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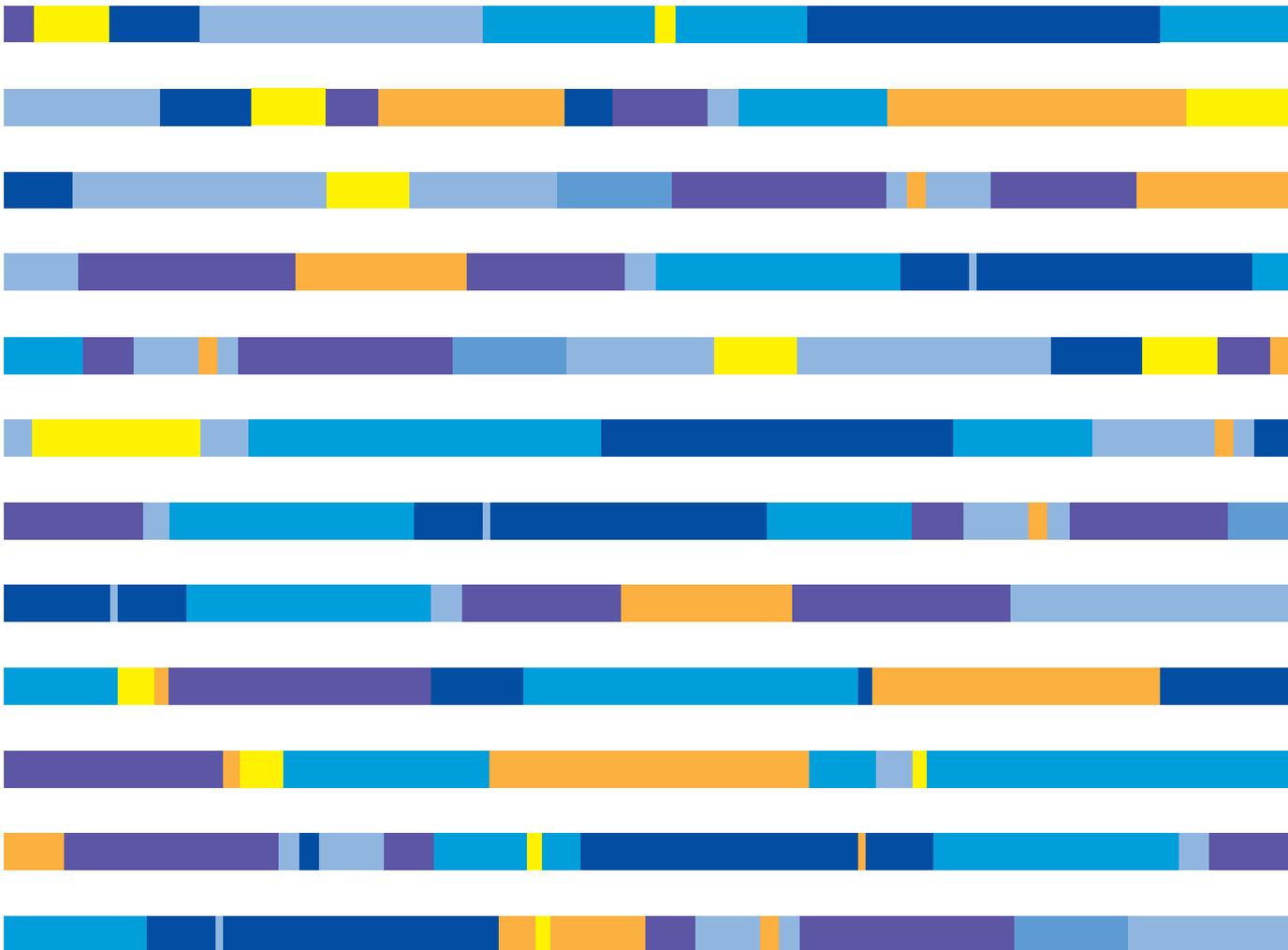
European
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European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update

COUNTRY REPORT: **CROATIA**

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Acknowledgements

This country update was produced by Marija Pavkov, as part of the 2018 update to the European Inventory on validation, a project managed by ICF (lead consultants: Manuel Souto-Otero, Ilona Murphy, Gabor Endrodi, David Scott and Andreea Hrimiuc) under the supervision of a steering committee formed by the European Commission (Koen Nomden, Godelieve Van-Den Brande; Martina Ni Cheallaigh and Corinna Liersch), Cedefop (Ernesto Villalba and Jens Bjornavold), and the ETF (Michael Graham and Kersti Raudsepp).

The report has benefitted from feedback from the European qualifications framework advisory group (EQF AG) members for Croatia as well as other national-level quality assurance (QA) contacts with expertise in validation.

Work was carried out under DG EMPL Implementing Framework Contract EAC/47/2014-3: VC 2017/0692

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The publication has neither been edited nor proof-read by Cedefop's editing service.

Please cite this publication as:

Pavkov, M. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Croatia*.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Croatia.pdf

1 Introduction

Since 2013, when the Act on the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) was established, validation is being incorporated in many strategic documents which would imply that on a system level, validation has gained in significance. The developments in the last five years are slowly, but steadily, setting the scene for the development of the validation framework. Significant steps are also being taken in the involvement of different stakeholders in the process. This certainly applies to the National Council for Development of Human Potential which has been very active since its establishment in 2014 because it has developed several important recommendations for the development of the overall qualification framework system and also validation.

Other significant evidence that many stakeholders are being involved in the process is the successful establishment of 25 Sectoral Councils. The legal documents that oblige implementation are slowly being developed which means practice is delayed compared to the country's actual need for validation and thus creation of a flexible work force. It should be mentioned that implementation depends on financial and human resources which are necessary for the implementation of legal acts and strategic documents. Currently, there is no national consensus or formal definition with reference to how validation is implemented at national level. The revised CROQF Act¹, accepted by Parliament in July 2018, and the Recommendations of the National Council for Development of Human Potential on strategic development of recognition of prior knowledge² can be regarded as national consensus about how validation is understood.

The Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning stipulates that by 2018 the member states should have in place arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Croatia is making good progress in this aspect because it has defined and framed several important domains with respect to the validation process in the revised CROQF Act.

The revised CROQF Act provides a clear description of different types of qualifications (partial and full), their volume (e.g. as HROO, ECVET or ECTS points) and allocation within the levels of CROQF. These make up a fundamental foundation for the establishment of the validation system. The revised Act also defines a procedure for recognition and validation of units of learning outcomes.

The first preconditions were set out with the development of the first CROQF Act (2013), Ordinance on CROQF Register and recent Recommendations for strategic development of recognition of prior learning (2018) developed by the National Council for Development of Human Potential. This also reflects the fact that the validation arrangements will be linked to the national qualification framework, which is recommended by the Council. The above mentioned successful stakeholder involvement is well in line with the Council recommendation on promotion of involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

Since the 2016 Inventory, the structure of the CROQF Register has been put in place, followed by the Register's online database that will contain units of learning outcomes, occupational standards, qualification standards, programmes for

¹ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_07_64_1309.html

² <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strate%C5%A1ki%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20u%C4%8Denja.pdf>

acquisition and validation of units of learning outcomes, and programmes for acquisition of qualifications. Currently, three occupational standards are registered in the database and further requests for 48 occupational standards to be included in the database were submitted up to mid-2018. All 25 Sectoral Councils, as foreseen by the Ordinance of the CROQF Register have been established and are being trained in the preparation and evaluation/assessment of occupational and qualification standards that will be included in the CROQF Register.

As there were no significant changes since reporting in 2016 on both adult education and higher education levels, specific details within each educational level will be reported as in the 2016 validation report. It is expected that by the end of 2018, a new Adult Education Act will be developed within which quality assurance in adult education will be ensured by aligning the adult education system with the needs of society and economy, with the CROQF, with educational policies in the EU, and with the Education, Science and Technology Strategy. It is expected that the revised Adult Education Act will also include aspects of validation since validation is an integral part of the CROQF and the Strategy. In 2018, the National Council for Development of Human Potential prepared Recommendations for the strategic development of recognition of prior learning (2018). These recommendations contain 15 items concerning the revision of legal acts in the adult education and higher education sectors; the operationalisation and financing of development of the system; a proposal for a validation model of competences acquired by formal, non-formal and informal learning; and suggestions for the fundamental principles behind the validation system. The Council also developed a draft of the Ordinance on recognition of prior learning, which has not yet been made public and is expected to be approved in 2019.

There are good practices in awareness raising activities related to validation. Under the remit of the National Council for Development of Human Potential and the Ministry of Science and Education, CROQF Conferences were organised in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The conferences provided the opportunity to invite different stakeholders and practitioners for two-day discussions on national developments within the CROQF system, and in particular on the development of approaches to the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

The revised CROQF Act³, accepted by the Parliament in July 2018, and the Recommendations of the National Council for Development of Human Potential on strategic development of recognition of prior knowledge⁴ can be regarded as national consensus on how validation is understood. Validation of units of learning

³ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_07_64_1309.html

⁴ <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strate%C5%A1ki%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20rednovanja%20prethodnog%20u%C4%8Denja.pdf>

outcomes is defined as the assessment of acquired competencies, including the issuance of a certificate by an authorized legal or natural person, in accordance with predefined and accepted criteria and standards. The procedure for recognition and validation of prior learning on CROQF level 6 or higher is regulated by the individual Acts of higher education institutions. Requests for recognition and validation of qualifications positioned on CROQ levels lower than level 6 can be submitted to the legal or natural person which is authorised to perform validation of units of learning outcomes and for issuing certificates for acquired units of learning outcomes. The procedure for applying for, validating and recognising prior learning and an award of qualification at level 5 of the CROQF and lower, will be set out in the Ordinance on the recognition of prior learning due in 2019. The Ordinance will be implemented in accordance with the appropriate programmes for validation of learning outcomes registered in the CROQF Register⁵.

Legal Framework

As reported in the 2016 report on validation⁶, the Croatian Parliament adopted the **Croatian Qualification Framework Act** (Official Gazette 22/2013) in March 2013, which establishes the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) and describes its implementation at national level, as well as developing references to the European Qualifications Framework, the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area and through meta-frameworks to national qualifications frameworks of other countries. The CROQF Act together with the revised CROQF Act (2018) established the foundation for the development of a system for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning on a national level in Croatia.

The principles and objectives of the CROQF as defined by the revised CROQF Act, which are related to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, are the following:

- *Developing a system of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning*

Followed by the CROQF Act from 2013, the revised CROQF Act (2018) also defined Sectoral Councils, the CROQF Register, the Ordinance on the CROQF Register, and the Ordinance on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These are defined as the building blocks of the national qualifications framework, which, at the same time, are the building blocks and foundations for setting up the national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The development of qualifications standards, units of learning outcomes and occupational standards are also pre-requisites for the development of the national system of recognition and validation.

The **Ordinance on the CROQF Register** was published in 2014 (Official Gazette 62/2014). It provided, together with the CROQF Act (2013), the legal foundation for the establishment of 25 Sectoral Councils.

The **revised CROQ Act** (2018) provides a clear description of different types of qualifications (partial and full), their volume (e.g. as HROO, ECVET or ECTS points) and allocation within the levels of CROQF. These are a fundamental foundation for the establishment of the validation system. The revised Act defines a procedure for recognition and validation of units of learning outcomes that is mentioned above in

⁵ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_07_64_1309.html

⁶ CEDEFOP (2016) Country report Croatia – 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning, Author: Marija Pavkov, prepared by ICF International.

this section. The revised CROQF Act also presents all CROQF levels and provides a clear description on the amount of HROO⁷, ECVET or ECTS points that are required for each of the levels.

Structures and actors within the future validation framework

By May 2018, all 25 **Sectoral Councils**, as foreseen by the Ordinance on the CROQF Register (Article 38) have been established. Their members were trained and have received instructions on the Guidelines for the preparation and evaluation of occupational standards and qualification standards, as Sectoral Councils were identified as key bodies in the process of implementation of CROQF, and indirectly validation.

Since the 2016 Inventory, based on the Ordinance on the CROQF Register, the online **CROQF Register** was developed in 2017⁸. The CROQF Register is a system for the registration and integration of occupational standards with the qualification standards through units of competences and units of learning outcomes⁹. All registered standards shall be public and aimed at enhancing the development of new curricula based on learning outcomes, that is, units of competences which meet the needs of the labour market¹⁰. Units of learning outcomes, occupational standards and qualification standards are assessed by Sectoral Councils and are included in the CROQF Register. As such, they can be used for validation purposes – for example, if an individual can prove that he/she possesses certain units of learning outcomes that were acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning, he/she can be awarded a partial or full qualification that is included/registered in the Register or a certificate confirming a person obtained units of learning outcomes from the Register.

The National Council for Development of Human Potential is a central strategic body for the development of the CROQF in the Republic of Croatia¹¹. The National Council assesses, validates and coordinates public policies, such as educational policy, employment policy, lifelong professional guidance policy and also policies related to validation of non-formal and informal learning, having in mind their influence on the human potential development and achievement of Croatia's strategic goals and competitiveness. The National Council monitors and validates the impact of the CROQF and respective qualifications, the work of Sectoral Councils and based on their regular reports, provides recommendations on how to better connect the educational offer with labour market needs. The Council also develops recommendations in regard to ongoing developments within the education sector and its relation with the CROQF.

In 2018, the National Council for Development of Human Potential prepared **Recommendations for the strategic development of recognition and validation of prior learning (National Council for Human Resources Development, 2018)**¹². The recognition of prior learning is described as validation of prior gained units of learning outcomes and validation of competences acquired through formal,

⁷ For more details about HROO please consult later sections in this report

⁸ Financed through the financial support of Erasmus+ programme.

⁹ <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/en/register-cqf/about-ordinance-croqf-register>

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/en/national-council/about-national-council>

¹² <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strateški%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20učenja.pdf>

non-formal and informal learning. The recommendations in the field of higher education refer to the need for the revision of the Act on scientific activity and higher education with the aim of enabling flexible access to higher education based on the recognition and validation of prior learning, and in line with the CROQF.

The recommendations in the field of adult education refer to the revision of the Adult Education Act and corresponding ordinances with the aim of prescribing the accreditation and re-accreditation processes of the programmes for validation of units of learning outcomes. In addition to that, the Council recommended development of the hybrid model of external validation of learning outcomes within the adult education system.

The Council also developed a draft of the Ordinance on recognition of prior learning, which is not yet publically available. Since the Ordinance needs to be approved by the minister responsible for education, with the prior approval by the minister responsible for the labour and pension systems and the minister responsible for regional development, the Council will propose the prepared Ordinance to the minister responsible for education which is expected to be approved in 2019.

Strategic documents referring to validation

In the **Education, Science and Technology Strategy (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2014)**, among the five overall goals for the education and training system in terms of lifelong learning, one is related to the 'development of processes and a system of recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and skills'. More specifically, the strategy describes that 'the system of non-formal and informal learning is intended especially for adults who have life and work experience. By evaluating the outcomes of different ways of learning and education, the time required for adult education is shortened, which thereby generates substantial savings, both for the individual and for the community, but it also contributes to the removal of barriers between the formal education system and competencies acquired through other forms of learning and education. In assessing and recognising the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning it is necessary to provide professional support and guidance for the individual, as well as the acquisition of additional competencies for all participants in both the process of evaluation and recognition of prior learning. The evaluation should be conducted by the institutions that are most competent experts in a particular field of expertise.'

Furthermore, the Strategy points out that for the development of the system of non-formal and informal learning, a consensus among key stakeholders is necessary as well as the creation of legal conditions that each citizen can exercise their right to validation of previously acquired competences.

The **Strategy for lifelong career guidance and career development** in Croatia 2016-2020¹³ positions validation of non-formal learning in the context of career guidance services provided by, for example the Croatian Employment Service and Universities. Validation is also put in the context of NEETs¹⁴ as the potential tool for supporting this group of individuals back into the labour market.

¹³ <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/news/2017-04/Strategija%20CPU%20i%20razvoja%20karijere%20u%20RH%202016.-2020..pdf>

¹⁴ NEET = not in education, employment or training

In 2017, two other strategic documents refer to the validation of prior learning as an important aspect of the educational system. The **Strategic Plan 2017-2019 of the Ministry of Science and Education**¹⁵ (MSE, 2017) states that the process of applying, acknowledging and validating previously acquired learning outcomes will be detailed in the Ordinance on Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and implemented in accordance with appropriate programmes for validating the learning outcomes from the CROQF Register.

The **Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017-2020**¹⁶ (AVETA, 2017) prepared by the Agency for VET and Adult Education strongly focuses on the promotion of the validation of prior knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal ways of learning, in particular for adult learners and therefore will be presented in more detail in sections 6 and 11 of this report.

Upskilling pathways

In April 2018, the Minister responsible for education has established the Council for the implementation of Council Recommendation for Upskilling Pathways¹⁷. The Council consists of 14 members from the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Ministry of Finance, Agency for VET and Adult Education, Office for NGOs, Agency for Teacher Training, Croatian Academic and Research Network, Croatian Employment Service, Association of Croatian Trade Unions, Croatian Chamber of Employers, Croatian Andragogy Society, and Croatian Country Association.

The Council will suggest activities for the implementation of the Council Recommendation for Upskilling Pathways; develop a Plan of activities for the implementation of the Council Recommendation; promote Upskilling Pathways as a tool for increasing the level of key competences of adult individuals; and monitor implementation and impact of Upskilling Pathways.

Since the validation system is still in development at national level, there is currently no support given to the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.

2.2 Validation in education and training

The national system for validation started being developed in 2013 when the CROQF Act was introduced. Prior to the CROQF Act, four other existing acts relating to different educational levels reflected on the validation possibilities within each educational level (VET, adult education, higher education). A new update of the Adult Education Act is foreseen by the end of 2018 and will take into account developments related to CROQF and all related instruments, Ordinances, and other legal procedures. The aim is also to ensure and improve the quality assurance system in adult education by harmonising it with the needs of Croatian society and economy, the educational politics of the EU, as well the national Education, Science and Technology Strategy.

¹⁵ Ministry of Science and Education (2017) Strategic plan for the period 2017-2019, https://mzo.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/strateski_plan_mzoa_za_razdoblje_2017-2019_web_15_5.pdf

¹⁶ Agency for VET and Adult Education (2017) Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia, https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/strateski_okvir_hr_priprema_za_tisak.pdf

¹⁷ Internal note from the Ministry of Science and Education.

The CROQF Act from 2013 and the revised Act from 2018 both take into account the four stages of validation: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification, which will be implemented by means of CROQF Register and Ordinance on recognition and validation.

Since there were no significant changes since the last reporting in 2016 in adult education and higher education levels, specific details within each educational level will be reported here in line with the 2016 validation report. Developments in VET are described further below.

Adult education

Existing validation arrangements can be found on a sectoral level, as noted in the European Inventory report for Croatia (European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International, 2014). The Adult Education Act (Official Gazette 17/07, 24/10 (NN 17/07, 24/10)) contains a provision in Article 11, which states that: 'adults shall have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities, regardless of the means by which these were acquired, by taking an examination'. This provision represents the necessary legal grounds for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Further detail on the legal framework supporting this Act can be found in the 2010 country report.

The **Adult Education Act**, Article 11 (Official Gazette 17/07, 24/10) and the Ordinance on Standards and Specification in Adult Education Institutions (Article 32)¹⁸ describe the possibility of implementing validation through a competence test. The Adult Education Act states that: 'the tests can be organised by those adult education institutions which organise and deliver the formal education programme for the acquisition of the same knowledge, skills and competences (that are to be tested). The Ordinance states that exceptionally, without attending practical teaching and training, acquired knowledge and skills from practical teaching and training can be validated based on the written demand of an individual and based on evidence, by a commission of three members. In respect of the individual who has evidence of knowledge and skills gained from practical teaching and training, the time of the overall formal education programme can be shortened (in the part of the programme or in the whole programme)'.¹⁹

In current practice, theoretical exams as a means of validating prior knowledge, skills and competences are not being implemented in adult education. The revised CROQF Act sets foundations for this type of validation in terms of formal adult education programmes. However, the validation of practical training is already in practice in terms of validating knowledge, skills and competences for craft occupations, as set out in the Crafts Act (see above) and as described in the European Inventory Country Report for Croatia in 2010. In that sense, the responsibility is held by the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts.

In the sector of adult education, the Strategy also refers to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning as a structural precondition for increasing the level of participation in adult education¹⁹.

¹⁸ Internet:

www.asoo.hr/UserDocsImages/Dokumenti/Pravilnik_o_standardima_i_normativima_te_nacinu_i_postupku_utvrdivanja_ispunjenosti_uvjeta_u_ustanovama_za_obrazovanje_odraslih.pdf

¹⁹ http://www.novebojeznanja.hr/UserDocsImages/datoteke/KB_web.pdf , Section on adult education, pg. 196

A new Adult Education Act (in compliance with the Act on the Croatian Qualifications Framework) will be drafted by the end of 2018. Since the CROQF sets the foundation for the validation framework and procedures, it is expected that the new Adult Education Act will also include aspects of validation which means that the new document will also take into account the existence of all legal documents linked to CROQF (Ordinance on CROQF Register because qualifications obtained through adult education will be an integral part of the Register; draft Ordinance on recognition and validation of prior learning because the validation will be performed based on the qualifications entered in the CROQF Register).

Vocational education and training

The **Act on Vocational Education and Training** (Official Gazette 30/2009 (NN 30/2009)) from 2009 stated that the competence acquired by formal and informal learning can be proven by taking a test, according to the occupational standards, or vocational qualifications (Article 5). The Act stipulated that the procedure and the way of performing exams to validate non-formal and informal acquired competencies needs to be prescribed by the Minister. However, the new Act on Revisions and Amendments to the Act on Vocational Education and Training (Official Gazette 25/2018) no longer takes into account validation of non-formal and informal learning. The revised Act defines that the qualification obtained through VET is of a certain level, volume, profile and quality that is proven by the public document and which support integration into the labour market or continuation of education.

The revised Act further states that VET is based on the national curriculum for VET, sectoral curriculum, VET curricula and curricula of VET educational institutions. The sectoral curriculum is the framework which includes all VET curricula linked to qualifications at levels 2-5 of the CROQF of one educational sector with corresponding learning outcomes from the qualification standards. Credit points (Article 4) are awarded to the qualifications and the associated learning outcomes. One credit point shall be awarded to a trainee for an average of 15 to 25 working hours in the duration of 60 minutes necessary for acquiring the appropriate learning outcomes. Once acquired credits from a set of learning outcomes of the relevant qualification standard are recognized as acquired credit scores of the learning outcomes of the same name and the content of another qualification standard. The sum of credit points of all learning outcomes of a given level of qualification of the appropriate level is equal to the volume of that qualification.

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

Higher education

With respect to **higher education**, the Education, Science and Technology Strategy (Government of Republic of Croatia, 2014)²⁰ describes validation of non-formal and informal learning as a tool which can enable students' vertical mobility by validating entry competences as the foundation for upward mobility in the qualification system (Official Gazette 124/2014).

The Strategy also recognises the importance of validation of non-formal and informal learning in part-time studies as they are mainly enrolled by students who are in employment and therefore there is a certain degree of experience, skills and knowledge that can be recognised and validated.

The 2016 Validation Report presented several existing practices of individual higher education institutions that developed internal ordinances as guides for recognition of non-formal and informal learning of students. Since there were no new initiatives identified since the 2016 Report, it is also worth mentioning that the recent Recommendations for the strategic development of recognition and validation of prior learning²¹ prepared by the National Council for Development of Human Capital included recommendations focused also at a higher education level that will create more precise conditions for the establishment of validation approaches in higher education .

The recommendations state that the Council recommends:

- revision of the Act on quality assurance in science and higher education, and additional ordinance which governs accreditation and reaccreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. This is achieved by prescribing options for the adoption of programmes of validation of units of learning outcomes that are in accordance with the qualification standards from the CROQF Register-revision of the Act on scientific activity and higher education. The aim is to enable flexible access to higher education based on the recognition and validation of prior learning, and in line with the CROQF.
- revision of higher education institutions' internal acts that regulate procedures for adoption of study programmes and educational programmes which are not regarded as higher education studies, and for which the possibility for recognition and validation of prior learning in accordance with qualification standards from the CROQF Register should be enabled.
- that at the level of higher education, it is not possible to obtain full qualification solely based on validation procedures of prior learning.

The forthcoming Ordinance on recognition and validation of prior learning is expected to take the above recommendations into account and to be aligned with the needs of all education levels.

Trades and crafts sector

In addition, the Trades and Crafts Act (2013) (Official Gazette 143/13 (NN 143/13)) defines a process of validating informal learning in relation to craft occupations (Articles 64 and 65):

²⁰ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2014_10_124_2364.html

²¹ <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strateški%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20učenja.pdf>

'For the purpose of running some associated craft businesses for which adequate qualifications are required, an examination for evidencing necessary competences is taken in accordance with the programme prescribed by the Minister of Crafts, Small and Medium Enterprises upon the proposal of the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts. The examination for evidencing necessary competences (vocational competence exam) can be taken by a person having completed at least primary school education.'

The Act also states: 'The examination for evidencing necessary competences includes practical vocational knowledge and knowledge that is necessary for carrying out craft activities independently'. It goes on to say: 'After the examination for evidencing necessary competences has been successfully passed, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts issues a certificate'.

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

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

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

2.3 Validation and the labour market

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

In recent years, there has been an increase of individuals passing the expert exam for tourist guides and tourist companions since Croatia is gaining importance and attractiveness as a tourist country/destination. Although the expert exam procedure was regulated in 2008 (National Gazette 50/08)²², it became more structured within the whole tourism sector when the recent Act on providing services in tourism was approved (National Gazette 130/2017)²³. The expert exam procedure allows the candidates who have acquired the occupation of the professor of foreign languages for a certain language or have gained an international certificate on the knowledge

²² https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2008_04_50_1686.html

²³ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2017_12_130_2982.html

of foreign language to be exempted from the obligation to take the foreign language exam. In that way, the both formal and non-formal ways of acquiring foreign language knowledge are accepted as validation approaches.

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

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

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

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

More detailed sectoral mapping (which is beyond the scope of this report) would be necessary in order to identify, list and describe all existing validation procedures. Further analysis could identify relationships between existing sectoral practice and the national validation system currently under development.

2.3.1 Skills audits

The Croatian Employment Service (CES) defines and practices 'skills audits' as described in the European Recommendation on Validation. The CES is defined in the Lifelong Professional Guidance and Career Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia 2016-2020 as the main body responsible for skills audits in Croatia. The Act on Employment Mediation and Unemployment Rights²⁴ describes professional guidance as different professional procedures that lead to the identification of possibilities, interests and competences of the users, with the aim of decision making on education and employment, and management of individual professional development. The services are offered to unemployed persons and other employment seekers, secondary school students and higher education students.

'Counsellors for employment' are CES employees to whom registered unemployed people are referred to for the purpose of skills audits²⁵. Counsellors for employment focus on an occupational field and are responsible for certain industrial sectors. An electronic application is used to record the knowledge, skills and competences of unemployed people. The skills audit record consists of information on formal education, additional courses, seminars, specialisations, licences, certificates, professional exams, adult education programmes, foreign language skills (in reading, speaking and writing with an indication of the level of knowledge) – formal and non-formal (verified with diploma or not), IT knowledge and skills, driving licence, and additional knowledge gained by self-learning or through hobbies and any type of informal learning. The employment record of unemployed people, managed by CES Employment Counsellors, summarises all jobs held by the individual (their description and employer details), and entrepreneurship experience.

²⁴ <https://www.zakon.hr/z/414/Zakon-o-posredovanju-pri-zapo%C5%A1ljanju-i-pravima-za-vrijeme-nezaposlenosti>

²⁵ This section was taken from the 2016 Country Report on the Update of the European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

The employment record is very detailed because the record can demonstrate the usage of skills, knowledge and competences that were gained outside the formal education system.

Box 2.1 The good CES practice on skills audits and some qualitative indicators

The skills audit is used in the following settings:

a) Matching the needs of the employer who is looking for new employees with the profiles of unemployed people.

b) Developing the 'Professional plan' of unemployed people. The Plan is used for job searching (matching the profile of unemployed people with advertised jobs) and for exploring the possibilities for further additional education and training – either formal or/and non-formal, according to the unemployed individual's preferences, motivation and existing knowledge, skills and competences. Based on yearly programmes and measures for active employment, CES provides opportunities and financial support for formal education undertaken by unemployed individuals.

2016

Source of information: Croatian Employment Service, Yearbook 2016
Service of "professional guidance" and development of professional plan: 18 410 users
CISOK: 53 185 career counselling and informing services

2015

Source of information: Croatian Employment Service, Yearbook 2016
Service of "professional guidance" and development of professional plan: 13.592 users
CISOK: 60 834 career counselling and informing services

2014

Source of information: Croatian Employment Service, Yearbook 2016
Service of "professional guidance" and development of professional plan: 272 223 individual counselling sessions
CISOK: 39 228 career counselling and informing services

The skills audits performed by CES can be described as part of a three step process of the Upskilling Pathways. The CES performs skills assessments (step 1) and presents the learning offer to the unemployed individuals (step 2). The third step (validation and recognition) is fulfilled if the unemployed person enrolls in formal adult education programme and obtains a certificate and/or qualification.

Since 2013, when the first CISOK centres (Guidance centres for providing information and counselling on career possibilities) were opened²⁶, a network of centres was created and currently consists of 13 centres spread throughout the country.

The centres offer a set of tools which guide students and adults in assessing their skills and competences necessary for professional development. The self-assessment questionnaire²⁷ for testing and identifying personality traits associated

²⁶ <http://www.hzz.hr/default.aspx?id=6358>

²⁷ <http://www.cisok.hr/upitnik-za-samoprocjenu-osobina-licnosti-povezanih-s-poslom>

with the current and/or future job provides the opportunity to determine individual personality characteristics that are important for adaptation to different positions in various business situations. This questionnaire is primarily focused on helping the individuals to become more familiar with their own traits and recognise a job that suits them best, and is in accordance with their character and abilities. Some relevant statistics on the number of users is presented in Box 2.1

The CISOK centres offer an online programme for vocational guidance called 'My Choice'. The programme is an interactive counselling system that is aimed at those who have to make a decision on the choice of the occupation or career development – either targeting students, unemployed persons or all other individuals searching for a job. The programme contains descriptions of more than 250 occupations, as well as an interactive questionnaire on professional interests, while based on respondents' answers. The programme proposes a list of relevant occupations and provides information about the system of education within the country.

Currently, the CES, together with other relevant stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Croatian Pension Insurance Institute, schools and universities, is developing a new track-record system with the support of an electronic application. This will enable electronic communication and data exchange with other public institutions with the aim of recording the history of knowledge, skills and competences (formal and non-formal) obtained by each individual through their life-span, including schooling and their employment period. Due to the complexity of the system, the synchronisation is still undergoing development, but once it is operational, it will also create the possibility to perform skills audits using the database.

Similar to "My Choice" programme, the Society for research and development of human resources called Razbor, developed an online computer software for professional counselling in 2007, called 'Occupational Choice'. The programme can be used to support individuals who are making career decisions because it offers an advisory module on career development – a self-assessment tool to take account of the individuals' own preferences and abilities. However, it is not additionally supported by a database of occupations, such as the "My Choice" programme.

The Razbor also developed a web-based professional consulting tool, a "Picture questionnaire for professional occupations"²⁸ that allows users to better understand their professional interests, which is one of the key elements in career orientation.

In 2017, the Institute Ivo Pilar developed and presented a career counselling website "Put karijere"²⁹ (career path) that undertakes skills audits. The website was developed as part of the project "Vocational Development in Adolescence: Setting the Adolescent Career Transition Model, HRZZ-1229". It offers a range of psychological questionnaires, including a picture questionnaire on interests (similar to the above mentioned Razbor web-based tool); assessment of general interest and working values, etc.

On the level of higher education, Universities in Zagreb³⁰, Rijeka³¹, Split³², as well as some private higher education institutions, such as Algebra³³, have established

²⁸ http://www.karijera.hr/upitnik_uvod.php

²⁹ <http://www.putkarijere.hr/>

³⁰ <http://www.unizg.hr/studiji-i-studiranje/podrska-studentima/centar-za-savjetovanje-i-podrsku-studentima/>

³¹ <http://www.ssc.uniri.hr/hr/>

³² <http://studentski.hr/oznake/sveucilisni-savjetodavni-centar-split>

³³ <https://www.algebra.hr/visoko-uciliste/centar-karijera/>

Career Counselling centres for students that provide psychological support and also career guidance support.

Within the private sector³⁴, the recruiting companies conduct skills audits³⁵:

- Sirius - a centre for psychological counselling, educational training and research (Centar za psihološko savjetovanje, edukaciju i istraživanje) conducts skills audits for young people to assist with their career choices. Several private employment services (PrES) (the most relevant being: Adecco³⁶, Dekra³⁷, Selectio³⁸, Smartflex³⁹) offer psychological testing of job candidates for employers.

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

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

2.4 Validation and the third sector

After the revision of the Volunteering Act in 2013 (Official Gazette 58/07, 22/13 (NN 58/07, 22/13)) and the created possibility to award Certificate on competences acquired during volunteering which contains information on the skills, competences and knowledge gained through volunteering practice, a good practice of creating the online certificate on competences gained through volunteering was developed, and is described in more detail in Box 2.2

Box 2.2 Online Certificate on competences acquired during volunteering

Through the Erasmus+ financed project, the Volunteering Center Osijek implemented the project “Competencies acquired through volunteering”. The aim of the project is to make volunteering more visible on the labour market, but also in further education, through amendments to the 2013 Act on Volunteering. Issuing a Certificate of Competences Acquired through Volunteering in practice and monitoring competences is a combined process of self-assessment of volunteers and the volunteer hosting organisation. The way of monitoring the acquisition of competencies depends on the agreement between the volunteer hosting organisation and the volunteers and the type of volunteer positions. It may include a variety of monitoring techniques such as regular meetings, assessment and

³⁴ DG Employment (2018) “Mapping Skills Audits in and across the EU”

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ <https://adecco.hr/nase-usluge/adecco-xpert>

³⁷ <http://www.dekra-zapo.hr/psihologijska-procjena>

³⁸ <http://www.selectio.hr/potruga-za-kadrovima/psihologijsko-testiranje/>

³⁹ <http://smartflex.hr/psihologijsko-testiranje/>

analysis of the results of volunteer tasks and works, feedback on the engagement of volunteers from other volunteers, employees and users, etc. The making of the Certificate is guided by four steps. Until May 2018, 63 online certificates were issued for 57 volunteers by 66 volunteer organisations.

Source: <http://kompetencije.volontiram.info/en>

As the result of the project “Towards full potential - volunteering encourages people and the community” that ended in 2015 and was financed by European funds, the Croatian Youth Network, as the leader, and Volunteering center Zagreb and the University in Rijeka developed a Charter on validation of competences acquired through volunteering that is now publically available to employers for signing. By the end of the project 23 employers (private and public) have signed the Charter whereas the number increased to around 30 employers until 2018. The good practice is described in more detail in Box 2.3.

Box 2.3 Charter on Validation of Competences acquired through volunteering

The project describes that within the Charter, employers and the education sector are encouraged to recognize and evaluate the competences acquired through volunteering as a tool to develop full human potential. In that way, standards and good practices are adopted in the process of recruiting, professional improvement and job advancement that relate to the recognition of the importance of volunteering and its benefits to individuals, organisations, communities and the entire society. Evaluating competences acquired through volunteering also offers numerous opportunities for students in education and for their mobility within the education system (reference from: <http://www.vcz.hr/info-pult/novosti-i-dogadjanja/potpisana-povelja-o-priznavanju-kompetencija-stecenih-volontiranjem/>).

The list of employers that signed the Charter can be found at: <http://www.vcz.hr/info-pult/novosti-i-dogadjanja/potpisana-povelja-o-priznavanju-kompetencija-stecenih-volontiranjem/>.

The Charter can be found at: <http://povelja.hr/>

The Certificate of Competences acquired during Volunteering (*Potvrda o kompetencijama stečenim tijekom volontiranja*) can be issued by the employer on the demand of the volunteer. The Certificate contains the following information: information about the organiser of the volunteering; information about the volunteer; description of the volunteer’s position (tasks and responsibilities); type, name and duration of additional training undertaken during the volunteering period; description of competences acquired during the volunteering period – divided according to eight key competences as defined by the European Commission (communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression). The skills, competences and knowledge gained through volunteering practice will not be entered into the Volunteering record in the form of the Booklet (*Volonterska*

knjižica), but its purpose is to present the list of gained competences to the third party (e.g. future employer).

3 Links to national qualification systems

Qualifications and qualification frameworks⁴⁰

As described in the previous section, the revised CROQF Act is a legal basis ‘for development of the future Ordinance on recognition of prior learning. The national qualification framework is based on learning outcomes, described through knowledge, cognitive skills, practical skills, social skills and respective autonomy and responsibility’. ‘There are eight levels of units of learning outcomes with corresponding descriptions representing minimal conditions for placing units of learning outcomes at respective CROQF levels’.

Recognition and validation of prior learning will be based on units of learning outcomes as defined in the revised CROQF Act.

Credit systems

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

The Ordinance on the CROQF Register⁴¹ regulates the content and management of the CROQF Register; the procedure for submitting requests for inclusion in the CROQF Register and the content and structure of the request form; the evaluation of submitted requests for inclusion and the procedure for including new entries in the CROQF Register; the work of Sectoral Councils (titles of sectors and Sectoral Councils, selection criteria and selection procedure for members of Sectoral Councils and the description of Sectoral Councils’ roles and responsibilities); and the internal and external quality assurance system of the CROQF Register.

The Register is public since 2016 and consists of three sub-registers:

1. Sub-registers of units of learning outcomes, to include: units of learning outcomes, programmes for acquisition and validation of units of learning outcomes, programmes for validation of units of learning outcomes, a list of legal entities and people accredited for awarding certificates of acquired units of learning outcomes etc. (regulated and maintained by the ministry responsible for education and science);
2. Occupational standards sub-register, to include: occupational standards, units of competences required for respective occupations etc. (regulated and maintained by the ministry responsible for labour);
3. Qualifications standards sub-register to include: qualifications standards, programmes for acquisition of qualifications, a list of legal entities accredited for

⁴⁰ This section was taken from the 2016 Country Report on the Update of the European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning and was updated accordingly

awarding certificates of acquired qualification etc. (regulated and maintained by the ministry responsible for education and science).

The Units of Learning Outcomes sub-register and the Qualification Standards sub-register are regulated and managed by the ministry responsible for education and science. The Occupational Standards sub-register is regulated and managed by the ministry responsible for labour.

Entry into the Register (Article 14) 'can be approved to any legal entity or natural person, as well as to the national authorities. The request for entry into the sub-register of units of learning outcomes and qualification standards sub-register will be submitted to the ministry responsible for education and science. The request for entry into the occupational standards sub-register will be submitted to the ministry responsible for labour. Based on the Sectoral Council's expert opinions, the respective minister will determine the fulfilment of formal and professional conditions for entry into the Register and will adopt the decree on entry into the respective CROQF sub-register'.

Currently, there are three occupational standards with 42 units of competences registered in the database. Further requests for 48 occupational standards inclusion into the database were submitted until the end of May 2018.

Article 15 of the revised CROQF Act defines the procedure for recognition and validation of previously acquired units of learning outcomes. The procedure includes the request for recognition, application, recognition and validation. The Article states that: 'a request for recognition and validation of previously acquired units of learning outcomes can be submitted by any individual to a legal entity or a natural person accredited for validation of units of learning outcomes according to an approved programme/procedure for validation of units of learning outcomes from the Register'. The Act on Science and Higher Education defines and describes the ECTS system for measuring students' workload. The Vocational Education and Training Act and the Strategy for the Development of the System of Vocational Education and Training (2008-2013) set the foundation for the development of the ECVET credit system. The VET Act defines (Article 7) one ECVET credit as being equal to 25 teaching hours. Credits can be acquired for one teaching subject or module, then used within another qualification, which contains the same subject module.

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

- One HROO credit as 15 to 25 hours of study work, as required for acquiring respective learning outcomes;
- One ECVET credit as 15 to 25 hours of study work, as required for acquiring respective learning outcomes;
- One ECTS credit as 25 to 30 hours of study work, as required for acquiring respective learning outcomes.

With respect to the recognition and transfer of qualifications, national as well as international, the Education, Science and Technology Strategy states that it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of ECTS and ECVET credits as tools that

enable mobility of students. The credits should be linked to the CROQF and more details on how this should be achieved are provided in the 2016 Country Report. The current developments of the validation framework do support these intentions because the units of learning outcomes that will be entered into the CROQF Register will also be assigned credits.

4 Standards

The Ministry of Labour and Pension System introduced the ‘Guidelines for the development of occupational standards’⁴² in 2016. The Guidelines define procedures for assessing the merits of the occupational profile by using the sectoral profiles which are made available on the portal of the Ministry of Labour and Pension System⁴³ dedicated to 25 CROQF sectors that are aligned with the sectors of the 25 Sectoral Councils. This portal brings together relevant data on the Croatian labour market from various sources; provides an overview of trends in 25 CROQF sectors by age, gender and regional origin; presents demand for sectoral professions; and, provides an overview of educational programmes. The process of occupational standard development is also elaborated in the guidelines. The occupational standards will become an integral part of the CROQF Register, as described in section 3 of this report, and will contain units of competences required for respective occupations. The competences will be acquired through the educational programmes that are built of units of learning outcomes, which will be entered into the CROQF Register and will become an essential foundation for the validation process.

The Ministry of Labour and Pension System also developed “Guidelines for the validation of the occupational standards and units of competences”⁴⁴, according to the Ordinance on CROQF Register, Article 21. The Guidelines will be used by Sectoral Councils when assessing submitted suggestions on occupational standards that are to be entered into the CROQF Register.

The Ministry of Science and Education published the ‘Guidelines for the development of qualification standards’⁴⁵ (July 2017). The guidelines provide an insight about the definition of qualification standards, their purpose, who develops them and who validates them. The process of the development is elaborated in detail and is linked to the Request for the inclusion of qualification standards into the CROQF Register. Once included in the CROQF Register, the qualification standard becomes the set of units of learning outcomes against which the validation process is conducted.

The qualification standard presents the content and the structure of the qualification, and involves all data/information for the determination of its CROQF level, its volume (number of credits), qualification profile (learning outcomes) and data that is needed for ensuring an improvement of the quality of the qualification (minimum common learning outcomes that need to be included in each programme that is

⁴² Ministry of Labour and Pension Systems (2017) Guidelines for the development of occupational standard, <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-08/Smjernice%20za%20izradu%20standarda%20zanimanja.pdf>

⁴³ <http://hkosektor.poslovna.hr/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.mrms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Prilog-6-Smjernice-za-vrednovanje-standarda-zanimanja-i-skupova-kompetencija.pdf>

⁴⁵ Ministry of Science and Education (2017) Guidelines for the Development of Qualification Standard, <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-09/Smjernice%20za%20razvoj%20standarda%20kvalifikacija.pdf>

linked to the particular qualification standard)⁴⁶. This information will be required for the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning as defined in the Recommendations for the strategic development of recognition of prior learning developed by the National Council for Human Capital Development.

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is defined as procedures in which the validation of competences (by means of tests, documentation overview, oral examination, etc.) is in accordance with prior defined and accepted criteria and standards prescribed by the programme for the validation of units of learning outcomes from the CROQF Register, and which include procedures for issuing the certificate from the authorised legal or physical entity. The Programme for validation of units of learning outcomes includes the description of the standardised process of validation of units of learning outcomes, in relation to standard units of learning outcomes and qualification standards from the CROQF Register. The Register mentions which units of learning outcomes will be validated, what validation methods will be used, how the testing will be organised and how long it will last, and who are the examiners, etc. According to this definition, the validation process will be standardised in many segments. The future developments within the field will demonstrate the level of standardisation and the complexity of requirements.

Occupational standards and qualification standards will be entered into the CROQF Register which will enable faster adjustment of educational programmes towards labour market needs. The qualification standards will serve as the basis for creating procedures for assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The forthcoming Ordinance on the recognition of prior learning will regulate the responsibilities and procedures for CROQF levels 1-5 and higher education institutions will develop procedures related to levels 6-8⁴⁷ as stipulated in the revised CROQF Act. It is known, since this is defined in the revised CROQF Act, that Sectoral Councils will validate occupational standards and qualification standards based on the requirements for inclusion into the CROQF Register, from the side of educational institutions or other legal and physical entities. After the Decision on the inclusion of the occupational standard and qualification standard into the CROQF Register, the educational institution will be able to adjust its educational programme with the qualification standard in the CROQF Register and in that way improve educational programmes and assign to them the corresponding CROQF level and EQF level⁴⁸. The Sectoral Councils will not be responsible for the validation procedures as such, but will approve standards that will become an integral part of the CROQF Register and which are foundational elements upon which the validation procedures will be conducted by other stakeholders.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The national institutional framework is being set up and will be defined with further official national documents, based on the CROQF Act (2013) and revised CROQF Act from 2018.. Since the Ordinance on the recognition of prior learning is about to be approved in 2019, the changes that occurred since the 2016 Report mainly refer to revisions stipulated in the revised CROQF Act.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 4

⁴⁷ Information from the Ministry of Science and Education

⁴⁸ Government of the Republic of Croatia (2017) National reform programme 2017, pg. 51.

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-national-reform-programme-croatia-hr.pdf>

As defined in the revised CROQF Act (Article 9), responsibilities for the implementation of the CROQF and the development of the national system and implementation of validation, is allocated to the following organisations: the National Council for Development of Human Potential, the ministry responsible for education and science, the ministry responsible for labour, the ministry responsible for regional development and to the Sectoral Councils.

The ministry responsible for education and science, as defined in Article 11 of the revised CROQF Act, 'is responsible, amongst others, for adopting the guidelines for the development of qualification standards, for the development of the system for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning; monitoring and analysing implementation of the system for validation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning and proposing measures for its regulation; developing the role of the CROQF in procedures related to recognition and identification of qualifications'. In addition, the ministry responsible for education and science also has the main responsibility for the establishment and coordination of sectoral councils. Further to that, it should coordinate the quality assurance of qualifications and learning outcomes.

The ministry responsible for labour, as defined in Article 11 of the revised CROQF Act, 'is responsible for collecting data about changes in competences required for occupations and proposing development of qualifications standards and occupational standards according to labour market needs; preparing and elaborating analytical background material and methodology for elaboration of occupational standards and managing the sub-register of occupational standards.'

The ministry responsible for regional development, as defined in the revised CROQF Act, is responsible for monitoring the effects of the qualification structure of the population on regional development; adoption of guidelines for the development of the regional labour market; and analysis of the needs for human potential development that arise from county and regional development strategies.

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

- Validate proposals of units of learning outcomes, occupational standards and qualifications standards;
- Analyse existing and required competences covered by a sector;
- Give recommendations to the National Council about admission policies, admissions quota and financing of qualifications from public sources, by qualification and by county;
- Give recommendations to the ministry responsible for education and science about changes in qualifications standards based on changes detected in occupational standards;
- Give recommendations to the ministry responsible for labour about changes in the National Classification of Occupations;
- Propose recommendations for sector development to the National Council.

The 25 Sectoral Councils that were established before 2018 are composed of a president and ten members: (one representative of ministries responsible for a respective sector; one representative of the CES; one representative of the agency responsible for science and higher education or agency responsible for vocational education and adult education or agency responsible for education and teacher training; eight sectoral experts to be appointed after a public call, taking account of proportional representation of the educational sector and unions representing the education sector, on the one hand, and unions representing the economic sector, employers' associations and other civil society organisations which are active in the sector covered by the respective council, on the other hand). Titles of the Sectoral Councils and their responsibilities are defined in the Ordinance on CROQF Register. On the other hand, in the case of current sectoral approaches which recognise knowledge, skills and competences as the pre-requisite for performing certain jobs (which are not qualification related), there is a responsibility on that sector and its national organisation(s) to define the different aspects of validation.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising

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

The Ministry of Science and Education developed a special web-portal – see internet (www.kvalifikacije.hr), dedicated to the CROQF, where it also publicises information related to validation. The portal is a central place for up-to-date information for practitioners, professionals and the wider public. This includes up-to-date information on the activities of each of the 25 Sectoral Councils and the National Council for Development of Human Potential, including agendas and minutes of regular meetings. Decisions of the minister responsible for education and their impact on the establishment of Sectoral Councils, and any changes that occurred in the composition of the Sectoral Councils, are made publically visible. Documents that were developed by the National Council for Development of Human Potential, such as different recommendations mentioned in this report, are also made available on the portal. The reports of the annual national conferences organised by the National Council for Development of Human Potential are shared and the good practice of these conferences is described in more details in Box 2.4.

Information about developments within the legal framework, as well as description of activities implemented within international projects can also be found on the portal.

Box 6.1 Yearly conference of the National Council for Development of Human Potential

Under the remit of the National Council for Human Resources Potential Development and the Ministry of Science and Education, CROQF Conferences were organised in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The conferences provided the opportunity to gather different stakeholders and practitioners for one-day (2017) and two-day discussions on national developments within the CROQF system, and in particular development of approaches to validation of non-formal and

informal learning. The CROQF Conference is already a yearly tradition that also intends to include employers as speakers and in that way bring the labour market concerns closer to stakeholders.

As reported in the 2016 Country report, with respect to sectoral approaches, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts publishes booklets and leaflets to promote the possibility of obtaining a Certificate of Vocational Competence and Master Craftsman Diploma through validating and assessing knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through non-formal and informal pathways. The information is also made publicly available through the Chamber's website and different events organised by the Chamber and other stakeholders.

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

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

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

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

Other sectoral associations (as described in Section 2.3) also provide support before validation in the form of professional literature and guidance⁴⁹.

The Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017-2020⁵⁰ (AVETAE, 2017) prepared by the Agency for VET and Adult Education included the activity “informing about the possibilities of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal lifelong learning” as one of the strategic goals of the communication plan. The target groups identified as those to whom the information will be shared are the following: students in higher education, individuals with low skills (primary education or without qualification), and the NEET group

⁴⁹ This section was taken from the 2016 Country Report on the Update of the European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

⁵⁰ Agency for VET and Adult Education (2017) Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia, https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/strateski_okvir_hr_priprema_za_tisak.pdf

(young people not in education and not in training). The stakeholders responsible for providing information will be the ministry responsible for education, ministry responsible for labour, higher education institutions, chambers of commerce, employers' associations, publishers of specialised publications, Croatian Employment Service and CISOK centres, adult education institutions, local and county level governments, syndicates, and development agencies. It is to be seen from 2018 onwards which concrete activities will be implemented by the Agency (such as the Lifelong Learning Week mentioned in section 6.1) and other stakeholders and what will be their impact on the target groups and wider population.

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

Since the recognition and validation system has not yet been developed on the national level, the profile of validation practitioners at national level is still to be determined in the framework of future legislation and in that sense the situation remains as it was in 2016.

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

Qualification requirements

The qualification requirements will be defined and described in the future, following developments in the legislative framework related to the CROQF and validation⁵¹.

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

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

A sectoral example in terms of craft examinations insists that the examination committee consists of at least three members and must include individuals with adequate master craftsman skills, teachers from crafts' secondary schools or other vocational education secondary schools; with the professionals from crafts' businesses forming the majority⁵².

⁵¹ ibid

⁵² ibid

7.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The approaches to training and support to validation practitioners will be developed in the future, following developments in the legislative framework related to CROQF and validation⁵³.

8 Quality assurance

As stated in the 2016 Country report, the CROQF Act (Article 13) describes the dimension of quality assurance in CROQF implementation, which includes quality assurance of validation. The CROQF Register is the main quality assurance tool as described in Section 3.

There is no standardised quality assurance system for existing validation practices. The Ordinance on validation and other related documents will provide the legal framework for ensuring the quality of validation which means that the situation remains as it was in 2016.

However, the Ordinance on CROQF Register defines measures for quality assurance in CROQF implementation in Articles 45 – 50. The quality assurance of the CROQF implementation encompasses quality assurance of the management of the development processes and CROQF implementation, and quality assurance of acquisition of qualifications and units of learning outcomes entered into the CROQF Register. Stakeholders involved in the quality assurance are as follows: authorised legal persons which award documents/certificates on acquired qualifications, authorised legal and physical persons who award certificates on acquired units of learning outcomes; Sectoral Councils; ministries responsible for the implementation of CROQF; National Council for Human Potential Development; agency responsible for science and higher education. Ministry responsible for science and education conducts quality assurance of educational programmes for acquiring qualifications at CROQF levels 1, 2, 3, 4.1, 4.2 and 5, depending on the qualification profile. The agency responsible for science and higher education conducts quality assurance of the programme for acquisition of qualifications at CROQF levels 5, 6, 7, 8.1 and 8.2, depending on the qualification profile. Quality assurance of the quality of acquisition of qualifications and validation of units of learning outcomes from the CROQF Register is conducted complementary with existing systems of internal and external quality assurance systems for primary, VET, higher education and adult education, according to the procedures and legal acts that regulate those educational sectors.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

The National Council for Development of Human Potential recommends the use of Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020 of the European Social Fund for development of qualification standards and programmes which are the basis for the recognition of prior learning (Recommendations for strategic development of recognition of prior learning (2018)).

⁵³ ibid

9.2 Distribution of costs

The National Council for Development of Human Potential recommends to the competent institutions not to set too high prices for the recognition of prior learning, in order to make the process available for individuals (quality assurance should however not be jeopardised).

The costs of existing sectoral validation practices (as described in 2.3) are covered by the individual. The costs can be covered in full by a one-off payment or as a loan-payment over several months. Sometimes, if the employer is willing to cover the costs of the validation (partially or in full), the employee might be asked to sign a binding contract which specifies the time an employee is obliged to spend in the company (or craft) as compensation for the 'investment' in validation. If an employee decides to leave the company (or the craft) before the timeframe has ended, he/she has to return a certain portion of the costs to the employer. Since no research has yet been undertaken regarding this matter, it is difficult to refer here to specific numbers, sectors and number of such cases⁵⁴.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Since there is little research and/or evaluation being undertaken to evaluate the benefits to individuals in terms of validation in the sectoral approaches as described above, it is difficult to refer to any quantitative outputs⁵⁵.

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

Since there is little research and/or evaluation being undertaken to evaluate the benefits to individuals in terms of validation in the sectoral approaches as described above, it is difficult to refer to any quantitative outputs⁵⁶.

9.4.2 Validation users

Since there is little research and/or evaluation being undertaken to evaluate the benefits to individuals in terms of validation in the sectoral approaches as described above, it is difficult to refer to any quantitative outputs⁵⁷.

9.4.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

The validation is not really used to address the needs of migrants/ refugees, and other disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment. The reason for that is that the overall system of validation of non-formal and informal learning is still under development⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ This section was taken from the 2016 Country Report on the Update of the European Inventory on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

⁵⁵ ibid

⁵⁶ ibid

⁵⁷ ibid

⁵⁸ ibid

10 Validation methods

Since the recognition and validation system is under development at national level, the situation remains as it was in 2016. This section therefore mainly refers to the exams organised by the Croatian Chamber of Trade and Crafts for the purpose of running associated craft businesses for which adequate qualifications are required (described in detail in section 2.2). The competences are tested by written and practical examinations in accordance with the programme prescribed by the ministry responsible for crafts.

This section also refers to the existing validation approaches developed by the private sector. For those sectoral practices described in section 2.3, the examinations used to conduct the assessments are either written or oral.

The validation of previous work experience for acknowledging adult's competences in practical knowledge and skills, as defined by the Ordinance on Standards and Specifications in Adult Education Institutions, (section 2.2 of this report), is certified by a confirmation document issued by the employer. In this document, the employer describes what knowledge, skills and competences the employee possesses and has further developed⁵⁹.

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

11 The position of validation in society: visibility and trust

The Education, Science and Technology Strategy (2014) points out that: 'it is necessary to take into account the need to change the cultural view of non-formal and informal learning and to take into account the learning and promote the wide acceptance of non-traditional ways of learning'.

Some good practices of ongoing activities at national level that contribute to the visibility and trust amongst the wider public are presented in Box 2.5.

Box 11.1 Visibility and trust development

- Three national conferences, since 2015, on developments related to Croatian Qualification Framework organised by the National Council on Human Resources Development which also discussed issues related to validation and attracted numerous stakeholders from education and also from employers.
- Round tables:
 - Ministry of Science and Education, April 2016, "Skills of the future for the development of the Croatian economy"
 - Ministry of Science and Education, April 2017, "Round table on the draft act on changes in the Act on CROQF"
 - Croatian Academic Network in cooperation with the European Commission Representation in Croatia, February 2018, "Validation of non-formal education as a catalyst for lifelong learning and adult education".

⁵⁹ ibid

The Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia 2017-2020⁶⁰ (AVETAE, 2017) prepared by the Agency for VET and Adult Education strongly focuses on the promotion of the validation of prior knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal ways of learning, in particular for adult learners. The validation of non-formal and informal learning is described as an important motivational factor for active inclusion of individuals in lifelong learning. In that sense the Strategic Framework formulates Priority 4 as “Increasing the consciousness about the importance of non-formal and informal ways of learning, acknowledgment and validation of knowledge and skills acquired in those ways.” The Framework defines actions and in particular those activities aimed at communicating with different target groups that should lead to the achievement of Priority 4 and its four strategic goals. However, it remains unclear how the achievement of the activities will be monitored and evaluated.

⁶⁰ Agency for VET and Adult Education (2017) Strategic Framework for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning in the Republic of Croatia, https://ec.europa.eu/epale/sites/epale/files/strateski_okvir_hr_priprema_za_tisak.pdf

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