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RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF ADULT LEARNING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S VOCATIONAL SECONDARY EDUCATION²

- Abstract -

According to the latest, Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, the Delegates of UNESCO Member States emphasized that recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of all forms of learning represents one of the 5 most important policies and legislative measures in establishing of a Life long Learning society.

The following paper has the purpose to analyse the current state of RVA in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by evaluating a specific field of adult education, the vocational secondary education. The search has been conducted considering the official UNESCO Guidelines on the RVA of the outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Findings indicating that the country is doing some fragmented progress, but still for a long-term success the authorities need to urgently develop a specific overall system for the recognition of different learning modes and venues, opening a clear pathway to qualifications and certification.

Key words: Recognition/validation/accreditation, education-policy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, vocational secondary education, UNESCO.

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Introduction

We are now living in a fast-changing and complex world to which we need to adapt by increasingly rapidly acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Therefore, all kinds of learning and training outcomes deserve to be valued and validated, regardless of where and how they were obtained.

However according to UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) when it comes to giving people access to either education or employment, many societies still focus exclusively on the outcomes of formal learning in educational institutions. As a result, a great deal of learning remains unrecognised, and in that sense many people are denied the opportunities, motivation and confidence to continue learning (UIL, 2015).

This specific concern were expressed in the Belém Framework for Action, adopted by 144 Delegations of UNESCO Member States at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education in Brazil, December 2009.

”To these ends, we commit ourselves to: developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning, by establishing equivalency frameworks such as frameworks for qualifications that encompass informal and non-formal learning.” (UIL, 2010, 2).

To move forward from the Belém Framework, all delegates, among them Bosnia and Herzegovina as an integral part of the UNESCO Member States, called on UNESCO to develop guidelines on all learning outcomes, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning, so that these may be recognised and validated.

On behalf of the UNESCO Education Sector, the UIL, has taken the initiative to develop the UNESCO Guidelines on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning (RVA). UIL’s understanding of RVA refers to the establishment of arrangements to make visible and value all learning outcomes (including knowledge, skills and competences) against clearly defined and quality-assured standards (UIL, 2015).

By definition from the guideline document: ”The RVA of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning is a key lever in making lifelong learning a reality. It renders visible and gives value to the hidden and unrecognised competences that individuals have obtained through various means and in different phases of their lives. Valuing and recognising these learning outcomes may significantly improve individuals’ self-esteem and well-being, motivate them to further learning, and strengthen their labour market opportunities.

RVA may help to integrate broader sections of the population into an open and flexible education and training system and to build inclusive societies” (UIL, 2012, 3).

Important to highlight is that regardless the extensive research for creating this document, the overall aim of the Guidelines are to propose principles and mechanisms that can assist Member States in developing or improving structures and procedures to recognise all forms of learning (UIL, 2015).

According to the UIL Guidelines, the following text analyses the current state of RVA of adult learning in a specific field, namely the vocational secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Background of the vocational secondary education in BiH

With the enacting of the *”Framework law on primary and secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina”* (Službeni glasnik BiH, 2003),³ Vocational Education and Training (VET) on national level was accepted as a key tool for initial and continuing training in response to the labor market demands and trends, and in ensuring conditions for the development and promotion of traditional crafts.

Vocational secondary schools carry the main responsibility for adult and continuing education in BiH. They organize training programs for adults mostly according to programs of formal vocational secondary education, in order to enable adults who did not finish regular school, to increase their employment opportunities⁴ by acquiring qualifications and certificates.

3 The document provides a broader perspective linked to lifelong learning with a special reference to initial and continuing training. In July 2008a more defined document: *”Framework law on secondary vocational education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina”* (Službeni glasnik BiH, 2008) was adopted.

4 In 2009 with the *”Draft Development Strategy of BiH”* (Council of Minister of BiH, 2009), VET is viewed as central strategic goal of employment and lifelong learning that is expected to ensure the competitiveness of the country. The strategy stresses the leading role of the Universities, followed by the employment services and companies in VET. In the most recent document’s this strategy was finally established with the *”Principles and Standards in the field of adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina”* (Službeni glasnik BiH, 2014) and in October same year with the *”Strategic platform for development of adult education in context of lifelong education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-2020”* (Službeni glasnik BiH, 2014). Currently a new VET strategy for the period 2015-2020 is in preparation.

VET reform in BiH has been implemented since 1998, mainly through programs financed by the EU, which has acted as the major donor and driver of innovation and modernization in the sector. The reform process initiated changes in almost all education functions, but its quality remains a challenge, particularly in terms of learning outcomes, the accreditation of training providers and the teaching and learning process.

Participation of adults in vocational secondary education is subject to different conditions at the entity level of BiH.

The smaller entity of Republika Srpska (RS), for example, unlike the Federation of BiH (FBiH), has adopted an entity law for adult education⁵. In that way, adult education has become an equal part of the education system of RS. In continuum such system is allowing a structured way for adults to incorporate in the vocational secondary education. According to this law, adults (above the age of 17) are required to have an additional qualification via additional schooling, more specifically attaining new knowledge in the context of the occupation that they were already practicing. Therefore, contingent upon an adult is seeking employment, the requirement is a prequalification i.e. educational attainment at the same or higher level.

In the case of FBiH, April 2014 it has been adopted the *"Draft law on the principles of adult education in Federation of BiH"* (Službeni glasnik BiH, 2014) by FBiH Government. This draft is based on the EU VET standards that (theoretically) allows Cantonal levels/governments to enact necessary legislation for closer regulation of standards in the adult education sector.

Regarding to Brčko District of BiH the *"Development Strategy of Brčko District for the period of 2008-2017"* (Vlada Brčko Distrikta, 2009) requires in foreseeable future to adopt a law on adult education. In the meantime, there are some activities in the VET of adults, which are modestly and incomplete regulated (especially in regard to RVA) by the *"Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Brčko District BiH."*⁶

Important to highlight, as already from 2011 a draft law on adult education for Brčko District exist, till today it was never given for consideration and adoption to the Brčko District Government. Considering that already 4 years have passed, it is necessary to make a conservative estimate and to refrain from predictions regarding the adult education law in Brčko District (Kojić and Čemerlić, 2015).

5 The *"Law on Adult Education in Republic Srpska"* (Službeni glasnik Republike Srpske, 2009) was finally adopted in June 2009.

6 Službeni glasnik Brčko Distrikta BiH, 2008.

Evident is that for RVA of adult learning to happen it is necessary to have standards (laws) against which adult skills, prior learning and work experience can be assessed and measured.

Main activities in RVA of adult learning in the vocational secondary education in BiH

Activities around adult and continuing education are mainly organised at the entity level rather than at the national level.

In Republika Srpska, which as mentioned has a law on adult education, the VET of adult is legally the responsibility of the particular established Institute for Education of Adults in RS. The Institute designs curriculum for secondary VET for third degree complexity and fourth degree complexity professions/vocations.

The Institute for Adult Education, after consulting ministries, has proposed following public training programs for: medical technicians working with radio therapy, sewing upper shoe parts, beekeepers, fruit business, winemaking, nursing of old and differently handicapped people. Until March 2011, 571 applications were filled for adult continuing education. The Institute approved 88 training providers from the Republic of Srpska for organising the program for adult education (Institute for Education of Adults in RS, 2011). Among other duties, the Institute, provides standardized certifications and in that way it enables RVA of all forms of learning.

In FBiH, viewed from the perspective of Cantons, the situation of the institutional framework for adult education is quite different. Till now only six Cantons have a law on adult education:

- Una-Sana Canton, which adopted a law on adult education⁷ in 2013. In this Canton adult training centres are under the authority of the employment services. In the city of Bihać such adult training centres are offering training in the field of construction using the ILO modular competence based approach. It has a capacity of 160 persons per year. In this regard Bihać is a pioneer city of BiH, because it is the first implementing such accelerated retraining (Council of Ministers BiH, 2009).
- Zenica-Doboj Canton, which adopted a law on adult education⁸ in May 2014. The Tešanj vocational school has formed an advisory council

7 Službeni glasnik Unsko-sanskog kantona, 2013.

8 Službene novine Zeničko-dobojskog kantona, 2014.

to take the first steps in developing collaboration through enterprise-based practice for young students, delivery of services to employed workers and the joint development of adult education striving to meet the needs of local enterprises.

- Bosnian-Podrinje Canton, which adopted a law on adult education⁹ in May 2015. The "ALDI" - citizens association for local development initiatives, based in this Canton, acts as one of the most engaged NGO concerning adult education and citizenship in BiH.
- West Herzegovina Canton, has adopted its law on adult education¹⁰ recently in July 2015. However the process of implementing the law in the Canton field is continuously slow.
- Tuzla Canton has after social unrests in February 2014 (Judah, 2014), and a long time government reshuffle, finally in July 2015 adopted the existing draft law on adult education¹¹.
- Sarajevo Canton has a draft law on adult education from 2012 (Vlada Sarajevskog Kantona, 2012) but has not due high political contravenes in the capital city of BiH, handed over the document to the Cantonal Government for consideration until October 2015, when it became finally approved as a law.¹² The Centre for Civil Initiatives "Centar civilnih inicijativa" (CCI) and Institut for international cooperation of the German Adult Education Association "Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband" (DVV International) are playing a vital role by providing research and expertise support in these issues.

In other Cantons there is either no law on adult education or it is in the process of being set up:

- In the Posavina Canton, till now, there are no positive indicators for drafting a law on adult education. This particular issue is not even envisaged in any program of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports who primary is in charge of drafting this law (Kojić and Čemerlić, 2015). Nevertheless, there are some activities in VET of adults, but they are under short and general regulations of the „*Law on Secondary Education*.”¹³

9 Službene novine Bosansko-podrinjskog kantona Goražde, 2015.

10 Narodne novine Županije Zapadnohercegovačke, 2015.

11 Službene novine Tuzlansko kantona, 2015.

12 Službene novine Kantona Sarajevo, 2015.

13 Narodne novine Županije Posavske, 2004.

- In Canton 10 (also known as West Bosnia Canton or Livno Canton) the situation is similar. Their Government has regarding VET and adult education adopted additionally an Ordinance on Secondary Adult Education.¹⁴ Still this sector is under the general regulation of the framework law on secondary education in Canton 10. At the time of writing there aren't any official steps in preparing of an adult education law or even an adjustment of the existing law on secondary education to the *"Framework law on secondary vocational education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina"*.
- Herzegovina-Neretva Canton still does not have a law on adult education, and in that sense it has not fully regulated the VET of adults. Till now the sector is under the regulation of the *"Law on Secondary Education"*¹⁵ (which is not adapted to the *"Framework law on secondary vocational education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina"*) and like in Canton 10 it is accompanied with an Ordinance on Secondary Adult Education. In the specific city of Mostar (administrative centre of this Canton), there are Regulations for basic adult education, and there has been some progress in bringing together the curriculum of the Croatian and the Bosniaks schools.
- Central Bosnia Canton also does not have its law on adult education. The overall VET is regulated in framework of the law on secondary education (which is yet not adapted to the *"Framework law on secondary vocational education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina"*). With beginning of the year 2015 the Standards and Criteria for Establishing of Institutions for Adult Education in Central Bosnia Canton where adopted.¹⁶
- This document allows function of adult education Institutes, but it is clearly not regulating all the necessary aspects for adult education, especially not in sense of RVA. At time of writing, there have not been identified concrete steps for developing of a necessary adult education law in Central Bosnia Canton.

Important to emphasize is that the Council of Ministers of BiH (by report from the Ministry of Civil Affairs) has recognized the problems in the above mentioned Cantons.

14 Narodne novine Hercegbosanske županije, 2005.

15 Službeni novine Hercegovačko-neretvanskog kantona, 2004.

16 Službene novine Srednjobosanskog kantona, 2015.

Furthermore in June 2015 the Council of Ministers has appeal to relevant education authorities in: Central Bosnia, Herzegovina-Neretva and Canton 10 to urgently develop its own laws on VET of adults, which must be in line with the *"Framework law on secondary vocational education and training in Bosnia and Herzegovina"* (Council of Ministers of BiH, 2015).

Outcomes and ways forward

All training providers in the field of adult and continuing education are mostly NGO's or representatives of donor organizations which have financial support from different countries. Public funding in the field of BiH's vocational secondary education is very low.

The biggest constraint for VET in general is the lack of opportunities for social partners (employers/employee associations) and stakeholders to establish real connections with the VET sector. Government interest in involving social partners for matching VET demand and supply is very low (ETF, 2011).

An additional problem for secondary schools is that many teachers of vocational and technical subjects do not have adequate teaching skills and lack modern andragogical approaches of teaching.

While there has been an attempt to introduce the licensing of teachers as a condition for career progression in Republika Srpska, the professional development situation in the rest of the country has remained unchanged for years.

To conclude, the current administrative divisions and the unclear structure of responsibilities among the various authorities in the decision-making and implementation process have led to an inefficient bottom-up approach so far. Several recommendations have been made by the European Training Foundation (ETF, 2010) for the recognition, validation and accreditation of adults through adult and continuing education at the secondary level. One of these suggestions is the establishment of an Agency for Standards and Assessment. This Agency should be responsible for the development of standards for accreditation of programs/modules, the development of procedures and indicators for evaluation of programs/modules and the procedure of accrediting programs/modules.

"The development of a quality assurance mechanism in line with the European Qualification Assurance reference framework for VET (EQA-VET) would be particularly useful in a country like Bosnia and Herzegovina given the extremely fragmented administrative organisation and also because of the need for greater autonomy among VET providers. This would lead to the

development of assessment, including self-assessment of providers (including VET schools), the development of indicators and a monitoring system at policy and system level.” (ETF, 2010, 22).

According to the recommendation of the ETF working paper ”Bosnia and Herzegovina - Impact assessment of vocational education and training reform” (ETF, 2012), a common state strategy on rationalisation of the school network is necessary, because none of the regions will be capable of developing their own plans and implementing them without. In this sense VET reform must continue as a part of the system, if providers want to meet labour market requirements and promote access to education and social inclusion/cohesion for all.

PREPOZNAVANJE, VALIDACIJA I AKREDITACIJA OBRAZOVANJA ODRASLIH U SREDNJEM STRUKOVNOM OBRAZOVANJU U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI

- Sažetak -

Prema zadnjoj šestoj Međunarodnoj konferenciji o obrazovanju odraslih, delegati zemalja članica UNESCO-a su istakli da prepoznavanje, validacija i akreditacija (PVA) svih oblika učenja predstavlja jedno od 5 najvažnijih politika i zakonodavnih mjera u uspostavi društva cjeloživotnog učenja. Ovaj rad ima za svrhu da analizira trenutno stanje PVA u Bosni i Hercegovini vrednovanjem određene oblasti obrazovanja odraslih, a to je srednje strukovno obrazovanje. Istraživanje je provedeno uzimajući u obzir službene UNESCO smjernice za PVA rezultate neformalnog i informalnog učenja. Rezultati ukazuju na to da je napredak zemlje u toj oblasti fragmentiran, međutim kako bi uspjeh bio dugoročan vlasti hitno trebaju da razviju specifičan sveukupni sistem za prepoznavanje različitih oblika i mjesta učenja stvaranjem jasnih mogućnosti za kvalifikacije i certifikacije.

Ključne riječi: prepoznavanje/validacija/akreditacija, politika obrazovanja, Bosna i Hercegovina, srednje strukovno obrazovanje, UNESCO.

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