.g.: the National Programme for Development of Education (2005-15), or the Law on Adult Education (2008) and its bylaws.

⁴⁶ This should not come as a surprise since the existing legal frameworks are mainly concerned with adult education and there is no reason to believe that a legal framework of the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should fall under a law on adult education. This would be too restrictive.

<p>Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any policies on the issue? - Which kind? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a policy addressing adult learning, and dealing with programmes; but - There is no policy regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals - Not even a central rhetoric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, prepared by NQA - Clear policy planning for 2013-14 (for teachers in particular) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are many policies addressing adult education; but - There is no policy about the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. - There is a revised draft IPA document... 	<p>- No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, in VET - Not a policy, but a set of fragmented practices within the university system
<p>Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methods and tools used - Results and impact of the different methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None - Some projects (HRD the most advanced, the IPA Programme Fiches) but nothing concrete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not implemented - Expected to start mid-2012 - The methods will be rather standard (portfolio, oral and written assessments...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior to, and during, the launch of the process for accreditation of programmes delivered by providers, in January 2012, a set of measures supported by <i>dvv international</i> and UNDP has been put in practice: - Model programme for validating adult education <u>programmes</u>; - Guidelines for licensing adult education <u>institutions</u> and <u>organisations</u>; - Guidelines for validation of special adult education <u>programmes</u>; - Series of seminars for adult education <u>providers</u>, in order to inform them about the ongoing processes and support their application. - As it is very clear from this list, there is nothing that addresses validation of the learning outcomes of individuals. - The CAE is shooting for the next round of IPA activities (2014). 	<p>- No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In VET: pilot mentioned above at the VET School of Zrenjanin, with the department for continuing adult education (a.k.a. Regional Training Centre) - Some elements of assessment and recognition within the university system (participants in language courses are awarded certificates fully recognised; informal recognition to access some master programmes)

<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who? - How much? - How long? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU in the context of the IPA (95% of the 3.5 ME of one project described in the Programme Fiches, which barely touches on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes) - <i>dvv international</i> in the field of adult learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQA budget - EU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Twinning</i>-GIP pilots: EU money (teams from France and Spain) - Budget: symbolic equivalent of 9 months work (2012-13) for few staff on a part-time basis. - There are many projects – mainly financed by <i>dvv international</i>, UNDP and the State (see above) – but - There are no earmarked funds for the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funds in the context of the Twining Project - Amounts difficult to assess at this stage because many subsidies in kind (staff for capacity building typically) - <i>Twinning</i> projects are supposed to benefit from matching money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In VET: the pilot was mainly financed by the selected VET School, with a marginal contribution from the IPA
<p>Using guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes, which? - Are they known? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, prepared by NQA - Also, NQA has developed the NQF based on the EQF - NQA has developed a National Quality Assurance Framework based on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET - NQA has developed a Credit System based on recommendations from the ECVET group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are guidelines (e.g. Guidelines for Licensing of Adult Education Institutions and Organisations, and Guidelines for Validation of Special Adult Education Programmes); but they are clearly targeted at providers, and - There are no guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. - It is likely that the guidelines that will be used when validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes exists will be the ones provided by EC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No - EU Guidelines do not seem to be used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, prepared in the context of the IPA pilot - Clear impact from the EU approach (it seems the EU guidelines were used, and adapted)
<p>Link to NQF</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A NQF is in preparation by the Ministry of Civil Affairs BiH (coordinating body at the state level) - Difficult to say whether it will be linked to the system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes since such a system does not exist yet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - Explicit, well spelled out link, with a clear rationale for linking NQF and validation/recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is the goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - Approach that put, up front all certificates and diplomas in the same NQF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, explicit link - NQF also based on the EQF, and in fact it is using it as a template which may not seem to be the right approach

<p>Impact on poverty reduction? - are there any indicators?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very likely through addressing informal economy - And because owning a recognised qualification is a visa for a regular job - Only if Bosnia and Herzegovina achieves societal recognition of the qualifications awarded after a validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process - No indicators: too recent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hard to say at this stage - But the description of labour market issues that Kosovo faces indicates that awarding qualifications to the traditional target groups will help to reduce poverty - No indicators: too recent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential impact: yes, due to the fact that a) a qualification is an effective visa for work in Macedonia, b) there are skilled unqualified people in Macedonia, and c) some activities in the informal economy could be codified and become revenue-generating activities in the formal economy - No indicators: too recent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The access rate to Tertiary Education is high - There is however a poverty issue by group (e.g. Roma) - Therefore poverty cannot be globally addressed - No indicators: too recent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear potential impact on poverty reduction and one of the main objectives of the Serbian approach to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes - No indicators: too recent
<p>Hindering factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political landscape (not conducive at all)- Outdated mindset: input based approach to education and training - No tradition of learning by doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Figures are difficult to obtain but it seems development funds are small - For the certification of teachers, for instance, which is a concrete and well identified problem: 15 000 Euros out of 2 913 310 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No middle workers or professionals (blue-collar high-skilled) - So no need for a highly qualified labour force - Assessment will have to be modular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The absence of a real adult learning system for delivering diplomas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A legal framework that is not ready
<p>Data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No - Some on the accredited institutions (www.akk-ks.net) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No - Some on the accredited VET providers (CAE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No

Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It may take time before something happens in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The most advanced country in the region - Although nothing has actually been implemented at the end of 2012 - Budget actually allocated to RPL unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concepts remain very fuzzy for all stakeholders - The necessary steps are neither being taken, nor been considered - The push only comes from the EU - Needs for capacity building are huge - Tendency of users to try to misuse the system whenever possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All this is very recent (some of the work reported in Section 2.4 took place in 2012) - The paradox about using validation to send people back to a formal learning system that it is not catered for adults is a real issue. - There are stakeholders that may have some interest in keeping a high informal economy because wages are lower in it (Low skilled equilibrium) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In VET, the pilot seems a successful endeavour, but still no attempt to go beyond VET - Tendency of users to try to misuse the system whenever possible
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3. Systemic Analysis, Policy Pointers and Possible Policy Options

The overall objective of *dvv international* in commissioning this piece of research was clearly to find ways to reduce poverty. This aim touches upon several other dimensions that directly relate to validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, such as equity, the role of a qualifications framework and the place of the informal economy. These dimensions are analysed in this section; and some possible systemic solutions are proposed.

3.1. Why Awarding Qualifications? Why Now?

It is probably the most frequently asked question in South East Europe when researching about validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes: why awarding qualifications?

The response is manifold:

- For equity reasons (see Section 3.2);
- To allow people to enter regulated occupations, assuming that a qualification, in most cases, suffices to grant access to such occupations and that licenses to practice are not required in addition to formal qualifications;
- Because companies often need to meet some standards in terms of having a certain fraction of their employees owning a qualification in order to have contracts;
- For the visibility of competences; and
- Because it can dramatically shorten formal learning periods for adults.

All these points have been addressed in depth in this paper. In the case of the five countries under study, it is particularly clear that:

- They have a low proportion of qualified workers, but many skilled workers;
- Having a recognised qualification – solely from the Ministry of Education for the moment – is a visa for a regular job;
- Poverty is an issue, together with unemployment and underemployment; and
- Some at-risk-groups deserve special attention.

Given that the five countries are either recognised candidates to the European Union or are considered to be future candidates, it is opportune to try to match EU standards in terms of qualifications of the labour force and organisation of the labour market. Among the good reasons for implementing validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, there are:

- It is at the top of the EU policy agenda;
- Many countries already have advanced systems (Australia, Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa), and some have quite interesting experiments going on (Belgium, Slovenia) and many more are setting programmes in motion (Czech Republic). There are therefore, many opportunities for policy learning, especially on the European continent. Some systems are focusing on the labour market experience, others on life experience. Some are addressing needs for academic credits/qualification; others needs for VET credits/qualifications. Some systems may award full qualification, others only partial, or just credits towards a qualification;
- The starting point of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is the concept of learning outcomes and one of the solutions proposed to address labour market issues in South East Europe is to begin with a survey of the labour market needs, i.e. find what competences are

in demand. This will help design the formal education and training initial system too, especially in the VET system;

- There is a large informal sector in the economy, and to fight it incentives need to be created so that people move from the informal to the formal economy. However, this move cannot be made without adopting a holistic approach that includes visibility of competences (through qualifications) and the use of qualifications in recruitment processes; and

- It is likely that occupations will be increasingly regulated, at least those that require a qualification, and therefore the pressure on alternative routes to the traditional learning path will increase so that people can make their competences visible even if they have not had the opportunity to attend the formal education and training system.

3.2. The Link with a Qualifications Framework

The point was made earlier on several occasions but it is worth stressing it here again. The whole point of establishing systems for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is to create new routes to qualifications, in addition to the formal learning path. It will become more and more difficult to establish qualifications frameworks without inviting all learners to be part of it through the classification of their qualifications in that framework. It is a matter of equity that qualifications achieved outside the formal learning system are included in the qualifications framework. The issue of equity comes into the picture because validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a way to make competences visible.

A matter of equity

The discussion about the link between organising validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals and establishing a national qualifications framework is among the most complicated ones. There are several arguments in favour of separating these two notions but it is important to mention that both have many points in common as well (Werquin, 2012a). Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and national qualifications frameworks often share the concept of learning outcomes. They both bring transparency to qualifications and competences. They both promote equity, because qualifications frameworks facilitate access to [lifelong formal] learning (Coles and Werquin, 2007); and the validation/recognition system offers a second chance for a qualification. It would be completely inequitable to establish a national classification instrument for qualifications – i.e. a qualifications framework – and not give everybody the possibility to have their learning outcomes accepted within this framework. The issue of equity is key because making all competences visible (the transparency argument) will make them portable, allowing all individuals, not just tertiary graduates, to travel inside and outside the country, for example⁴⁷.

The issue of equity is quite relevant to people whose qualifications are not recognised, either because they never had an opportunity to access the formal learning system (the Roma in South East Europe, for instance) or because they were early school leavers. It is therefore very likely that validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes will not be introduced in many countries without a qualifications framework. These commonalities between the two – and a lack of clarity in communications from international organisations regarding the real issues at stake – probably explain why many countries try to address both notions at the same time and in the same legislation, for example. However, there are also many reasons to believe that qualifications frameworks and validation/recognition systems do not have to be dealt with at the same time, and should certainly not be addressed in the same legislation.

First and foremost, a qualifications framework is often an education and training framework, rather than a real qualifications framework, in the sense that the legislative texts that bring the qualifications

⁴⁷ This is the role of a regional qualifications framework, such as the European Qualifications Framework, but this will not be addressed here.

framework to life are often focused on, or biased toward, the education and training formal system, and more frequently than not toward the initial one. For instance, the stakeholders and actors described in legislative texts for qualifications frameworks are mostly the same individuals who operate in the formal learning system. In addition, the four objectives usually accepted for establishing validation and recognition systems – qualification, access to learning, career guidance and (re)entry in the labour market – are not often all described in a legislative text for qualifications frameworks. This is not an issue in itself when it comes to establishing a qualifications framework through legislation, but it becomes a problem when ensuring that recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes for individuals is adequately taken on board in the same legislation. In fact, it is more likely that the four objectives for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes cannot be addressed in a legislative text involving qualifications framework (Werquin, 2012a).

Qualifications frameworks and recognition of non-formal and informal learning have many things in common but address different issues

There is also the fact that validation is a process. What is described, or provided, in a qualifications framework is final outcomes: the qualification. A qualifications framework is a classifying tool for qualifications. In the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes system, the qualification also appears at the end, but it cannot be the only objective (there are the three others that are not described, or not well enough, in a qualifications framework: access, guidance and labour market). Since, validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a process, the legislation must enlighten the users about the vision in terms of this process: assessment, financing, objectives... This is difficult to achieve in a text about qualifications frameworks.

There is also the case – although less and less frequent nowadays – where the qualifications that appear in the qualifications framework are input-based in the sense that they are based on duration of the programme(s), number of credits, or content of programme(s); which are concepts not very germane to recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Modern qualifications frameworks are based on learning outcomes, although this does not have to be so. France already had a national qualifications framework in the early seventies and it was not based on learning outcomes when it was created. The first version of the French national qualifications framework appeared in 1969 and it had seven levels. It was highly focused on the level ‘young people leaving the initial education and training system who should have to meet the needs of the labour market’. It is nowadays a standard approach to establishing a national qualifications framework – sometimes linked to a regional international one⁴⁸ – for preparing the establishment of a validation of non-formal and informal learning system. Many countries have adopted this approach, probably because the concept of learning outcome is at the heart of both the qualifications framework and the validation/recognition system. As to the five countries under study in this report, and based on the on-going discussions and published documents, none seems to have chosen a different approach.

Qualifications frameworks and recognition systems should have their own legislative texts

The existence of a national qualifications framework is clearly conducive to the development of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes; but there are drawbacks in addressing both at the same time and in the same law, as explained above. In short, the concepts, the actors and stakeholders as well as the objectives of the two systems are different. Passing a law describing both systems may create unnecessary complexities and rigidities.

⁴⁸ For example, see the work by the European Commission (European Qualifications Framework), the ECOWAS or the SADC.

3.3. The Role of the Informal Economy – Unemployment and Underemployment

By definition, the informal economy is difficult to measure and to observe with traditional statistical tools⁴⁹. Nevertheless, two elements lead to the belief that the informal economy is quite a large sector in the five countries under study: the high levels of unemployment (especially long term unemployment) and the high proportion of part timers among workers in the formal economy (underemployment).

The whole Europe is going through very difficult times in terms of unemployment rates. The recent crises have fuelled the long-standing problem of unemployment, especially among young people and poorly qualified people in general. They are hit very badly by unemployment in EU countries such as France or Spain. However, despite this historical high, unemployment rates in the EU seem lower than those witnessed in the five countries under study. For example, the average youth unemployment rate has just reached 50%. Youth unemployment in the region is almost four times the EU average (Dotto, 2011; UNDP, 2011). It is probably because it reveals a different reality.

A very high youth unemployment rate

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 58% of young people between 15 and 30 years of age are unemployed. According to data from the Macedonian State Statistical Office, 52.5% of young people aged 15-24 were unemployed in the first quarter of 2011. In Serbia, the unemployment level for the age bracket 15-19 is 53.6%, and 49.3% for those between 20-24. An International Labour Organization meeting in December 2007 estimated youth unemployment in Montenegro at 58%, and the situation has undoubtedly worsened since then. In Kosovo, with overall unemployment levels of more than 50%, it is estimated that up to 75% of young people are out of work. Another characteristic of the region is the huge number of long-term unemployed. The ILO reports that more than 75% of unemployed youth have been looking for a job for more than a year. The National Employment Service's December 2010 report on labour market trends in Serbia says long-term unemployment is 64.12%. Meanwhile, Macedonia's State Statistical Office lists 63.8% of the unemployed as being without a job for more than four years!

A very high proportion of part-timers

In addition to these dramatic raw figures, a second look at labour market data shows that young people are often employed only in part-time and marginal jobs. The official employment figures disguise huge levels of underemployment. For instance, ILO research found that in 2006 the share of temporary work of the overall workforce in Croatia was 12%, while the percentage of young workers involved in temporary work was 51.1%.

Such figures can only mean one thing: in countries where unemployment benefits are non-existing or not very generous anyway, people are generating revenues through other means other than participating in the formal labour market. Young people and poorly qualified people probably accept jobs in the informal economy. Their employer does not register them. This is confirmed by the ILO which reports that around 60% of young workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina are employed in the informal economy. In Macedonia, only 30% of the active population is officially employed. This indicates that the rest of the employed population is probably working in the informal economy. Marginal jobs in the informal economy are a second best option and this means that young people in particular and unemployed people in general are more often hit by poverty.

Achieving a qualification as a visa for the formal economy?

The other main factor that may prevent the development of a recognition of non-formal and informal learning system, which has been reported several times above, is the attachment of the South East

⁴⁹ National accounts and statistical surveys typically both fail to adequately take the informal economy on board.

Europe society to formal qualifications, almost always awarded by the Ministry of Education. This places validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes at the forefront of the policy to help people generate revenues, and cross the poverty line upward. However, the more than likely existence of a large informal sector in the economy has two major implications in terms of validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes:

- People would have to transfer from the informal to the formal economy to have their newly achieved qualification given currency, and reap the benefits that comes with it: better wage and social protection, usually; and
- Many non-formal and informal learning outcomes may never be assessed – even if workers in the informal economy decide to apply for validation of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes – because applicants may hide them, as they may be worried about the possible negative consequences of admitting that they were economically active in the informal sector of the economy.

Promoting (re)entry in the formal economy

A possible solution would therefore be to disconnect the assessment undertaken in a validation process from any other administrative matter. For example, it should be disconnected from the tax administration. A good communications campaign could be organised so that potential applicants become aware that this initiative could mean a fresh start for them in the formal economy, and with relevant qualifications. This could definitely create a conducive environment to lifelong learning, access to qualifications and entry in the formal economy. In fact, only a holistic approach – with key elements such as temporary tax exemption for returnees, social protection, right to education and training, minimum wage... – will address this issue as working in the informal economy is probably a choice that individuals could not avoid, rather than being a positive decision made at some point in their lives. They will probably not even consider making this choice if the environment does not considerably change.

In social sciences, there is not such a thing as one, unique solution. Social sciences deal with human beings and consequently there are many factors involved in any decision. Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes goes along with some other emblematic measures. For instance, it cannot deliver alone.

3.4. The Validation/Recognition System is not a Competitor to Formal Education and Training

Often time, the introduction of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes would question well-established – sometimes financially rewarding – situations. It is the case in two main circumstances:

- When the State or any other stakeholder – universities for example – generate resources from fee paying access to the formal learning system; and
- When the reputation of the qualifications awarded by, or in, the formal learning system is so high that nothing else can match it.

Adults are interested in obtaining a qualification, not necessarily in studying in the formal education and training system

It is therefore quite often the case that a system for validating/recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is seen as a competitor by stakeholders already in the field of education and training. But in fact, evidence suggests that it is a win-win situation to establish a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in addition to the existing education and training system. The argument is based on the fact that validating/recognising prior learning may attract new learners. Research also suggests that:

- In many countries, the pool of potential traditional students – especially potential entrants in the tertiary education system – is diminishing very quickly due to the demographic decline;
- Adults are not very keen on engaging in formal learning activities per se. Adults are interested in achieving a qualification – because they have realised it is a visa for many benefits in their society, including obtaining a job and having the possibility to speak up in their community – but they are not necessarily interested in engaging in formal learning; especially if this formal learning resembles the school system that failed them many years before; and
- Assessing potential adult learners – the few that have made the necessary steps to undertake formal adult learning activities – before they actually start learning does dramatically cut the cost and the duration of the formal learning because only what is needed (know or know-how) is delivered.

Validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes creates the virtuous cycle of learning

Traditional, well-established education and training institutions could therefore greatly benefit from the establishment of a validation/recognition system if they would consider it as an instrument to attract individuals that would have never engaged in formal learning activities otherwise. One interesting example is found in universities in countries such as Canada or South Africa where the pool of potential customers – and therefore fee-paying students – increases when assessment is proposed in the first place, and an abridged *curriculum* whenever possible.

It must be especially stressed that examples are many where successful applicants in a validation/recognition process decide to engage in longer term formal studies after realising that learning is not what they had experienced in school. The key psychological factor here is that validation and recognition highlight what people know or can do. This considerably raises their self-esteem; whereas the traditional school system usually only stresses what students do not know, therefore lowering their motivation to engage in further formal learning.

Create positive externalities for all stakeholders

The providers of education and training should also learn about the possible benefits of establishing systems for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes. They should definitely be involved in reaping some of the benefits. For example, they should be able to use a fee system so that potential applicants contribute to supporting the formal system, just as traditional students do. Some countries have decided to make participation in a validation/recognition process less expensive than participation in traditional studies. If this may make sense in order to attract new applicants, as well as shortening the *curriculum* (due to the exemption associated with the already acquired learning outcomes), it may also be questioned from the point of view of the interest of the education and training institution. It must be stressed here that applicants are already better off by participating in a validation/recognition process because they endure less opportunity costs⁵⁰. In addition, what matters is the currency of the qualification they achieve at the end. If it is the same qualification as the one awarded in a formal system, the fees can reasonably be set at similar levels. It is difficult to provide clear recommendations at this stage – because each case is different – but the matter needs to be thoroughly discussed and tested. Also, the interest of all stakeholders must be addressed to avoid creating resentment, and therefore lack of engagement on the part of some of the key actors.

3.5. Validation/Recognition System in South East Europe is at its initial stage

A rather ambitious, but comprehensive, definition of system leads to the clear conclusion that there is not a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in any of the five

⁵⁰ Costs due to the fact that learners cannot engage in any other activity (work or leisure) while studying.

countries under study: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. By system it is meant that there is a policy – and preferably an inclusive one – as well as a vision, a culture of recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes⁵¹ and a holistic approach to the process. In detail, this could mean:

- The existence of a legal framework or a political consensus;
- The existence of actual practices, already implemented, tried and tested;
- A financial provision;
- Some sort of quality assurance in the assessment, especially for qualifications leading to regulated occupations;
- All levels and sectors of the education and training systems and the economy are addressed;
- There is access for all groups or individuals, and positive discrimination for at-risk groups;
- There is a significant participation;
- There is a high level of acceptance by society (social recognition); and
- There is an evaluation of the system (data, research...), and a mechanism for on-going improvement.

The fact is that, even if one accepts to loosen some of these conditions, South East Europe is still far from having anything anywhere near a quasi-system or even a consistent set of practices. Some of the interviewees were even very pessimistic about the likelihood that anything like this will ever really happen. It is true that very few countries, beyond South East Europe, do have a system. Countries such as Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway or South Africa have a quasi system or a consistent set of practices. High levels of awareness and participation are frequently the missing characteristics. A real vision is sometimes absent too. Countries such as Chile, the Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland or Slovenia are moving fast, and catching up.

In the countries under study, individuals cannot have their non-formal and informal learning outcomes validated/recognised. In detail, the situation is as follows:

- Kosovo is well advanced in the thinking and the official rhetoric;
- Montenegro is the most advanced country in theory, but nothing has yet been implemented. There are reasons to believe that Montenegro will introduce a system by the end of 2013. Significant steps have been taken so far (legal framework, policy, guidelines, a VET centre in charge of drafting the standards for both the initial and the adult learning system, a clear understanding of the concepts, a national qualifications framework...);
- Bosnia and Herzegovina has not implemented anything yet. There is a need for a culture shift, and some political harmonisation. The EU push may help create the conditions for this to happen;
- Nothing is happening in Macedonia yet. There is the process of accreditation of programmes delivered by VET providers (supported by *dvv international*), which began in January 2012, but no steps have been taken yet when it comes to validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes of individuals. The IPA may also provide the necessary push within two years.
- Serbia is the only country that has conducted a very promising pilot project.

It may take long before inclusive systems are actually implemented in the five countries because there is a need for a consistent communication policy, so that society and the main stakeholders accept the idea that people may also learn outside a classroom. It will take a great effort. One interviewee summarised the situation by stating that “it is difficult to be too much ahead of your time”.

⁵¹ A tradition of valuing experience, not necessarily over and above qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system, but on par.

In addition to time, the initiative will require money and technical support. However, the role of donors other than the EU seems to be diminishing. It appears as if the status of candidate country had an impact on the presence and involvement of international donors – beyond the EU – which tend to leave these countries. For example, the German donors were more numerous in the early 2000 than in the early 2010s. Having said that, it is clear that the perspective of accessing the EU gives a clear thrust to the work on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This momentum has to be seized because in these circumstances countries are often ready to do whatever it takes to access the European Union.

The lack of understanding or the confusion between the terms ‘competences’ and ‘qualifications’ (see Section 1) may prevent placing validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes at the top of the agenda, because a validation process does not create competences. A validation process reveals the existence of competences.

3.6. Validation/Recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may help address poverty... under certain conditions

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes may be an interesting solution for addressing poverty. However, this demands that several conditions be met:

- People below the poverty line do have competences (skills and/or knowledge and/or attributes) that can be validated during an assessment process. This is a challenge because research shows that most non-formal and informal learning is happening at the workplace, in the exercise of regular jobs. Almost by definition, poor people do not have a regular job, and therefore are less likely to learn enough non-formally and informally to meet assessment standards. In addition, they are also less likely to be able to gather sufficient evidence of their non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
- Qualifications awarded after validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are fully recognised; this means that the usually very traditional approach of the Ministries of Education is revisited to make room for other qualifications, on par, and with the same level of esteem and reputation. This demands an effective communications policy, especially with employers; and
- Qualifications are used in recruitment. This also demands that the functioning of the labour market is made more rational and efficient. This requires a strong incentive that only a general policy can generate.

The first condition can be partly addressed by organising partial qualifications, i.e. successful applicants would be given a qualification corresponding to only a fraction of the tasks that can normally be done by an owner of the full qualification. It is an efficient way of creating stepping-stones toward further learning and/or further engagement in validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The last two conditions described above can widely benefit from the following:

- General use of widely agreed pre-defined assessment standards, which means the involvement of most, if not all, stakeholders, in order to create a sense of ownership;
- Quality assurance wherever needed, for qualifications leading to regulated occupations typically;
- Self-analysis of learning outcomes is taught at school, at least in upper secondary education, and this field is added to the *curriculum* of secondary teachers; and
- Professional development of the assessors.

3.7. Using qualifications in recruitment processes

In countries where recognition of non-formal and informal learning has brought hope and/or created expectations, it is because holding a qualification makes a significant difference in the labour market and/or it means something in that society. It may mean access to further studies in the formal learning system (university typically). It may also mean the right to take a competitive examination (to become a civil servant e.g.). In both cases, this is particularly true if accessing the study programme or taking a competitive examination demands some pre-requisite in terms of academic qualifications.

Often time, it means better productivity/employability and therefore improved probability to find a job because a qualification makes competences visible and this usually matters to employers.

Finally, creating a new route to qualifications – in addition to the traditional route that consists of the initial formal education and training system for young people – brings more equity as being awarded a qualification does not depend solely on some initial condition (awareness of what to study, correct information and guidance, parents well able to make rational decisions for their children and/or to help the learning process, for instance, private tutoring etc.), but on experience and personal competences acquired outside of the initial formal education and training system.

If a qualification means very little in a given country, either because existing qualifications are poorly regarded (because they can be bought, literally) or because the recruitment system relies on other more or less explicit arrangements (network of acquaintances, tested competences...), then being awarded a qualification does not bring hope or create expectations. Therefore, creating a new route to qualifications does not help in any way because being awarded a qualification is a non-issue in the first place. In the five countries under study, it seems that qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system, by the Ministry of Education, do have currency. The next step will be that they are used in recruitment processes but on a larger scale, and that achieving a qualification can be made possible through validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

4. A summary of possible next steps in practice

All in all, the environment seems fairly conducive to taking validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes one step further in the five countries under study. They are all taking the necessary initial steps and they all have different options to keep the momentum. This last section of the report is a summary of ideas gathered all along the study and discussed above. They are either practical, i.e. at the ground level, or more systemic.

This list can be seen as a checklist for policy makers.

4.1. Making Validation/Recognition happen, even if on a small scale

The first set of options essentially consists of making things happen at the ground level, without necessarily relying on the pre-existence of a comprehensive system.

Pass a law and create consensus

Passing a law is always a good solution to make validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes a right for every citizen. The point on whether this law should be specific or if it should be part of a more comprehensive law on the establishment of a national qualifications framework was discussed earlier. The conclusion was that validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is rather specific in terms of objectives, stakeholders and procedures. The point was also made that a qualifications framework is an instrument whereas validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a process. If a general law is contemplated, the section on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should probably be fairly specific to avoid unnecessary complexities.

In addition to a law, a key element that has proven to be even more important in many countries is the existence of a consensus on the necessity to implement validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, its objectives and technical aspects. This consensus usually helps meeting one of the necessary conditions: the sense of ownership on the part of the stakeholders regarding the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This almost always entails the involvement of all stakeholders early in the process, in order to set the objectives of the validation/recognition system, and elaborate the assessment standards and quality assurance procedures.

Award partial qualifications wherever possible

The two general objectives of validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes can be found in the lifelong learning formal system (that individuals are granted the right to resume formal studies at the desired level) and in the labour market (that individuals can (re)enter the labour market or get a better job).

When the main objective is to help people find a [new] job, seeking to receive a full qualification may not be the most effective way, as a full qualification usually demands a broad set of competences that applicants may not have acquired from their non-formal and informal learning. This can therefore be either time consuming, or rather disappointing in the end if applicants are denied the full qualification when they reasonably master some of the competences involved in the exercise of some particular tasks at work. Evidence suggests that workers barely use at work all the competences they are supposedly able to master. Awarding partial qualifications could therefore be an excellent stepping-stone approach so that the assessment/validation time is kept to a minimum and that the proportion of successful applicants is relatively high.

Meet employers' expectations and needs

A necessary condition going along with the previous point is that awarded partial qualifications meet the needs of employers. So not only employers should be involved in the technical validation process, but they should also be consulted about their needs. This step implies the assumption that employers are able to spell out their needs, which may require long-term collaboration among stakeholders and the building of a mutual understanding.

There will be cases in which employers may only need some of their workers to do specific tasks at work: an individual may not need the full car mechanic qualification, for example, if his/her job only consists of changing tires. This does not prevent workers from investing in learning to become acquainted with other tasks later on and thus improve their qualifications status, but in the short term, learning specific tasks may help them get a job more quickly.

A general tool to gather information on employers' needs, such as statistical observatories, could be introduced to help in this process.

Create partnerships with the private sector

The involvement of employers can be an opportunity to engage the private sector in specific partnerships to pilot validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcome projects. Involving employers in defining their needs and investing in the vocational preparation of their workers and the funding of the assessment procedures in the validation process may prove to be an interesting approach.

Harvest low hanging fruits first to build success stories and create ambassador programmes

Part of the idea of recommending starting on a small scale in order to make validation/recognition happen is to create success stories that can be used in a broader communications policy. Examples are

manifold where successful projects have shed light on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and generated interest on the part of all kinds of players, thus creating a snowball effect.

Attracting curiosity can be very easy and finding solutions to problems encountered along the way are often readily available. A potential example is found in the activity of collecting and recycling plastic bottles, and/or other recyclable goods. It seems this activity is left to some groups, such as the Roma, in Macedonia⁵², for instance. It also appears that it can turn into an interesting initiative because it can be of benefit to many people. This activity is not organised by the system and the general population does not perform it either, but it provides revenues to the companies that are buying the bottles for recycling and to the individuals who collect them. These individuals are clearly generating revenues since they have been performing this activity for quite some time. A value is created by collecting and selling disposed plastic bottles. The assumption is that individuals who perform this activity, informally thus far, have developed some competences that could be assessed. However, experience suggests that, in practice, such activities also generate hygiene problems⁵³. To improve collection practices, basic hygiene rules could be integrated in an assessment process. Top-up training could be organised for those who do not meet basic hygiene standards when collecting bottles (or any other recyclable goods), before they receive a certificate for performing this kind of activity. In the end, the idea is to help individuals do their job officially and in a better manner. Of course, there is no guarantee that individuals will accept to be assessed, but this could be organised in coordination with Roma representatives, and incentives could be made readily available, such as officially granting individuals the right to collect plastic bottles and legally protecting this kind of activities. Key messages about recycling, the goods that can be recycled, the connection between effective collection methods and revenues would be sent to applicants. It would also be an opportunity to look beyond the short term and invite individuals to invest in literacy skills to improve revenues.

This is a typical example of a very pragmatic approach that does nothing else than provide individuals with an opportunity for an initial step into investing in learning and assessment of their competences. There is evidence that the word of mouth is a very effective tool in the field of adult learning and validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. It is not necessarily amenable to policy, but successful practices can definitely help communications about the positive benefits of learning.

Another example of low hanging fruits is found in Slovenia which has organised the assessment of unqualified bricklayers so that they become team leaders if they are successful in the assessment/validation process. The assessment is organised during the evening or on Saturday mornings in training centres and therefore the cost is minimum because the facilities exist and are shared for this purpose. Applicants are motivated by a small pay rise and assessors are teachers and professionals in the field. It is again a situation that is beneficial to all stakeholders in the bricklaying business.

A final example is found in some universities, in South Africa for example, which open their courses to non-traditional students, i.e. those who do not have the academic prerequisite normally required to enter the university system. Based on an initial assessment of their prior learning outcomes, non-traditional students are accepted at a certain level and granted the right to follow the *curriculum* to achieve the qualification of their choice.

As a general rule, creating success stories often build on identifying “RPL-ready” individuals: those with a long working experience and non-recognised qualifications, for example, or those extremely skilled in documenting their prior learning and all their working contracts. Success stories can also build on meeting urgent needs of employers that cannot wait for the initial education and training system to prepare young people for the labour market. For instance, Canada has learnt to rely on internationally trained nurses to meet the needs of hospitals (Van Kleef and Werquin, 2013).

⁵² See for instance: www.pressonline.com.mk/default-en.asp?ItemID=4F2BFC8AFB91684D867AE178A242CBA0

⁵³ Garbage bags are left open and the rubbish spread on the floor.

Build validation/recognition systems that accept all learning outcomes

Most of the non-formal and informal learning is happening at the workplace, in regular jobs in the formal sector of the economy. With a large fraction of the population not having a regular job, and an increasing fraction becoming unemployed, opportunities to have access to valuable non-formal and informal learning are decreasing. This is creating a vicious cycle because individuals in the informal sector of the economy will have less and less opportunities to have their non-formal and informal learning outcomes validated and recognised. And the longer they stay in the informal sector of the economy the less likely they will be to obtain a regular job in the formal sector of the economy; unless the validation and recognition system is built so that any kind of experience – especially in the private life such as taking care of children, having volunteers activities – can be accepted for assessment.

4.2. Addressing systemic issues

In addition to making validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes happen on the ground, more systemic steps can be taken to foster the process, such as:

Simplify the vocabulary – establishing good communication

The complex vocabulary used in this field should be left to analysts and policy makers. Only basic key words such as ‘competences’, or ‘needs for the labour market’, should be used with end users, whether they may be employers or applicants. Countries such as Australia have opened offices in shopping malls where they never talk about non-formal and informal learning outcomes, for instance.

The vocabulary should match the level of understanding of applicants. It would help to elaborate a communications strategy at the initial stage of the preparation and establishment of the system for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

By the same token, spelling out the validation process in clear understandable terms – documenting prior learning, assessment, validation, certification, recognition – makes it less frightening to potential applicants, helping them engage in a validation process.

Learning outcomes-based *curricula*⁵⁴

Successful countries in attracting many applicants to their validation/recognition systems are often those that have been able to simplify the approach and concepts by creating a natural connection between the formal education and training sector and non-formal and informal learning. Those countries have rewritten all their *curricula* in the formal education and training initial system in terms of learning outcomes. It is not anymore the number of hours in such and such subject matter that defines a *curriculum* but the expected competences to be acquired: being able to do something, and/or knowing something.

This approach has definitely helped promote validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes by creating an understanding of what learning outcomes are all about, and about the need to start from expected competences rather than from number of hours taught. Assessing against a *curriculum* rather than against expected competences is not a very useful approach to meeting the needs of the labour market.

Introduce systematic assessment before any formal learning activity

In addition to writing *curricula* in terms of learning outcomes, generalising the use of assessment before any formal learning activity is organised (education and or training) is a promising avenue. It

⁵⁴ See University of Warwick (2012), for a survey of the practice in the European Union countries regarding learning outcomes based *curricula*.

will help organise the learning activities so that only what is missing is delivered to learners. It is a situation that is beneficial to all stakeholders since it cuts on direct costs for the system and opportunity costs for the participants.

Communicate about the benefits

A necessary, and very useful initial step would also be to clarify, with great precision, what applicants may gain from participating in a validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process. The linkage to the national qualifications framework, although apparent, may not be spelled out enough for end users to figure out the possible advantages they gain from participating in validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. To this end, the description and design of the registered standards in the national qualifications framework must be clearly developed in order to permit all actors to understand the validation/recognition process.

Use widely accepted pre-defined standards in assessment

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a rather new and complex approach. Experience suggests that many stakeholders – especially employers – do not really understand it and have a tendency to be wary of it because the input process is unknown. Of course, it is the purpose of the approach to state that what matters is not the input process, but people's competences. Nevertheless, in order to convince sceptical stakeholders more easily, organising the design of the assessment standards so that all stakeholders are involved and therefore understand what applicants are assessed against, could help making progress on the road to accepting the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes approach.

Those standards could already exist, such as those used in the initial education and training system provided by the Ministry of Education. They could also be built to meet specific labour market needs, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Labour, as it has been done in Flemish Belgium, for example. In the case of an approach aimed at poverty reduction, the system should be clearly geared to providing quick access to a job.

Systematise the use of validation-related tools, such as the portfolio of competences

Since lack of awareness is clearly an issue with some of the basic validation techniques, countries would greatly benefit from a more systematic use of basic tools such as the portfolio of competences. For example, students in high school could be taught how to self analyse their learning outcomes and acquired competences. They could be familiarised with the concept of a portfolio. Examples of portfolio across Europe, such as the comprehensive German ProfilPASS, could be borrowed and adapted to help students become informed lifelong learners. This would obviously require that teachers learn how to teach the portfolio approach and self-assessment techniques.

Pilot strategies

In addition to the necessary policy that must be elaborated on a national basis, some strategies could be elaborated to make validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes a reality. This would require a thorough collaboration between national or regional stakeholders and donors or international organisations. A policy is clearly useful but it addresses the vision and the general objectives rather than describing all the necessary actions to make validation/recognition happen. Countries in South East Europe must now go into this next stage to complete the cycle of actual implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

The National Qualifications Authority in Kosovo, for example, seems to be in the best position for piloting a strategy for the establishment of a national qualifications framework based on learning

outcomes, clearly making room for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. The Institute for the Improvement in Education, in Serbia, seems also well equipped to assess the relevance of awarding partial qualifications. The VET Centre in Montenegro could help other countries to prepare a strategy for the design of the assessment standards.

Anticipate European Union practices and stronger regulation of occupations

The last point of the report is somewhat forward-looking but rather pragmatic. If the five countries under study enter the European Union, which is very likely in the medium term despite the current turmoil due to the financial crisis, then local actors in these five countries should be informed about usual EU practices. Stakeholders aware of international developments should start communicating nationally about existing practices in the EU because these practices are likely to pervade the accessing countries even before they actually enter the EU. This pervasion process may be slow but it is inevitable.

Labour markets are likely to become more and more regulated because ensuring the safety of people, for instance, often requires adopting regulations. This is the case in the health care sector, where practicing medicine or becoming a nurse requires a qualification. Many other occupations (car mechanics, electricians, food industry...) are likely to become regulated as well to protect people against hazardous malfunctions. Anticipating the future is always a good idea. It requires political will and strong commitment. The key issue is that the initial education and training formal system will not suffice to provide the labour market with all the required qualified workers: new routes to qualifications such as validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes will then prove to be essential. A validation and recognition process like this will also require the harmonisation of all existing qualifications, but that is the role of a national qualifications framework.

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Acronyms

AP(E)L: Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (mainly used in England)

BA: Bosnia and Herzegovina

CAE: Centre for Adult Education (or COV), Skopje (Macedonia)

CVET: Council for Vocational Education and Training (Kosovo)

C-VET: Continuous Vocational Education and Training

EC: European Commission

ECTS: European Credit Transfer System (Tertiary Education) (European Commission)

ECVET: European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (European Commission)

EQF: European Qualifications Framework (European Commission)

EU: European Union

FYROM: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

IBE: International Bureau of Education (UNESCO)

ILO: International Labour Office (Geneva)

IPA: Instrument for Pre Accession

I-VET: Initial Vocational Education and Training

KO: Kosovo

KOSVET: Kosovo Vocational Education and Training (Project in Kosovo)

ME: Montenegro

MK: Macedonia

MoE: Ministry of Education

MoL: Ministry of Labour

n.a.: Not applicable, or not relevant

NQA: National Qualifications Authority (Kosovo)

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

NQS: National Qualifications System

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Paris)

PES: Public Employment Service

PLAR: Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (only used in Canada)

RNFIL: Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (OECD terminology)

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning (widely accepted in international *fora*)

TPD: Teachers Professional Development (Kosovo)

UNESCO: United Nations Education Science and Culture Organisation

USAID: United States Agency for International Development (USA)

USD: US Dollar

VAE: *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (France RNFIL system)

VET: vocational education and training