



***ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL  
CAPACITIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE VNFIL PROCEDURES  
AND INSTRUMENTS IN MACEDONIA***



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## Abbreviations

AE	Adult Education
AEC	Centre for Adult Education
AECDIC	State Examination Centre
ECM	Economic Chamber of Macedonia
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESA	Employment Service Agency of Macedonia
ETF	The European Training Foundation i
EU	European Union
LLC	Lifelong Learning Centre
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science of Macedonia
MQF	Macedonian Qualifications Framework
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning



## Executive Summary

The development of this paper is a result of the cooperation between Macedonian Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) and the Adult Education Centre (AEC), within the framework of the long term support that the LLC has been delivering to the AEC.

The Republic of Macedonia as an EU candidate country has been making a continuous and significant progress towards aligning its education with the European education policies and standards. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) steers and actively participates in a number of related legislative, strategic and operative initiatives, which include a clear commitment also to validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL).

The purpose of this analysis is to answer the question which stakeholders in Macedonia (state institutions, education providers, companies, NGOs, etc.) can become carriers of the VNFIL process in general, and in particular, which stakeholders can be included in which phase of VNFIL: 1. Identification, 2. Documentation, 3. Assessment and/or 4. Certification.

To answer this question, an online survey with representatives of main stakeholders was conducted and the results verified and extended through targeted interviews and focus groups.

In short, it can be concluded that the stakeholders in the Republic of Macedonia already have a solid understanding of VNFIL, especially when it is considered that this process is at its very start.

The main stakeholders included in this analysis have interest and to some extent capacities to be included in one or more VNFIL phases. A key issue which should be addressed by legal and policy documents is and will remain the issue of financing of the involvement of stakeholders in VNFIL. Furthermore, depending on the specifics of every single VNFIL initiative, the exact capacities of stakeholders need to be examined and possibly upgraded.

As regards the interest and capacities of different groups of stakeholders to participate in VNFIL phases, it can be concluded that:

- Phase 1 (identification) and to a certain extent also Phase 2 (documentation) can be covered mainly by state institutions and NGOs/projects that support employment of citizens already in their regular scope of activities (such as the Employment Agency, municipalities, NGOs/projects). Critical challenges for these phases are knowledge and capacities of stakeholders.
- For phases 3 (assessment) and 4 (certification) there is a very clear interest of education providers, but also companies to participate. Specific capacity development for different VNFIL fields might be needed, whereas equipment is to a large extent available.
- Three VNFIL models are feasible for Macedonia: 1) a "roof solution" where all four phases are covered by one institution, 2) a "2 step solution" where Phase 1 (identification) is covered by one and three other phases by another institution or 3) "3 step solution" where first two phases would be covered by one and the latter two by another institution. All phases have their advantages and disadvantages.
- Adequate strategy and financial resources are needed: For a successful VNFIL, state steering (such as giving a mandate to state institutions and streamlining projects to address relevant issues) and investment (through state budget and projects) will be necessary to support the first two phases of VNFIL, with focus on phase 2.
- In the upcoming years, VNFIL should be focused around targeted and most needed skill sectors and around national and international projects, following relevant examples from other countries. The focus of VNFIL should be on validation of qualification levels 2 and 3.



## 1. Introduction

The Republic of Macedonia as an EU candidate country has been making a continuous and significant progress towards aligning its education with the European education policies and standards. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) steers and actively participates in a number of related legislative, strategic and operative initiatives, such as the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its referencing to the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

This process includes country's efforts to integrate into the European Lifelong Learning (LLL) area, with a vision to empower its citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries in pursuit of learning. Thereby, LLL covers all forms of learning from pre-school education until after retirement and encompasses formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Thereby, formal, informal and non-formal learning are understood as follows<sup>1</sup>:

**Formal learning:** Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

**Non-formal learning:** Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contains an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.

**Informal learning:** Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective.

Whereas formal education is traditionally regulated and commonly recognised by the employers, education providers and the society in general, validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is still a relatively new development. Importantly, it has so far been recognised as an important aspect of the MQF.

So far, Macedonia<sup>2</sup> has adopted a Roadmap for implementing a System for VNFIL on the Republic of Macedonia, in 2016, following the adoption of a Concept Paper for Non-formal Adult Education and Informal Learning in 2015. A Guidance Note on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) processes and Specifications for the Methodology package were developed in 2017, which are also considering the different EU institutional frameworks, VNFIL procedures and instruments.

Further on, a training session for potential VNFIL assessors was carried out by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in December 2017, based on a defined handbook for assessment. The Adult Education Centre is involved in all validation related developments in the country. In 2018, a Coordination Body and a Working Group have been established for further implementation of

<sup>1</sup> CEDEFOP definitions, see <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/EV\\_2018\\_Designing\\_a\\_legal\\_framework\\_for\\_Validation\\_of\\_non-formal\\_and\\_informal\\_learning\\_in\\_Macedonia?openDocument](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/EV_2018_Designing_a_legal_framework_for_Validation_of_non-formal_and_informal_learning_in_Macedonia?openDocument)

validation arrangements. However, the legal provisions for VNFIL are not in place yet. In 2018, ETF organised a joint Kosovo-Albania-Macedonia workshop based on a peer learning format, aiming to improve capacities of country teams in VNFIL design and implementation. Macedonia has concluded about the right legal provisions needed on validation, and the need for formulating first the amendments to the Adult Education Law of 2008, which is currently in process, following Slovenian examples.

### 1.1. Purpose and scope of the analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to answer the question which stakeholders in Macedonia (education providers, companies, NGOs, etc.) can become carriers of the VNFIL process in general, and in particular, which stakeholders can be included in which phase of VNFIL: 1. Identification, 2. Documentation, 3. Assessment and/or 4. Certification.

To answer this question, an online survey with representatives of main stakeholders was conducted and the results verified and extended through targeted interviews and focus groups.

**The focus of the analysis was to identify interest and institutional capacities of stakeholders for their involvement into one or more phases of the VNFIL process.** For this purpose, particular focus was put on analysing if the stakeholders see themselves in the VNFIL process, and if yes, in which of its four phases. Furthermore, stakeholders were asked to determine in more detail if they have human and other capacities to participate in this process and to determine skill and other gaps that could be an obstacle for their participation in VNFIL.

The analysis includes answers of around 50 stakeholders that participated in the survey (out of 265 contacted), including state agencies, education providers, companies and sector organisations, local government units and NGOs.

### 1.2. Methodology

The analysis was conducted using a combination of methods:

1. **Preliminary agreements** with the AEC and the LLC on the target group and outcome of the analysis.
2. A **desk research** of the existing VNFIL documents relevant for VNFIL in Macedonia (in particular the ETF Roadmap for Implementing a System for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2017), the AEC web site and the Register of training providers, the comparative Analysis “VNFIL Solutions in EU and Recommendations for Macedonia” from February 2017, as well as the major guiding documents: the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012), the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (2015), the and the documents related to MQF.
3. **An online survey** conducted in the period from 23 November 2017 to 7 December 2017. An extensive questionnaire containing 19 questions was developed and sent to institutions which were identified as main stakeholders and potential participants in this process. A list of 265 institutions was compiled including:

- a. Agencies (national and regional employment agencies, State Examination Centre, national sector and regional departments for inspection and evaluation of the quality of primary and secondary schools, Centre for VET, National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobilities),
- b. Associations of employers (Business Confederation Macedonia, Organisation of Employers of Macedonia, Association of Business Women, chambers of crafts, economic chambers and chambers of commerce, clusters),
- c. 23 companies,
- d. 81 municipalities,
- e. 10 non-governmental organisations,
- f. 73 VET schools,
- g. 10 worker's universities,
- h. and other education providers certified by the Centre for Adult Education.

Besides the general questions inquiring about the type of organisation, number of employees and sector, the following information was required in order to analyse their potential role in the VNFIL process:

- Which stakeholders, relevant for VNFIL process they cooperate with, such as education providers, companies, agencies, centres, ministries
- In which phase of the VNFIL process do they see their organisation
- Number of employees they have with expertise in different areas relevant for VNFIL process and its implementation (VNFIL process in general; validation procedure, requirements, costs and duration; learning outcomes; occupational standards; assessment procedures, methods and tools, quality assurance methods and instruments; training providers in Macedonia; counselling; career counselling; identification of skills and competences; linking experiences to occupational standards and qualification; collection and revision of documents; development of a portfolio of skills; assessment of qualifications against certain criteria; internal quality assurance; certification of qualifications)
- If their institution has the infrastructure, capacities and in-house experts which could be made available for the process of assessment of qualifications
- If their employees are certified trainers
- If they provide services for job-seekers
- To state if their employees need training in the following areas: non-formal and informal education; validation procedure; professional counselling; learning outcomes; occupational standards; assessment procedures; methods and tools; quality assurance.

All organisations were contacted per e-mail and asked to fill out an online questionnaire. In total 49 replies were recorded in the data base; two had to be excluded since two organisations have filled the questionnaire two times. Therefore, 47 replies were included in the analysis, a quite satisfactory response rate of 18%.

The replies were analysed using simple statistic methods in order to gain a general overview of the respondent characteristics. Some questions were combined to gain insight in the willingness and capacities of the organisations to get involved in the VNFIL process. At the end, a gap analysis was

conducted, foremost to identify the areas in which the employees of the responding stakeholders need trainings as a precondition to participate in VNFIL.

Obtained data were analysed and compiled in a draft report, jointly with an outline of suggested further steps to obtain further necessary data, which were agreed upon with the LLC.

Since the VNFIL system is not established yet in Macedonia and there is the possibility that different stakeholders perceive in quite different way what VNFIL is, what it comprehends and what the participation in the VNFIL process requires, it was decided to complement this analysis with interviews and focus groups.

#### **4. Three focus groups and two interviews**

This next step in the research was to use focus groups and interviews to double check and fine-tune the findings of the previous research phase. In particular, the following was discussed:

- How the institutions see the VINFIL process and the role in it – in which VNFIL phase?
- How does the VNFIL fit in their sector and line of work?
- What is their expected benefit from participating in this process?
- What are the impediments and challenges for that participation?
- What are their capacities with regards to their role and participation?
- What are the gaps (e.g. in skills, equipment) which need to be filled and how should this be done?
- What are the challenges of the VNFIL system in Macedonia from the single organisation's point of view?
- What kind of support is needed in order to make the VNFIL system in Macedonia work?
- What can be defined as a joint conclusion in terms of identification of roles, capacities, gaps and required support?

The participating organisations in the focus groups and interviews were selected based on the following criteria:

- Diversity in terms of type or organisation and sector of operation
- Geographical coverage
- Level of participation in the VNFIL system (i.e. how many phases can be covered)

Internal capacities (i.e. how many employees do they have who are trained in / familiar with related issues).

#### **Focus groups**

As agreed, three focus groups representing the major types of organisations to be involved in VNFIL were organised in the second half of December 2017: local government bodies, education providers, business associations/companies/NGOs.

All institutions which are proposed to participate in the focus groups were selected based on the following criteria:

- Willingness to cooperate (i.e. response, provision of contact information)
- Willingness to participate in the VNFIL process (at least one of the phases)
- Sector of operation
- Geographical coverage
- Cooperation with relevant institutions
- Capacities to participate in the VNFIL process

All three focus groups had a workshop character: Firstly, the participants were introduced in the topic and given the presentation of the basic research findings. As the next step, the participants gave a short introduction of their organisation, the reason of their participation, their perspective of the VNFIL in Macedonia and the role of their organisation as they see it. Lastly, the focus group discussed the questions outlined above.

Below, an overview of participants per focus group is given:

#### **Focus group 1: Local government bodies**

- Jagunovce
- Pehcevo
- Stip
- Negotino
- Gjorce Petrov
- Tetovo

#### **Focus group 2: Education providers**

- VET School SUGS Dimitar Vlahov Skopje
- VET School OSU Jovce Teslickov, Veles
- Open Civil University 'University Otvoren gradjanski univerzitet za dozivotno učenje Tetovo
- Workers' University Rabotnicki univerzitet "Joska Svestarot", Strumica

#### **Focus group 3: Business associations, companies, NGOs**

- Chamber of Crafts Skopje
- National Centre for Innovation Development and Entrepreneurship, Skopje
- Company Oreov lad
- Youth Cultural Centre, Bitola

## Interviews

Two interviews were conducted involving two central state actors in VNFIL - the Centre for Adult Education and the National employment agency:

- Interview 1: AEC, Maja Korubin (Head of the unit for training the trainers, personal development and professional orientation at Adult Education Centre)
- Interview 2: Employment Agency (Tatjana Sestovic, Active labour market policies and Biljana Delovska, Head department for analytic and research)

## 5. Analysis of institutional capacities and conclusions

At the end, all gathered data were analysed again with reference to the purpose of this Analysis and documented in this paper. Based on the key findings, the authors of this paper have drawn some key recommendations on the stakeholders interest and capacities for VNFIL in Macedonia for their participation in single or more VNFIL phases and how a realistic and pragmatic solution for the first phase of the implementation of the VNFIL system could look like, based on the existing resources.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1. How to read this section

At the beginning of this section, the Chapter “**Key research findings**” presents the main findings of the whole process are summarized. They are followed by detailed results of all research methods. Based on these findings, the authors of this paper have drawn key recommendations as an answer to research questions. The recommendations are documented below in the **Chapter 4 “Recommendations”**.

Chapter “**Results of online survey**” presents detailed findings of the online survey are presented for the main participating stakeholder groups. To obtain more detailed information on responses of 47 individual stakeholders who has submitted the answers, the reader is invited to use the database provided in Annex 1 (Database). The Database documents all single responses per question and can be a valuable source of information when recruiting stakeholders to participate in the future VNFIL processes. In addition, the Database contains contact data of respondents.

After the results are presented, open issues are summarized which needed further in-depth research, which were a subject of further research through interviews and focus groups.

The Chapter “**Results of Focus Groups and Interviews**” presents the key findings of this research phase, which mainly confirmed the results of the online survey and provided further level of detail.

### 2.2. Key research findings

This Chapter summarizes the key findings of all research phases that were derived from the online survey and could be confirmed through further research methods.

It must be noted here that most of the stakeholders involved in this analysis have shown a solid understanding of the VNFIL process and the roles of different stakeholders in it, which shows that the awareness among the target group exists.

The AEC Optimal **usage of local capacities and potentials** will be crucial for creating sustainable VNFIL solutions in Macedonia.

1. In general, the VNFIL “basics” – the process itself is clear and easily acceptable for all stakeholders interested to be included in one or more of the VNFIL phases, especially to those who have a long experience in the process of offering qualification, further qualification or re-qualification of candidates (such as Chamber of Craft, VET schools, workers' universities etc.).
2. It is clear that the stakeholders see a very direct relation between the system of financing of VNFIL and the number and mode of the stakeholders willing to be involved in the process. Provision of a feasible financing model should be reflected in the respective legal and strategic documents, and included in the design of the international projects (following the project-based financing solution from Island, and partly from Slovenia).
3. All stakeholders agree that the VNFIL focus should be on the qualification levels 2 and 3. None of the involved stakeholders expressed trust in the verification of the level 4.

4. The most interested stakeholder group for participation in VNFIL are education providers, because VNFIL represents a new field of work for them which is fully compatible with their current profile (esp. education providers).
5. The most attractive VNFIL phases for the stakeholders are phases 3 (assessment) and 4 certification, because they are directly connected to the possibility to generate income for services provided.
6. The least attractive VNFIL phases for stakeholders are phases 1 (identification) and in particular 2 (documentation) that do not necessarily lead to continuation towards to assessment and certification, and thus have a questionable income possibility for the stakeholders involved. State bodies (municipalities, employment service) already providing employment support services for the citizens are the most interested and have the most capacities to cover phase 1.
7. Primary capacities, both in terms of human resources and infrastructure, exist especially with experienced providers. With an additional training and clear and feasible definition of conditions and prices of services, the VNFIL system can easily become functional.
8. Equipment necessary for assessment is not seen as a challenge by the providers and the companies. Especially the interested education providers either have the necessary equipment for their field of work or a contract with a company that possesses it.
9. The prior conclusions hold only for clearly defined skill sectors and clearly defined projects (and not VNFIL in general), at least at the beginning of the VNFIL process - and not for an undefined VNFIL process covering all possible inquiries and needs.
10. All stakeholders see the AEC as an institution with a leading role in the VNFIL process.
11. All stakeholders understand the roles of the MoES as an institution responsible for the VNFIL legal framework, licensing of providers and overall quality assurance.
12. The role of the State Education Inspectorate is seen in the field of an operative quality assurance through inspection of the work of all stakeholders involved in the process, especially when it comes to offering and assessing trainings. However, a vast majority of stakeholders have a vague understanding of the role of the State Examination Centre.
13. It is unclear to the stakeholders who will train and licence the advisers/councillors.

## 2.3. Results of online survey

### 2.3.1. General data: sample and participation

All types of stakeholders which were contacted responded, however, with different level of participation.

The questionnaire was sent to a total of 265 stakeholders. Overall, 45% (21) of respondents were education providers, 34% (16) were local government bodies, 7% (3) companies, 6% (3) NGOs, 4% (2) business associations and 4% (2) central government bodies.

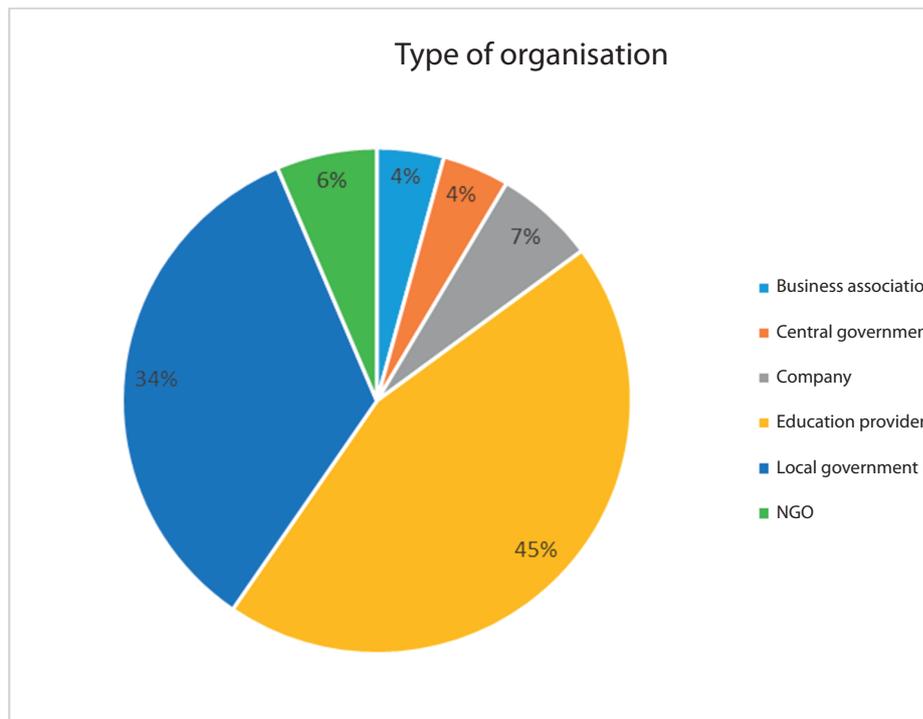
**Central government bodies** are the least represented in the group which part of this analysis (4%). However, considering that only 5 central government bodies were contacted, their response rate was medium with 2 respondents out of 5 contacted. Even so, considering the relevance of all contacted central government bodies, it would have been important to have a bigger response rate than 40%. Therefore, their potential limited interest in and capacity for participating in the VNFIL process cannot be excluded.

Importantly, one of the respondents was the **Employment agency**, however, its local branches have not responded to the questionnaire.

At the same time, the involvement of governmental institutions will mainly depend on the legal VNFIL framework – their real involvement will depend on their mandate and provision of respective resources.

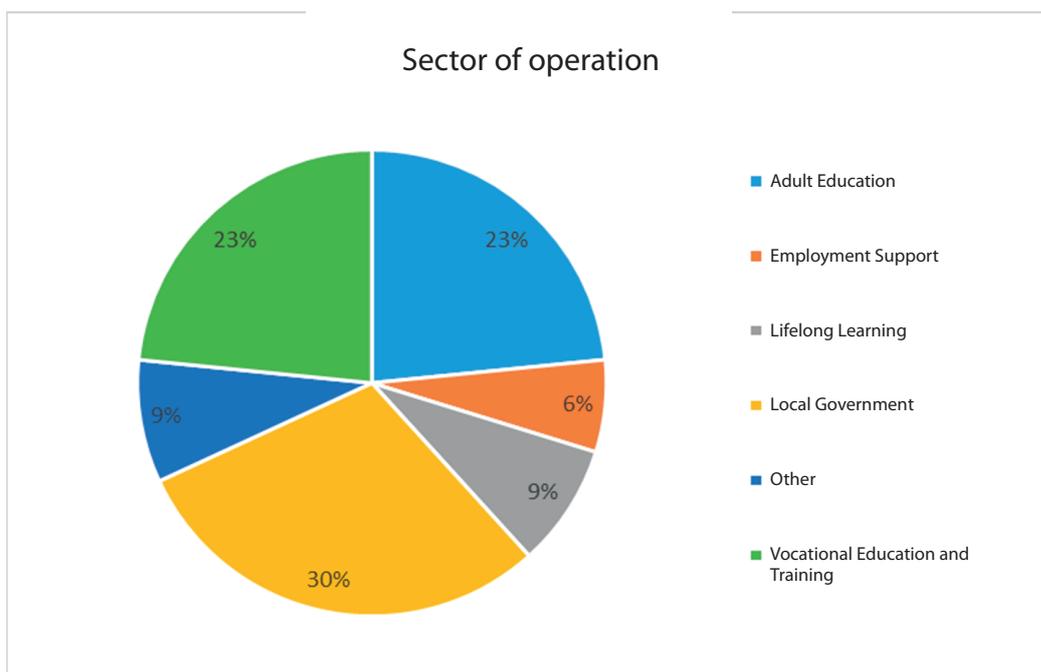
Low participation is evident among the **business associations, NGOs and companies**, which are represented in this sample in small percentages even though many more are included in the process of adult education and which could also be included in some of the stages of the VNFIL process. In this sample there are 8 representatives of those stakeholders, thus 14% of the 57 which were contacted.

Almost half of all the respondents (21 respondents or 45%) and thus the majority are **education providers** and thus they carry the most weight in the type of the overall results of this survey. One third (16 respondents, 34%) were **local government bodies**. Since they were both suggested as important actors in the VNFIL process, it is good to have their opinion represented in this survey. Considering that 119 **local government bodies were** contacted, their response rate of 13% was rather low. Therefore, additional engagement needs to be made in order to get them more interested in the VNFIL process.



Out of 47 respondents only three did not provide their contact details (please see attached data base) leading to a probable conclusion that almost all who participated in the survey are also willing to be contacted in order to provide additional input regarding their participation in the development and implementation of the VNFIL system in Macedonia.

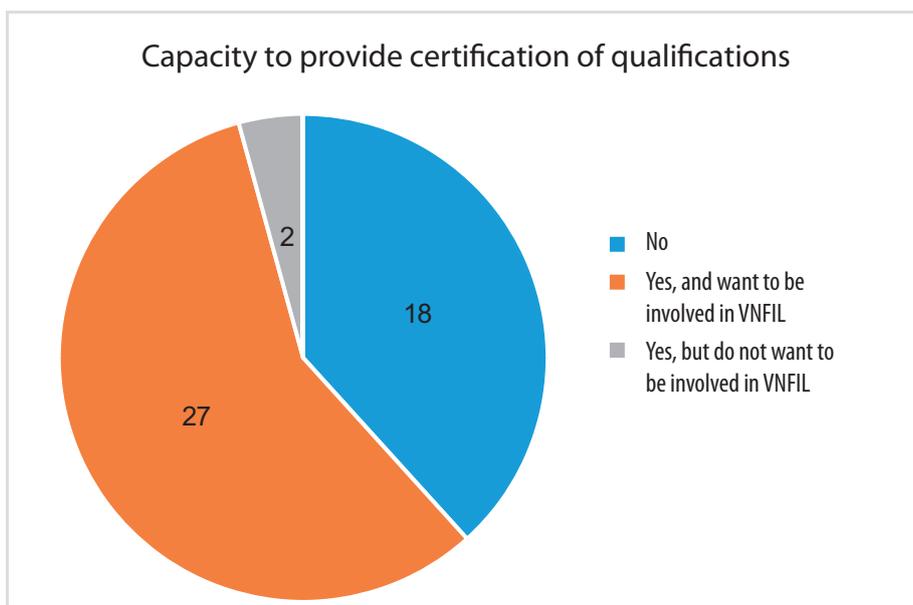
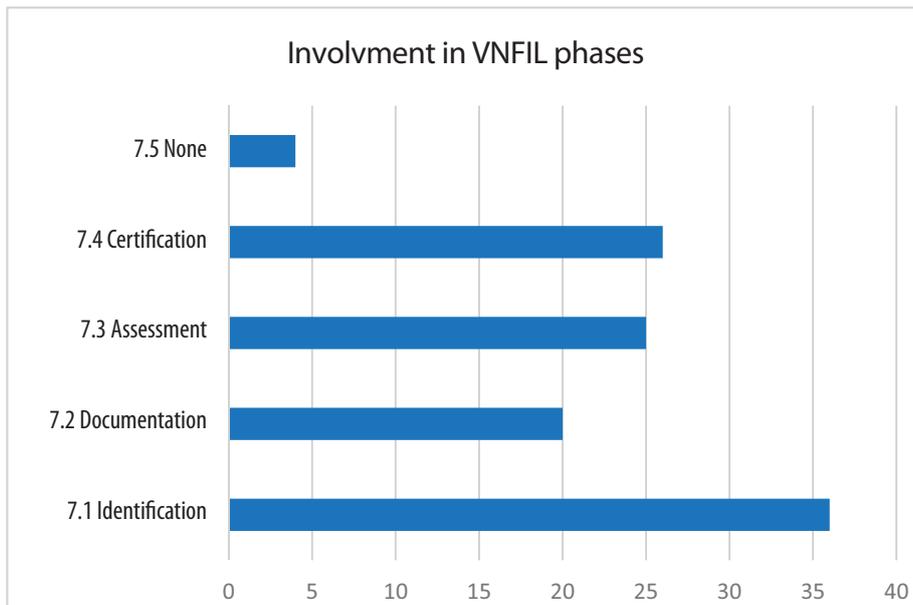
The respondents were asked to select one of the offered sectors as their main sector of operation. The division of the participating organisations based on that criterion is demonstrated in the next chart. Most organisations work in the area of local government (14 or 30%), adult education (11 stakeholders or 23%) and VET (11 stakeholders or 23%). Three (or 6%) are offering employment support, four (or 9%) are involved in lifelong learning and four (or 9%) are in different sectors (9%). This distribution is expected considering the type of the organisations from the sample.



### 2.3.2. Interest and capacities for participation in VNFIL

Out of 47 respondents, the majority of 43 stated that they do see their role in one or more of the four stages of the VNFIL process. Therefore, almost all respondents consider that they have capacities to be involved in one of the stages of this process with 13 stakeholders stating that they see their involvement in all four stages of the VNFIL process. The majority (10) of these 13 organisations are education providers, however, there is also one NGO, one company and one business association among them.

The majority of respondents see their role in the process of identification (36), followed by the process of certification (26), assessment (25) and finally documentation (20).



In the table below, it is specifically stated how many stakeholders have expressed interest to participate in different phases of VNFIL, based on the type of the organisation.

Type of organization	Identification	Documentation	Assessment	Certification
Business association	2	1	2	2
Central government body	2	1	0	1
Company	2	1	2	2
Education provider	15	12	19	19
Local government body	12	3	0	1
NGO	3	2	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>

Table 1: Organizations interested to be included in different VNFIL phases by type of organisation

Both business associations from the sample stated that their interest in being involved in all phases (identification, assessment and certification), but one – documentation. Therefore, the Chamber of Crafts of Skopje sees their role in all phases of VNFIL.

Also, both central government bodies see their role in the identification phase, however, only one (State Examination Centre) sees its role in the documentation and certification phase. None of them sees their role in the assessment phase.

All three companies see their roles in one of the phases of the VNFIL process, i.e. in each of the phases identification, certification and assessment two companies expressed their interest in participating in, whereas one company is interested in participating in the documentation phase.

Out of 21 education providers, almost all of them (19) are interested in the assessment and certification phases, but the majority are interested in other two phases as well (15 in identification and 12 in documentation).

Most of the local government bodies (12 out of 16) stated that they can participate foremost in the identification phase, three in the documentation phase, one in the certification process and none in assessment. As already stated, it was one of the targets of the workshop, focus groups and interviews to examine if their interest in participating in VNFIL is matched by their capacities and if so, to what extent.

In order to gain a better insight in the capacities of the surveyed stakeholders to be involved in different phases of VNFIL, they were asked about the number of their employees who have knowledge and experience in different phases relevant for VNFIL process and its implementation. The results are presented in tables 2 and 3.

The most employees are knowledgeable about the assessment procedures, methods and tools (347 in total), with 24 companies stating to have employees with knowledge in those areas. As many as 273 employees have knowledge in the methods and instruments in quality assurance and 204 knows who the training providers in Macedonia are. Almost 200 employees have knowledge in learning outcomes (185) and occupational standards (179) with 27 and 26 stakeholders, respectively, having employees who are familiar with those issues. Somewhat less employees of the respondents have knowledge in VNFIL process (141), in validation procedure (132) and in validation requirements (102), followed by 97 in the area of validation costs and duration. The fewest stakeholders (17) stated to have employees in this later area.

	<b>Number of stakeholders</b>	<b>Number of employees, all stakeholders</b>
VNFIL process	25	141
Validation procedure	22	132
Validation requirements	20	102
Validation costs and duration	17	97
Learning outcomes	27	185
Occupational standards	26	179
Assessment procedures	24	347
Assessment methods & tools	24	347
Quality assurance methods & instruments	26	273
Training providers in Macedonia	28	204

*Table 2: Number of stakeholders having employees with knowledge and skills in different areas relevant for VNFIL and number of those employees*

In order to estimate the capacities of the surveyed stakeholders to implement the process of VNFIL, they were inquired about the number of their employees having knowledge and skills in certain areas, which would be also relevant for VNFIL. The most employees (330) are stated to have knowledge in the area of assessment of qualifications, followed by counselling (271), linking experiences to occupational standards and qualification (231) and identification of individual's skills and competences (222). Around the same number employees are stated to have experience in the areas of internal quality assurance (199) and development of a portfolio of skills (198). The least number of employees are knowledgeable and skilled in the areas of collection and revision of documents (174), career counselling (167) and certification of qualifications (146). As it can be seen from these numbers, the more specifically we go in the direction of VNFIL there are less employees who have knowledge in those areas.

	Number of stakeholders	Number of employees, all stakeholders
Counselling	32	271
Career counselling	31	167
Identification of individual's skills and competences	32	222
Linking experiences to occupational standards and qualification	30	231
Collection and revision of documents	35	174
Development of a portfolio of skills	28	198
Assessment of qualifications against certain criteria	28	330
Internal quality assurance	25	199
Certification of qualifications	25	146

*Table 3: Number of stakeholders having employees with knowledge and skills in different areas relevant for implementation of VNFIL and number of those employees*

Around 40% of the surveyed stakeholders (19 out of 47) have employees who are certified trainers with one company having 60 internal trainers and the others between one and six (chart below).

Around half of the respondents stated that they have capacities in the area of infrastructure needed for the assessment of qualifications, capacities for certification of qualifications in their field of work, as well as internal experts for the assessment of qualifications. Furthermore, almost all (27) of the respondents who possess the capacity to provide certification of qualifications (29) have stated that they **want to be involved** in the VNFIL process, which is more than half of all the respondents, i.e. 18 stated that they do not have the required capacities (chart below).

Likewise, when it comes to the infrastructure required for providing practical tests for assessment of qualification around half of the respondents (25 out of 47) stated to possess the required infrastructure in their field of work and all but one (24) are willing to use it within the VNFIL process.

The majority (31 out of 47) stated that they have in-house experts who could participate in the assessment of qualifications in specific area(s), with 28 of them wanting to be involved in the certification process.

Almost 70% (32 out of 47) of the respondents stated that they provide service for the job seekers. This means that once these organisations are part of the VNFIL process, they will be able to additionally support this group of people and help them improve their chances in the job market.

Finally, it was enquired how many of the stakeholders require training in the areas which are core to

the VNFIL process and it is clear that the majority of the surveyed stakeholders need trainings in all stated areas. Only few (below 25%) stated that they possess sufficient knowledge. It was recommended that additional information was gathered during the workshops and interviews in order to identify the specific competence gaps and to provide recommendations on how to develop capacities in order to assure proper implementation of the VNFIL process in Macedonia.

Need for training in...	Yes	No, we have sufficient knowledge in this area	No, it is not relevant for us
Non-formal and informal education	39	6	2
Validation procedure	33	4	10
Professional counselling	37	6	4
Learning outcomes	31	9	7
Occupational standards	36	4	7
Assessment procedures	31	9	7
Assessment methods and tools	33	9	5
Quality assurance	38	6	3

Table 4: Training needs in different areas relevant for the VNFIL process

### 2.3.3. Results of focus groups and interviews

Results of the focus groups largely confirmed previous research findings.

The results of the interviews and the online survey significantly differ when it comes to attractiveness of different VNFIL phases for the stakeholders. Even though the survey results could lead to the conclusion that the phases 1 and 2 are the most attractive ones for the stakeholders, a deeper analysis of focus groups and interviews has shown a different result: Because these two phases are not seen by the stakeholders as the ones leading to a possible income generation through phases 3 and 4, they are not so attractive for the stakeholders as the latter two.

#### Focus groups

In general, the attending municipalities have confirmed the results of the municipalities obtained from the survey. They expressed their interest to participate in the VNFIL process. The background of their interest is to support the employment and employability of the citizens belonging to their municipality.

All municipalities stated that they could be involved in the phase 1 (identification), because a part of their staff is already involved in a kind of informing or consulting process for the citizens. The precondition for an active involvement in the VNFIL provided that their employees are trained for this task. Individual differences between the municipalities were not identified.

The focus group results confirmed the results also for the target group for **education providers**. However all participants came from the capital of Skopje, so that the sample is not representative to confirm results for other geographical areas.

The education providers are the stakeholder group in Macedonia which will be the most involved and active in the operative side of the VNFIL. Especially those providers that have previous experience

with qualification, further qualification and re-qualification of the work force see themselves as capable and interested to be involved in the VNFIL. The workers' universities can be the main carriers of a large part of the future VNFIL process. They are institutions with a long standing tradition, defined processes and cooperation agreements possessing the necessary equipment.

Equally, **VET schools** with similar experiences have demonstrated capacities, knowledge and the wish to become an active part of the VNFIL process. A precondition for this would however be to enable an adequate payment to the teaching staff to get involved in the documentation and assessment. This is currently not possible due to the legal regulation limiting the top-ups to their salaries with a maximum of 10% of the total salary. The teachers are enabled and experienced to become a part of these phases, and some of them have a long-standing experience in defining learning outcomes and occupational standards as a basis for the validation process.

The last focus group (**Business associations, companies, NGOs**) also confirmed the results of the online survey. The group is interested and has capacities to be involved in VNFIL.

Especially the **Chamber of Crafts** possesses the competences, capacity and the equipment needed for the validation process of the 12 existing verified occupations of masters of crafts and craftsmen – the areas in which the Chamber already offers training and certification.

The company **Oreov Lad** can be considered as a representative of other similar companies offering qualification programmes in a specific occupational area (cook, waiter) and be an example of the public private partnership in the validation process for specific occupations.

Phase 2 (documentation) is seen as the biggest challenge and requires specific staff training. Companies such as Oreov lad are not confronted with the lacking equipment for VNFIL, and their staff includes potential VNFIL assessors, experienced in assessment of candidates who would only need a very limited training on VNFIL specifics. Once the occupations which are the target of the VNFIL process are clear, interested companies can be identified and the details of their capacities analysed.

The **National Centre for Development of Innovations and Entrepreneurial Learning** is interested and has understanding of the VNFIL process. However, its expertise is only relevant for the qualification levels 4 and higher which is not a subject of the upcoming VNFIL activities in Macedonia.

Provided that their staff is trained, they are ready to participate in the awareness rising process among their target group. If financing is provided i.e. through projects, the involvement of the Agency can be intensified with the aim of fostering employment of its target group.

## Results of Interviews

As, two interviews were conducted involving two central state actors in VNFIL: the Adult Education Centre and the National employment agency. The stakeholders agreed in one key conclusion: VNFIL in Macedonia is needed and it can be realised, at least in its first phase, through targeted projects tailor made for specific priority skill sectors.

The following are the main findings of the interviews:

### Interview 1 – Centre for Adult Education

The Centre clearly sees itself as the owner and the central of the VNFIL process, responsible for related central registers. The Centre does not have the capacity to participate in the assessment/certification process.

**Interview 2 – National Employment Agency**

The Employment Agency does not have experience or capacities in training provision and validation. The Agency is however interested to participate in certain VNFIL areas, especially related to the design of the training programmes, verification and accreditation related to occupational standards and learning outcomes.

Provided that their staff is trained, they are ready to participate in the awareness rising process among their target group. If financing is provided i.e. through projects, the involvement of the Agency can be intensified with the aim of fostering employment of its target group.



### 3. Key recommendations

The main purpose of this Chapter is to respond to the key questions of this Analysis presented in the Introduction. In addition, it contains further recommendations relevant for the operationalization of VNFIL system which have not been initially required but which were contained in the results of the analysis.

Furthermore, it can be noted that as an added value of this analysis, it has significantly contributed to the awareness rising process about the reasons, needs and the very process of the VNFIL among the numerous contacted stakeholders. Furthermore it enabled the stakeholders – especially those involved in the focus groups and interviews – to discuss the process and acquire or share the same knowledge about the VNFIL process, as well as to talk about their attitude towards it.

For some of the participants this was the first time ever to talk or to talk openly about this process, their potential role in it and the role of others. This will surely contribute to those stakeholders becoming and being the future VNFIL “advocates” in Macedonia, due to the high level of the achieved identification with the process.

Much will depend on the on-going development of the respective legal framework, developed financing models and other types of motivation or incentives for the stakeholders which will encourage them to participate in this process.

A summary of key recommendations is given below:

Based on the identified interest and capacities of the stakeholders, it is strongly recommended that at the very beginning of the process, mainly those stakeholders that have experience in provision of training and assessing the candidates through participation in offers for further qualification or re-qualification should be involved in the VNFIL process. Their respective background, knowledge and capacities will allow the validation process to be carried out in the required quality. Potential gaps in their competences can be addressed by short targeted trainings if needed (especially in the documentation phase, see the second recommendation.).

These stakeholders are: workers' universities, schools with experience in adult education (AE) and assessment, Chamber of Crafts of Skopje, Economic Chamber of Macedonia (Stopanska komora na Makedonija).

From the very start, sufficient funding and attention needs to be invested in the most critical of all phases, i.e. phase 2 - documentation. Especially this phase will require that involved stakeholders are equipped with appropriate personal and professional skills to motivate and support the candidates to document their knowledge, skills and experience. This is particularly important due to the fact that main VNFIL target group is to a large extent the vulnerable population with low education level, and thus there is a high risk that many will fail to compile any evidence if not supported appropriately.

Following the good practice of the pilot project Build up Skills ([www.buildupskills.mk](http://www.buildupskills.mk)) also future VNFIL initiatives should be aligned with Macedonian skill sectors and follow national, regional or international projects. This will also contribute to the piloting and testing of the VNFIL model, building trust into the VNFIL system and among the involved stakeholders – especially important among the private sector. At the same time, the project based approach will allow for a sufficient financing of the process in the skill sectors relevant for the employment of the target group.

With this regard, the analysis has shown that based on the capacities and interest of the stakeholders, three models would be feasible for Macedonia, whereas each of them has its advantages and disadvantages, as described below:

### **Model 1 – “1 ROOF SOLUTION”: All four validation steps are offered by one institution**

- The advantage of this model is that the costs of VNFIL arising for the institution are simply covered by the fee of the certificate issued at the end of the process. Furthermore, competences and capacities are bound to one institution, which is easily understandable for all potential candidates. This would also motivate the institutions to invest in and bound capacities for their involvement in the VNFIL.
- This model has several significant disadvantages: : From the financial side, it is likely that not all candidates involved in the phase 1 and/or 2 will go through the process until its very end, i.e. the issue of the certificate. With a certificate based payment system, this would leave institutional costs uncovered in case of “drop out” candidates (for comparison see Models 2 and 3).
- A further disadvantage is connected to the transparency of the process (consulting, documentation as well as assessment and certification in one hand might lead to lack of transparency of the process<sup>3</sup>) and the fact that the candidates would be disabled in their right to choose where they would like to conduct the VNFIL process after the initial counselling.

### **Model 2 – “2 STEP SOLUTION”: Identification (phase 1) is offered by one institution, other three phases by a second institution**

- The advantage of this model is that the initial VNFIL phase – the most unbinding and uncertain phase (if the candidate will proceed towards further phases) could be taken over by the pool of (probably) mostly public institutions within their designated mandates. Thereby, the municipalities and the local offices of the Employment Service, but also NGOs active in a related field, would be responsible for the basic awareness rising among the target group, using existing instruments, providing general information about the validation possibilities to potential candidates, and overall counselling. In this case, after the initial counselling, the candidate could choose the institution that would support him/her with the documentation, and be responsible for the assessment process and the certification. This model would thus provide a better transparency as compared to the model 1 by at the same time simplifying the financial feasibility of the system.

### **Model 3 – “3 STEP SOLUTION”: Phases 1 and 2 are covered by two separate institutions, phases 3 and 4 are covered by a third institution**

- Advantages of this model are: transparency that ensures independence of different phases and also ensuring that costs can be covered for institutions that do not issue certificates.
- A disadvantage of this process might be the complexity of this setting for the candidate and also the complexity of the financing model which would have many institutions involved.

<sup>3</sup>The existence of a defined organizational policies to disclose information to the stakeholders, subject to criteria of the information being accessible, able to be used, well presented, prone to be understood and auditable

## 4. Conclusions

In short, it can be concluded that the Republic of Macedonia has VNFIL capacities to cover all phases of the process. A key issue which should also be addressed by legal and policy documents is and will remain the issue of financing of the involvement of stakeholders in VNFIL.

The state investment and support is thus desirable especially in phases 1 (identification) and 2 (documentation), to enable an efficient start of this process. It is strongly recommended that especially at the beginning of the VNFIL process, and following related international examples, the Macedonian government streamlines international VNFIL projects towards setting up and initiating VNFIL in defined and needed skill sectors.

As regards the interest and capacities of different groups of stakeholders to participate in VNFIL phases, it can be concluded that:

- Phase 1 (identification) and to a certain extent also Phase 2 (documentation) can be covered mainly by state institutions and NGOs/projects that support employment of citizens already in their regular scope of activities (such as Employment Agency, municipalities, NGOs/projects). Even though many are interested, the documentation phase is expected to be the most critical one because of lack of knowledge of interested stakeholders in the field of learning outcomes and occupational standards.
- Phases 3 (assessment) and 4 (certification) will be less challenging as soon as the legal framework and the pricing for the services are in place. Especially education providers, but also companies have interest and capacities to participate. Thereby, the education providers either have the necessary equipment that they use for their regular activities or a contract with a company about the usage of this equipment. The stakeholders have human resources and competences for these two phases, however could need additional training for VNFIL specific purposes.
- Adequate strategy and financial resources are needed: For a successful VNFIL, state steering (such as giving a mandate to state institutions and streamlining projects to address relevant issues) and investment (through state budget and projects) will be necessary to support the first two phases of VNFIL, with focus on phase 2.
- In the upcoming years, VNFIL should be focused around targeted and most needed skill sectors and around national and international projects, following relevant examples from other countries.



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## Links

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary>

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/EV\\_2018\\_Designing\\_a\\_legal\\_framework\\_for\\_Validation\\_of\\_non-formal\\_and\\_informal\\_learning\\_in\\_Macedonia?openDocument](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/EV_2018_Designing_a_legal_framework_for_Validation_of_non-formal_and_informal_learning_in_Macedonia?openDocument)

<http://www.buildupskills.mk/>