

Assessment and certification of competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts referred to the occupational standards

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VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN ROMANIA

Continuous vocational training in Romania has as legal basis:

- Government Ordinance no. 129/2000 regarding adult vocational training, modified by the Law no. 167/2013, determines that adult training is a general interest activity, that is part of the national education and training system;
- The Law of National Education no. 1/2011;
- Government Decision no. 918/2013 approving the NQF;

By the Law of National Education no. 1/2011, validation of informal and non-formal learning is seen as a lifelong learning service offered to individuals in order to become aware of their own skills and competences and to receive a certification linked to a specific qualification.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Romania is carried out in competences assessment centres according to *Procedure for assessment and validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal context*, approved by the Joint Order of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour no. 4543/468/2004.

Authorization of the first Assessment and Certification of Professional Skills Center started in Romania in 2004. According to statistic data during 2010-2015 in Romania were authorized more than 140 assessment centres of professional competences, more than 240 qualifications and over 50,000 people have been assessed and certified. At the moment are authorized 41 assessment and certification centers of vocational skills for occupations in different economic sectors. The authorized centres are located in 25 counties (there are 41 counties in Romania) with a high unequal geographical distribution (most of them are from Bucharest-Ilfov region). Access to assesment is preceded by information and professional guidance. The evaluation is conducted by evaluators of professional skills which are primarily specialists in field. The certificate of competencies obtained after the evaluation process is recognized nationally.

PROCEDURE FOR ASSESSMENT AND VALIDATION OF COMPETENCES ACQUIRED IN NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXT

Authorizing an assessment center and certification is achieved for occupations classified according to ISCO 2008. The evaluation methods and assessment tools are determined on the basis of achievement and competencies described in the occupational standards. They are applied in real working conditions and / or in simulated conditions, in different contexts, at different times.

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The principles underlying the evaluation of professional competences acquired in other ways than formal ones are:

- a) validity: the assessment of competence is based on evidence from the activities described in the occupational standard;
- b) credibility: assessment uses methods that consistently lead to the same result;
- c) impartiality: allows assessment involving all stakeholders, without predominance of any particular interest;
- d) flexibility: it adapts to the needs of evaluating candidates and the particularities of the workplace;
- e) Privacy: data on the conduct and outcome of belonging to the beneficiary;
- f) simplicity: the evaluation process is easily understood and applied by all persons involved.
- g) equality: equal opportunities and non-discriminatory center all candidates who wish to be evaluated for obtaining a certificate of professional competence;
- h) the procedure for contesting: the center has a transparent system that allows candidates to contest the assessment decision "not yet competent", in relation to certain units of competence, and to benefit from a new assessment for those units of competence, carried out by another evaluator;

The evaluation process is easily understood and applied by all persons involved:

- It is a flexible process adapted to the specific needs of candidates and jobs.
- Valuation methods are clear and applied in different contexts, at different times, thus leading to some real evidence of competence.
- Methods: self-evaluation, written test, oral test / interview, direct observation/ simulation or demonstration structured, portfolio of works previously completed evaluation project by the candidate.
- The evaluation process can be described as beneficial as far as the candidates for validation finds and work. Under the legislation, the certificate obtained by assessing the same effect as a certificate obtained formal system.
- There is not a structural link between the types of validation and formal system.
- There is no clear differentiation between the LO of formal and the LO of non-formal and informal system.

The validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning is based on the unique national occupational standards. People looking for a job are helped to validate non-formal learning and informal by the National Agency for Employment. Costs are lower than in the formal but tariffs are not fixed by legislation, depends on each assessment center.

It is a tax which is payable on registration to assessment by the applicant: can anyone seeking certification of skills, an employer who wishes certification of employment or agency labor. For people looking for work the tax is supported by state. At the end of the assessment people receive a certificate of professional competences.

Occupational standards

Occupational standard is the document that specifies the competences and the quality level of the results of the activities included in an occupation. Occupational standards include all information necessary for development of assessment tools or training programs. They are developed by experts in the field and validated by the sectoral committees. National Qualifications Authority approved occupational standards. They are unique documents nationally.

Adoption of occupational standards in Romania was based on the need to operate a clear mechanism for cooperation between providers of professional training and the actual requirements of the labor market.

The first occupational standards were developed in Romania before 1997, the Project for reform of university education component "Occupational Standards", funded by the Government and the World Bank and approved by the Council for Occupational Standards and Assessment (COSA).

With the support of the social partners and other stakeholders (ministries, training providers, sectoral committees, professional associations, regulators, etc.), the database comprising occupational standards has been extended in 3 PHARE projects.

The first institution empowered to coordinate the development of occupational standards was the Council for Occupational Standards and Assessment (COSA), a tripartite body type, autonomous, permanent, non-government, nonprofit, national public interest. The main tasks of COSA were approval and placing in the databank own nationally recognized occupational standards. COSA was authorized by GD 779/1999 to adopt a uniform methodology for development of occupational standards according to European and international practices and approve new standards, amend or cancel the existing ones.

Occupational standards provide a basis for training in vocational programs. They are essential to promote and facilitate effective recruiting labor mobility. The existence of occupational standards provides a valuable benchmark for Romania to assess the international competitiveness of its economy, as it reflects the content of occupations. Occupational standards are a source of information to identify sectors that need investment in technology development and human resources.

TASK OF THE INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN VALIDATION OF COMPETENCES

1. Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and Elderly

- Coordination and modernization of COR - Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR) with new occupations according to ISCO 08 through the terms/terminology adjusted to European labor market;
- Counseling, guidance and funding to people looking for a job through the National Agency for Employment.
- The training activity of people looking for work is coordinated nationally by the National Agency for Employment.
- National Agency for Employment, which operates within the Ministry of Labor, develops analyzes, studies and special statistical research on the situation and the evolution of unemployment and employment at national and regional economic field of activity.
- To certify professional skills obtained in other ways than formal, people looking for a job, registered at the agencies for employment can receive, free of charge, service evaluation and certification of professional skills on the other formal ways than those whose financing is provided from the unemployment insurance budget, once for each period that is looking for a job. These centers are authorized for evaluation and certification of vocational skills obtained through non-formal and informal.

2. National Qualifications Authority:

According to the Law of National Education no. 1/ 2011, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) has been established.

The tasks of NQA in CVT are:

- Achievement of the new methodology for drawing up of the occupational standards;
- Settlement of the National Qualifications Register - RNC;
- Regulations for quality assurance in education and vocational training.

3. Sectoral Committees

The sectoral committees are social dialogue institutions of public utility, with legal personality, organized by economic sectors, which were established by agreement associating at least two organizations, one employer and one trade union.

They recommend specialists in occupational areas for achieving occupational analysis, defining competencies and qualifications and the development and validation of occupational standards and assessment and certification based on standards and endorses the work done by them.

The tasks of sectoral committees in CVT:

- Elaborate/improve competences and occupational standards according to ISCO 08;
- To validate occupational standards;
- Establishment of competences for each occupation from COR;
- Creates a link between labor market requirements and training in the formal, non-formal and informal system;
- Participation to the settlement of the National Qualifications Register – RNC.

In the current economic crisis, validation of non-formal and informal learning can lead to a better employability of the labor market and increasing labor mobility.