OECD Input to the Methodology

Establishing a validation system of prior non-formal and informal learning in Croatia

Foreword

The report has been developed in the framework of the project "Establishing a validation system of prior non-formal and informal learning in Croatia," which was funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the OECD, in cooperation with the European Commission.

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Introduction

This report provides support to the Croatian government in drafting the "Methodology for Creating a Validation Programme for Recognition of Prior Learning." It first outlines the types of assessment methods that are commonly used in other countries for recognition of prior learning and offers general considerations that adult education institutions and Evaluation Committees should take into account when selecting assessment methods. It then discusses the important role of the Croatian national qualification framework (CROQF), recognition of prior learning (RPL) standards and task sheets in structuring the assessment. Finally, using two qualifications as illustration (Cook and Web Developer[1]), this report compares concretely how four different countries (France, Germany, Spain, and French-speaking Belgium) conduct RPL assessment for the same qualification. Finally, the report makes recommendations for Croatia in drafting its "Methodology for Creating a Validation Programme for Recognition of Prior Learning."

The analysis in this report is based on consultations with Croatian stakeholders, an OECD review of European practices in the implementation of RPL for technical skills, interviews with international experts carried out by the OECD team, and actual RPL standards and task sheets provided by France, Germany, Spain, and French-speaking Belgium.

[1] Since Germany does not offer RPL for Web Developer, we illustrate the assessment method for another IT-related qualification (IT specialist) instead.

Glossary

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions are used:

Assessment matrix: A table showing which assessment methods can be applied to which learning outcomes for a given unit of learning outcomes. It indicates which assessment method can be used to validate different types of learning outcomes, and whether the assessment method is using during the documentation or assessment phase of the RPL process.

Assessment method: The general procedure taken to validate whether learning outcomes have been met. It can include direct methods like work simulation, workplace observation or role play, as well as indirect methods like portfolios, work samples, letters of reference, and self-assessment questionnaires (see definitions of direct assessment and indirect assessment). The description of assessment methods featured in the RPL standards are more general than the tasks outlined in the task sheet.

Direct assessment: Direct assessment methods produce evidence of learning outcomes being met based on activities carried out in real time under observation. Examples include work simulation, workplace observation, interview or role play.

Evaluation Committee: Also called “assessors”, or “jury”, the Evaluation Committee reviews the candidate’s portfolio, carries out the assessment and determines whether the candidate meets the required evaluation criteria to get validated. The Evaluation Committee decides the task and task-specific evaluation criteria to be used during the assessment, using the RPL standards as a guide.

Evaluation criteria: These are concrete indicators that should be demonstrated in order to convince the assessor that a given learning outcome is met. Evaluation criteria are more detailed than learning outcomes. They describe clearly how the assessor will verify that the candidate has met the learning outcomes. For example, in Spain’s Evidence Guide, one of the evaluation criteria for the learning outcome “Design simple gastronomic menu that is attractive to customers” is “In preparing the simple gastronomic menu, the candidate takes into account available physical, human and economic resources, the type of premises and location, needs and tastes of potential customers, and raw materials”.

Indirect assessment: Indirect assessments provide evidence of learning outcomes being met based on activities carried out in the past. Examples include portfolios, work samples, letters of reference, and self-assessment questionnaires.

Task-specific evaluation criteria: These are the answer key or test rubric for a particular task. They describe the desired behaviour (action, verbal response, written response) relevant to the assigned task. They are included in the task sheet but are not communicated to the candidate. They are more specific than the evaluation criteria. For example, in a German task sheet, the candidate is asked to prepare two orders of schnitzel in order to demonstrate the learning outcome “Prepare and process meat and offal, game and poultry.” One of the task-specific evaluation criteria is that the candidate should successfully calculate that 180g of veal per person is required and prepare this amount.

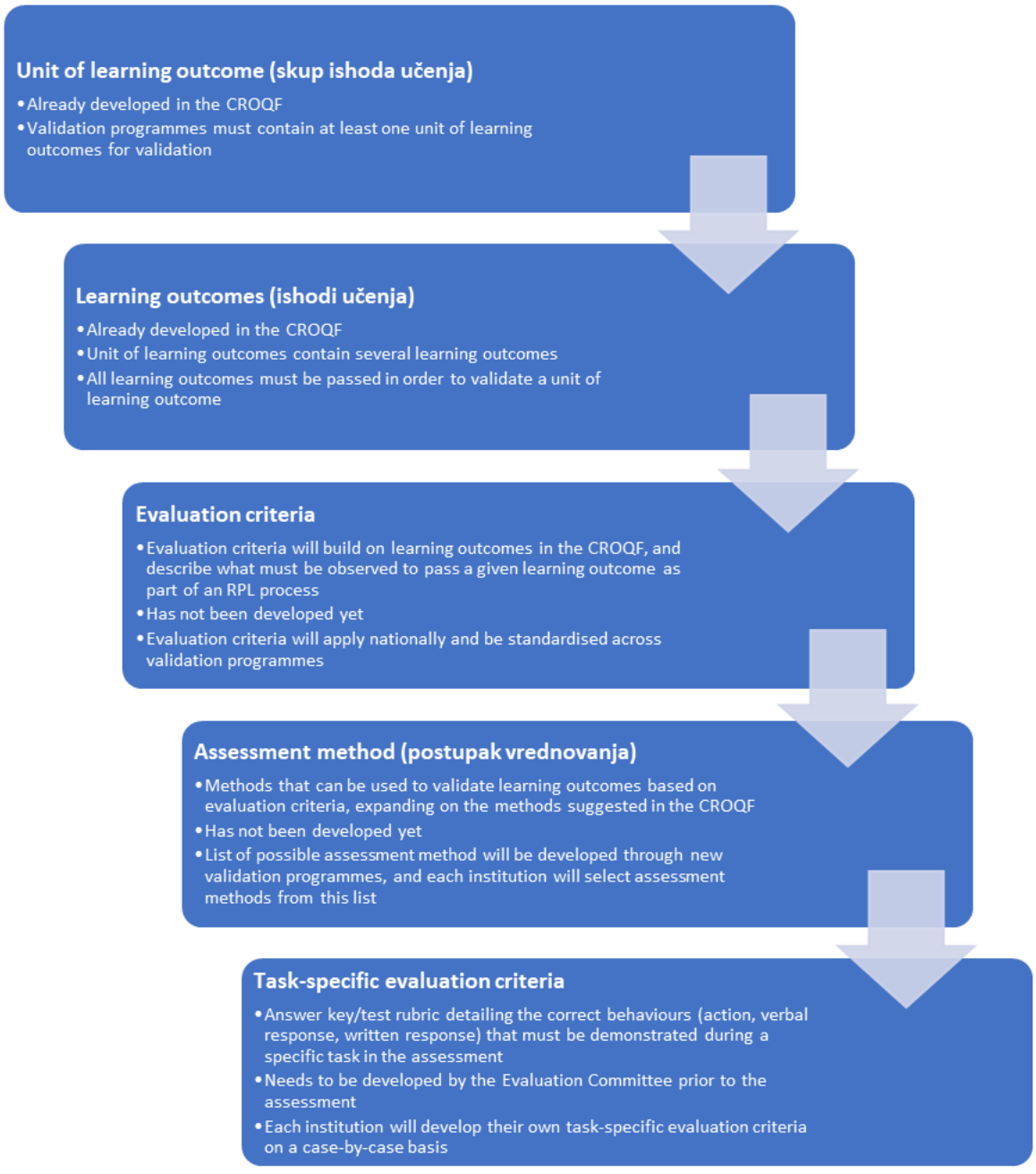
RPL standard: The benchmark against which the candidates’ competences are assessed during the RPL process. RPL standards are usually based on pre-existing occupation or qualification standards, like the CROQF in the case of Croatia, but go beyond the occupation or qualification standards to establish clear and concrete evaluation criteria and suggest assessment methods that could be used in validation.

Task sheet: The actual set of tasks that will be assigned to the candidate for a particular validation process. Often, the task sheet will include an outline of which specific tasks will be given, how much time the candidate will be allocated to complete the tasks, and the equipment and materials required. These are very practical documents usually developed by the Evaluation Committee on a case-by-case basis, drawing guidance from the RPL standard.

Validation programme: This is a Croatia-specific term that refers to recognition of prior learning for one specific qualification. Adult education institutions that meet quality standards submit a proposal that summarises which learning outcomes will be assessed by recognition of prior learning, how they relate to the CROQF and which assessment methods should be used to assess them. This proposal is submitted to the Agency for Adult Education and VET for approval.

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document..**1. Components required for a new validation programme in Croatia**

Mapping of the process of creating a new validation programme, starting from units of learning outcomes in the CROQF



Note: Author's elaboration. Where applicable, the chart uses the existing Croatian terminology from the CROQF.

Assessment Methods

The choice of assessment methods for recognition of prior learning is ideally more flexible than for formal education and training programmes and can be adjusted based on the candidate's personal characteristics. Adults who could potentially benefit the most from recognition of prior learning – including low-educated adults, migrants, or those who acquired their skills through informal or non-formal learning - may be uncomfortable with the type of assessments used in formal education and training. In selecting assessment methods, adult education institutions and Evaluation Committees need to think creatively and keep an open mind, therefore, about what constitutes valid evidence of learning outcomes having been met.

While flexibility in the selection of assessment methods is important, so is quality assurance. In formal education, the education institution carries out quality assurance at every stage of the learning process: in determining the content and delivery of learning material, in preparing exercises to encourage the student to apply and reflect on the learning material, and finally in assessing the learning outcomes were met. In recognition of prior learning, the adult education institution is only able to perform quality assurance at the final stage of the learning process, i.e. during assessment. The Croatian government intends for the final certificate from recognition of prior learning to be equivalent in value to a certificate from formal education, which means that the assessment must meet high levels of quality assurance.

This section first outlines the type of assessment methods available to assess whether learning outcomes are met. It then discusses how to select an appropriate assessment method.

Type of assessment methods

Broadly, assessment methods for recognition of prior learning can be grouped into two types: direct and indirect (see Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**.1). Direct assessment methods produce strong evidence that the candidate can perform the learning outcomes because they are carried out in real time under observation. Examples include work simulation, workplace observation or role play. While they produce strong evidence, direct assessments can be expensive and demanding in terms of equipment, materials, space, and time. Since direct observation is not always possible nor cost effective, indirect assessments are often used. Indirect assessments provide evidence about a candidate's ability to perform a given learning outcome based on evidence of activities carried out in the past. Examples include portfolios, work samples, letters of reference, and self-assessment questionnaires.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document..**1. Types of assessment methods**

	Examples	Advantages	Disadvantages
Direct assessments	Work simulation, practical test, workplace observation, role play	Easy to prove authenticity and currency More natural to adults who are wary of formal assessment	Costly, demanding in terms of equipment, materials, space
	Case study, Written or oral exam, technical interview	Easy to prove authenticity and currency Low cost	If written, language requirements can impose barriers on low-educated candidates and migrants
Indirect assessments	Portfolio, work samples, letters of reference or validation from employers, peers, subordinates	Gives candidate more flexibility to produce relevant evidence Low cost	Harder to prove authenticity and currency Written portfolios can impose barriers on low-educated candidates and migrants

	Self-assessment questionnaire	Gives candidate flexibility to report on which learning outcomes they have met Low cost If in checklist format, can be accessible to adults with poor literacy	Potential for candidate to misrepresent the learning outcomes they have met

Source: Adapted from OECD (forthcoming), "Fostering Upskilling Pathways through RPL."

Selecting assessment methods

This section outlines considerations that should be taken into account when selecting assessment methods, including general considerations, the type of learning outcome, combining multiple types of methods and the candidate's personal characteristics.

In Croatia, the CROQF includes suggestions about assessment methods for each Unit of Learning Outcomes, but they are not detailed and do not offer multiple possibilities that would allow flexibility in the choice of assessment method. New validation programmes should elaborate on these suggestions to provide more detail about the types of assessment methods that *could* be used to assess a given Unit of Learning Outcomes. Not all assessment methods can be applied to all Units of Learning Outcomes, but effort should be made to suggest all those methods that can gather the required evidence. These suggestions should become part of the national RPL standards. All adult education institutions that intend to validate a Unit of Learning Outcomes will have to choose from this list of proposed assessment methods in the RPL standard.

General considerations

In selecting assessment methods, these key questions should be considered (Cedefop, 2023[1]):

- Does the choice of assessment method consider individual circumstances and characteristics?
- Are assessment methods in line with validation objectives?
- Are assessment methods free from bias and how is fair treatment assured?
- Have the assessment methods been clarified and agreed upon by all stakeholders?
- Which assessment methods are available and how can they be used and potentially combined?

Further, the following general considerations can be used to think about the type of evidence that will be generated and whether this evidence will allow an assessor to make an accurate assessment (Simosko, 1992[1]):

- **Valid**: Is the evidence produced relevant to the standards or learning outcomes? Validity measures how well the assessment matches what is being assessed.
- **Sufficient**: Does the evidence represent sufficient breadth and quality to be appropriate to the standards to which it applies?
- **Authentic**: Is the evidence beyond a reasonable doubt the work of the candidate? How can the assessor be sure that the evidence presented really does represent the achievements of the candidate who submitted it? Most often a portfolio will collect a range of evidence, and some of it will be difficult to authenticate independently of other evidence (e.g. a photograph). Combining multiple pieces of evidence frequently serves to authenticate each particular piece of evidence.

- **Current**: Is the evidence recent or current enough to meet the requirements of the performance criteria or learning outcomes? Recognition of prior learning processes aim to assess what a candidate currently knows and can do. But it is up to the assessor to decide how recent the evidence must be to satisfy that learning outcomes are met. For instance, in qualifications relating to technology that is evolving quickly, evidence produced in the last year or two may be required to reflect the newest technological skills.

Adult education institutions should bear these considerations in mind when defining which assessment methods to propose in RPL standards, and Evaluation Committees can also review these considerations when evaluating a candidate's portfolio, deciding whether additional evidence is required, and preparing task sheets for the assessment.

Type of learning outcome

The type of learning outcome is an important consideration when selecting assessment methods. Different assessment methods will be more appropriate depending on the type of learning outcome (ILO, 2022[7]):

- Learning outcomes that belong to the **cognitive** domain, such as knowledge, critical thinking or comprehension, can be tested using written or oral methods such as exams, reports, interviews or presentations.
- Learning outcomes that belong to the **psychomotor** domain involve testing practical skills, such as the ability to manipulate a given tool or instrument. These can be tested through workplace observation, workplace simulation, work samples (through, for example, videos or photos) that are part of a portfolio, case studies or references, for example.
- Finally, learning outcomes related to the **affective** domain, such as emotional or personal growth, can be tested through workplace observation, role play, references or self-assessments, which may be part of a portfolio.

Combining direct and indirect evidence

Selecting a combination of assessment methods to validate the same Unit of Learning Outcomes has been identified as best practice, since it allows one type of evidence to cross-validate the other. A mix of tools will better capture the complexities, both breadth and depth, of individual learning experiences. Survey evidence from countries suggests that most use a combination of assessment methods for each recognition of prior learning process (Cedefop; European Commission; ICF, 2017[1]). In a review of European RPL practices carried out in the framework of this project, Denmark, France, Germany and Spain generally combine assessment methods as part of validation of prior learning, while the Netherlands and French-speaking Belgium rely on a single assessment (Box **Error! No text of specified style in document.**.1). In France, Germany, Denmark and Spain, the assessment phase generally follows two steps: first, the Evaluation Committee reviews the portfolio contents; and second, if the portfolio contents did not produce sufficient evidence to determine whether learning outcomes were met then the candidate is asked to complete a direct assessment. Combining evidence from both direct and indirect sources allows an assessor to make informed inferences about whether the candidate has achieved the relevant learning outcomes, without necessarily witnessing every learning outcome performed directly. As noted above, combining multiple pieces of evidence from different sources serves to authenticate each particular piece of evidence. Allowing some evidence from indirect sources (such as portfolios, employer references) also reduces the overall cost of the assessment, as direct assessments can be costlier in terms of equipment, space, materials and the assessors' time.

Box Error! No text of specified style in document.**.1. International examples: Assessment methods used**

Belgium

In French-speaking Belgium, the assessment usually includes a professional simulation. Group assessments are possible in French-speaking Belgium, allowing many candidates to undertake the assessment at the same time.

Denmark

The documentation phase is the core of the RPL process, though each education and training institution decides on the assessment method they will use. After reviewing the portfolio, the institution may ask the candidate to undergo further assessments, such as a practical test, exam, or written assignment.

France

After being deemed eligible to participate in recognition of prior learning, candidates prepare a portfolio with the support of an advisor. This portfolio includes a description of the candidate's professional trajectory; the firm for which they work for, including the organizational chart; and the candidate's position within the firm. The candidate describes 3-4 of their job activities in detail, including who they work with, what their role is, their tasks, and the outcome of their tasks. After submitting their portfolio, candidates have an interview with the jury in which they are asked about specific components of their portfolio. For vocational qualifications, a practical assessment is usually required.

Germany

In Germany's Valikom program, candidates complete a self-assessment and gather documentation, and then they are given a practical task. The Chamber and an industry expert decide on the assessment method, and the industry expert prepares the practice-oriented task that could involve work samples, case studies, presentations, role play, interviews, or workplace observation.

Netherlands

Assessment methods are chosen on a case-by-case basis and are quite diverse. They can include a portfolio, an interview, workplace observation, gathering 360-degree feedback, or practical simulation.

Spain

In Spain, candidates are required to first submit a portfolio, but the second assessment method is decided by the jury on a case-by-base basis if deemed necessary. The assessment method is decided based on the options included in the Evidence Guide, taking into account the evidence already presented in the portfolio, the level of the competence unit and the characteristics of the candidate.

Candidate's personal characteristics

The individual and their specific requirements and circumstances need to be considered in all elements of the RPL process. In order for people to move forward in their careers and lifelong learning, validation should help them become aware of their current knowledge, skills, and competences and make them visible to others (Cedefop, 2023[1]).

The Evaluation Committee should select assessment methods that are appropriate to the candidate's personal characteristics. In some cases, the candidate might not be able to produce indirect evidence for the portfolio. This could be the case with refugees, migrants, informal economy workers, or adults with

poor literacy skills. In such cases, the Evaluation Committee may need to rely entirely on direct assessment and should prioritise real or simulated work situations.

Written knowledge tests should be avoided for candidates with low literacy skills who have difficulty expressing themselves in writing, or for adults who have been out of formal education for many years and are uncomfortable sitting written tests. An alternative to written knowledge tests could be an oral interview that allows the assessor to first build trust with the candidate, giving them an opportunity to express their knowledge more freely.

Preparing RPL standards

RPL standards are the benchmark against which a candidate's competences are assessed during the RPL process. RPL standards establish clear and concrete evaluation criteria which can be used by the Evaluation Committee in evaluating evidence and preparing task sheets for the assessment. RPL standards usually include suggestions about assessment methods that can be used for particular units of learning outcomes. These suggestions are intended to provide ideas about how to carry out assessments and which tasks to assign. Offering multiple suggestions of possible assessment methods allows for flexibility in tailoring the assessment to different types of candidates/learners and their skills.

Some countries base RPL standards directly on pre-existing National Qualification Frameworks (NQF). or National Occupational Standards. But this is only possible if these standards include evaluation criteria which are sufficiently detailed and practical that an assessor can objectively observe them. If such evaluation criteria do not exist in the NQF, or the system is based on occupational standards which do not generally include evaluation criteria, then an extra step is required to define RPL standards. The CROQF does not currently contain evaluation criteria for validation of prior learning, and RPL standards need to be developed as part of creating new validation programmes.

The Croatian 2021 Adult Education Act (Article 2(34)) stipulates that adult education institutions are responsible for creating new validation programmes. To do so, the institution must receive a high-quality standard rating by the Agency for Adult Education and VET. Once a validation programme has been approved, it can be offered by any adult education institution with a high-quality standard rating. In their application to have a validation programme approved, Croatian adult education institutions need to demonstrate that they can deliver the validation service to the standard prescribed by the Ministry of Science and Education. As part of creating a new validation programme, the adult education institution will need to document which learning outcomes will be assessed by recognition of prior learning, how they relate to the CROQF and which assessment methods can potentially be used to assess them. It is the responsibility of the Evaluation Committee (assembled by the adult education institution) to then prepare the task sheet (i.e. the specific tasks, allocation of time, list of equipment and materials, and task-specific evaluation criteria) to be used for a particular validation process.

In assigning the responsibility to develop new validation programmes to individual adult education institutions in Croatia, the OECD team understands that adult education institutions will also develop the RPL standards – including evaluation criteria and suggestions about assessment methods — for each new validation programme. This review has not identified any other countries where adult education institutions develop RPL standards. Typically, countries either organise RPL standards centrally (such as in Spain, France, French-speaking Belgium) or the social partners assume the responsibility (Netherlands, Sweden, Germany). **Error! Reference source not found.** provides an overview of RPL standards in six European countries. Each model for developing RPL standards has advantages and disadvantages.

When RPL standards are developed centrally, as is the case in Spain, France and French-speaking Belgium, this facilitates a standardised approach to validation across the country. In Spain, RPL standards are developed jointly by the Ministries for Education and Labour; in France, they are developed by the

Ministry for Education; and in French-speaking Belgium they are developed by a public agency specifically created for this purpose – the Professions and Qualifications Service (*Service Francophone des Métiers et des* Qualifications, SFMQ). Centrally developed RPL standards do not exclude the possibility for variation in the choice of assessment method, or to tailor the task sheet to the needs of the individual. But by taking a centralised approach to developing RPL standards, the burden on individual adult education institutions is reduced and there is consistency in the way standards are developed. Social partners' contribution to the development of RPL standards in such cases is generally limited to their contribution to the development of the National Qualification Framework (or the National Occupation Standards, as is the case in Spain), upon which the RPL standards are based. In French-speaking Belgium, a commission made up of social partners and training providers (a *Commission de Référentiels*, COREF, Commission for Skills Unit Indicator) is put together which defines RPL standards based on training standards.

When social partners drive the development of RPL standards, as is the case in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany, there are strong ties with labour market needs. Employers and industry representatives are arguably in the best position to determine which assessment methods are capable of demonstrating that learning outcomes are met, and that the candidate is qualified to perform the associated occupational tasks. An industry-led approach may not be appropriate, however, when the goal is for validation to lead to certification that is equivalent to that obtained via formal education and that will be recognized by education institutions to enable upskilling.

Having adult education institutions develop RPL standards, as may be the model adopted in Croatia, has several advantages. Adult education institutions have experience evaluating learning in formal training programmes. If the RPL certification issued is to be indistinguishable from that earned from a formal training programme, then qualification and RPL standards should be similar to each other. Further, having adult education institutions develop RPL standards can ensure the process is demand driven: resources are only spent setting up RPL standards when sufficient numbers of potential candidates request validation or when demand is otherwise identified by the adult education institution.

However, there are some drawbacks with having adult education institutions develop RPL standards. First, quality assurance is more difficult. Clear guidelines will be needed to ensure that adult education institutions follow a similar approach in creating new RPL standards. Second, if the intention is to make the RPL system responsive to labour market demands (in addition to promoting upskilling), input from industry experts will be crucial, Industry input is needed to validate evaluation criteria in the RPL standards, to prepare the task sheet and to participate in the assessment. Adult education institutions offering validation programmes should therefore have sufficient ties to the labour market to recruit industry experts for validating RPL standards and/or participating in Evaluation Committees. Third, when faced with a candidate requesting a new validation programme, adult education institutions may find it more profitable to convince them to take the equivalent training programme instead. Thought must be given to whether there are strong enough incentives for adult education institutions to establish new validation programmes.

In preparing a new validation programme, adult education institutions in Croatia will need to communicate what will be considered acceptable evidence for each unit of learning outcomes in the qualification or micro-credential. There are some suggestions for assessment methods in the CROQF, but these are general and apply more to assessment in formal education. Adult education institutions will need to create a list of potential assessment methods for each unit of learning outcomes. One way to communicate which assessment methods are considered acceptable is by an Assessment Matrix. Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**.2 provides an illustration of an Assessment Matrix used in Sweden. The institution developing RPL standards indicates which assessment method can be used to validate different types of learning outcomes (skills, abilities or knowledge), and at what stage of the RPL process the assessment methods can be used. Evaluation Committees can refer to this Assessment Matrix (or similar guidance) in preparing task sheets.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document..**2. Assessment Matrix in Sweden**

Example of assessment matrix used by the Swedish Authority for Vocational Colleges, adapted for this report

Assessment Method	Is the method used for the validation programme?	What can be tested using the method?			Comments
		Knowledge	Skills	Abilities	
Dialogue and conversations					
Conversation (mapping skills)					
Conversation (testing skills)					
Statements and self-assessment					
Review of documentation					
Self-assessment form					
Self-assessment form in combination with conversation					
Workplace observation					
Workplace observation, controlled tasks					
Workplace observation, no control					
Co-assessor: 360-degree survey of different forms					
Co-assessor: colleague					
Co-assessor: supervisor					
Simulation and role-play					
Observation at test centre, controlled tasks Observation at test centre, no control					
Assessment of work samples					
Theoretical case studies that are carried out presented orally and/or in writing					
Tests and exams					
Oral questions with multiple choice answers					
Open oral questions					
Written questions with multiple choice answers					
Open written questions					

Note: Modified example of an assessment matrix in Sweden. Responses are only illustrative and do not apply to a specific RPL programme.
Source: Standard och riktlinjer för branschvalidering av yrkeskompetens - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan (myh.se)

Box Error! No text of specified style in document..**2. International examples: Preparing RPL standards**

Spain

Evidence Guides supplement occupation standards by providing guidance on how to assess if candidates are fit to work in an occupation, including evaluation criteria. The Jury uses the Evidence Guide to prepare their task sheet for the candidate or for a group of candidates.

France

By law, a VAE procedure must be planned for every qualification registered in the RNCP, except those that are linked to a regulated profession (for which is it illegal to practice without a qualification). The RNCP qualification standards describe the knowledge and skills that a person must have, and these have been developed in line with the occupation standards. Based on these standards, an Evaluation Framework (*Référentiel d'Evaluation du Titre Professionnel*) is prepared which provides guidance about specific tasks to use for the assessment, suggested time allocation, and evaluation criteria.

Belgium

The same assessment is used for testing learning acquired formally, non-formally and informally in French-speaking Belgium. The Validation Referential outlines the knowledge and abilities to be tested for a given qualification. It describes the tasks that could be asked of the candidate, including how much time they should be given, the degree of complexity, the assessment context, and required equipment. It also prescribes an assessment framework which includes essential evaluation criteria.

Germany

Valikom standards (called "Activity Profiles") are not prepared for all occupations in the NQF. They focus on occupations where you can find many people with no formal degree, and where the social partners are supportive. It takes six months to develop new standards, through workshops with social partners. Activity Profiles are created based on training regulations (*Ausbildungsordnungen*) and on training frameworks (*Ausbildungsrahmenpläne*) for particular occupations. They focus on the practical aspects of the qualification, not the theory.

Netherlands

Industry standards for *Vakbekwaamheidsbewijs* (Certificate for Vocational Competence) can be developed by industry bodies, which reduces the time and cost of developing new standards and ensures alignment with labour market needs. After review by a working group made of social partners, standards are submitted to the Dutch Knowledge Centre for VPL for approval to be recognized as an industry standard. RPL providers can then apply for the right to implement RPL using the new industry standard. An industry standard must include: a description of the occupation, context, nature of the work, learning outcome, core tasks or professional products, activities, or work processes.

Sweden

Two different RPL systems can be accessed in Sweden: RPL for education and training and industry-specific RPL. RPL for education and training uses RPL standards outlined in the Swedish Qualification Framework. Industry-specific RPL uses industry standards which are developed by social partners in the relevant industry. The industry-specific RPL standards include an Assessment Matrix that specifies which assessment methods to use to evaluate a candidate's competences.

Preparing task sheets

The task sheet is the actual set of tasks that will be used for a particular validation process. Task sheets contain very specific tasks the candidate must carry out, including time allocated to prepare and execute the task, materials, and equipment available, as well as task-specific evaluation criteria that indicate desired behaviour (such as actions, verbal responses, or written responses). The tasks and task-specific evaluation criteria are more detailed than the suggested assessment methods and general evaluation criteria found in the RPL standards and can be tailored to the specific candidate.

Task sheets are developed by an Evaluation Committee or individual assessors, based on guidance found in the RPL standards. In Spain, task sheets are developed for individual assessments by the assessor and advisor (with the support of the president of the Evaluation Committee) at a regional validation centre. In France and Belgium, they are developed by the centralized institution responsible for the validation of prior learning. In Germany, the assessors create the task sheet themselves.

In some cases, task sheets are developed for all candidates seeking validation for the same qualification, while in other cases they are produced on a case-by-case basis. In Germany, the task sheet is developed on a case-by-case basis by the industry expert, and the tasks are chosen to supplement or validate the evidence already demonstrated in the candidate's portfolio. Individual characteristics are taken into account. Additional time or aids can be allocated to candidates with physical or mental disabilities, for example. In France and Belgium, the task sheets are generally the same for every candidate vying for the same qualification (with allowance for tailoring as needed) and thus are kept confidential.

The selected assessment method is usually shared with the candidate ahead of the assessment. Unlike RPL standards, which are often publicly available, the full detailed task sheets with task-specific evaluation criteria are not distributed publicly, and though the candidate may be informed of which tasks they will have to carry out in advance they are not informed about the task-specific evaluation criteria, since this would be like providing the answers to a test.

The task sheet often includes task-specific evaluation criteria to be used by assessors. These criteria are specific to the chosen tasks and are a type of answer key or test rubric. In Germany, an observation report lists the various learning activities to be assessed, and the task-specific evaluation criteria that must be demonstrated. In France, jury members use the evaluation grid (*grille d'evaluation*) to monitor which competences and evaluation criteria were demonstrated or not. After internal discussion they come to a consensus about whether the candidate was successful or not. In Germany, France and Spain, candidates do not necessarily need to demonstrate 100% of learning outcomes to pass an assessment. They must demonstrate achievement of the most critical learning outcomes, and the Evaluation Committee is trusted to identify which learning outcomes are critical.

Practical examples: Cook and Web Developer/IT specialist

This section compares how four European countries assess learning outcomes for two qualifications as part of a recognition of prior learning process. The two qualifications are Cook and Web Developer/IT specialist. Analysis is based on RPL standards and task sheets provided by four countries: French-speaking Belgium, France, Germany, and Spain (Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**.3). Only one task sheet was provided (by Germany), and it is a "fictional" task sheet for a hypothetical individual. Task sheets are usually prepared on a case-by-case basis and are confidential.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document..**3. Templates of RPL standards and task sheets received by countries**

	Cook		Web Developer/IT specialist	
	RPL standard	Task sheet	RPL standard	Task sheet
France	x		x	
Germany	x	x	x	
Netherlands				
Spain	x		x	
Sweden				
French-speaking Belgium	x			

Note: The OECD team requested RPL standards and task sheets for both qualifications from each of the six countries. This table summarizes the documents that were received. Most countries reported that task sheets are confidential and could not be shared.

Cook

The qualification 'cook' is frequently found on lists of qualifications eligible for validation of prior learning. This qualification was available for validation in all four of the countries analysed (Spain, France, French-speaking Belgium, and Germany). In Spain, validation is available for cooking-related vocational qualifications at three levels: Basic kitchen operations (Level 1), Cook (Level 2) and Kitchen management (Level 3). In France, validation is available for Cook at Level 3. In Belgium, validation is available for Cook Working Alone (level not specified). In Germany, validation is available for Cook (level not specified). The fact that this is a common qualification for validation may reflect that there are many people working in hospitality and food preparation who do not have formal qualifications, but who nevertheless acquire relevant knowledge and skills through on-the-job training and experience.

In the countries analysed, the most common assessment methods used to assess learning outcomes for the qualification of 'cook' were practical assessments, and usually workplace observation or workplace simulation. This reflects that many of the learning outcomes associated with this qualification involve practical skills, such as the ability to prepare a meal using appropriate techniques, to ensure proper conservation of ingredients, to plan a menu, to source materials, to ensure hygiene practices are followed, and to manage a team. In France, practical assessments for cook are supplemented by a technical interview and a portfolio. In Belgium, the candidate completes a written questionnaire in addition to the practical assessment. In Spain, all three cooking-related qualifications are generally tested with both a practical test and a professional interview, with the practical test being the highest priority for the Level 1 qualification where more manual skills are covered.

The tasks that candidates are asked to do as part of the practical assessment for the qualification of cook are similar across countries, though they vary in detail. For instance, in France the candidate is asked to prepare a hot dish and dessert for 4 people using 4 different techniques. Candidates do not discover the menu until the day of the assessment. In Belgium, the candidate must prepare a randomly-drawn menu for 4 people. In Germany, the candidate must prepare an appetizer, main course, and dessert for 2 people. In Spain, the Level 1 Basic kitchen operations qualification requires the preparation of a simple culinary creation, while the Level 2 Cook qualification requires the candidate to first develop menus and then to prepare the dishes using the right culinary techniques. The length of the assessment is 4 hours in Germany, 5 hours in France and 7 hours in Belgium (length not specified in Spain).

Candidates are notified about the type of assessment in advance but are generally not informed of the exact menu or recipes that they will be asked to prepare until the day of the assessment. An exception is Germany, where candidates are notified of the general assignment 4 weeks before the assessment and are asked to prepare a menu suggestion along with a list of necessary ingredients 2 weeks before.

Web developer and IT specialist

The occupations of web developer and IT specialist face high demand for skilled workers due to the digital transformation. The skill demands of these occupations are continuously changing in line with technological innovation, and workers in these jobs are expected to upskill throughout their career. The availability of online resources related to web development and computing allows for self-directed online learning, both for upskilling and for training to enter the sector for the first time. RPL processes therefore need to be adapted to assess candidates who have acquired their skills independently through self-directed online learning and who may not have any work experience. Candidates may have acquired skills from non-formal training courses; others may have acquired their skills through informal learning such as watching Youtube videos or doing Google searches.

The learning outcomes associated with web developer and IT specialist qualifications are both theoretical and practical, and they require the worker to have a wide range of knowledge and problem-solving skills. Web developers often work independently with a coding software and have learning outcomes related to front-end and back-end website development. IT specialists have learning outcomes related to both hardware and software, in addition to customer service skills.

France and Spain offer RPL for web developer, while Germany and French-speaking Belgium do not. As an alternative, we look at the qualification of IT specialist in Germany and French-speaking Belgium. In France, the Afpa offers validation for web and mobile web developers. Spain offers a Level 2 qualification in Preparation and publication of web pages. In Germany, the Valikom programme offers validation for IT specialists specialising in systems integration, while in Belgium the Consortium de Validation des Compétences offers validation for PC and network technician. Each of these validation programmes has a focus on practical assessments.

In France, the Afpa assessment for web and mobile web developer is based on a take-home exam followed by a technical interview. The candidate is given an assignment to build a web page and to submit it along with a written description of the website, how they built it, and what methods they used. These inputs are submitted to the assessors at least one day before the in-person evaluation. During the in-person evaluation, the candidate presents their website and then the assessors carry out a technical interview. The presentation usually lasts 35 minutes and the technical interview 40 minutes. The assessment ends with a final 15-min interview about the candidates' CV and motivation.

A take-home exam is a good assessment method to use when the qualification assessed has many related learning outcomes that can be assessed by a finished product, such as a website. Instead of a take-home exam, a candidate could also be asked to show examples of previous websites they have built in a portfolio, combined with a technical interview. But a take-home exam is a more accurate representation of the candidate's current skills. The technical interview verifies authenticity by asking detailed questions about the website to confirm that the candidate was the one who built it, and the written description of their work and methods helps reduce the risk of the candidate taking shortcuts during the take-home exam.

In Spain, the Evidence Guide for the competence unit "Integrate software components in web pages" as part of the web developer qualification is assessed using a professional situation which includes at least the following activities: building software components, integrating software components and testing the operation of the pages with embedded components. The particular task selection is left to the Evaluation Committee to decide but the Evidence Guide includes evaluation criteria and a performance scale for evaluating them.

In Germany, the candidate for IT specialist faces a work simulation where a customer needs help updating an outdated IT system for their business. The practical assessment is divided into four phases: greeting the customer, finding out the customers' goals through conversations, determining the existing IT infrastructure, and presenting three possible solutions to the customer (with explanation). The assessment tests both the candidate's knowledge of IT infrastructure and their customer service skills. During the final

part of the assessment (when the candidate presents three possible solutions) the “customer” gets to quiz the candidate on their technical knowledge in a type of technical interview. Candidates may find this type of assessment less intimidating than a formal technical interview since it takes place in an environment similar to the real-life workplace (and therefore feel less like an exam). The Valikom role-play assessment lasts 30 minutes.

In French-speaking Belgium, the Consortium offers validation for four competence units that together make up the title of PC and network technician which are assembly and integration of PCs in local environment, maintaining and troubleshooting PCs in a local network environment, provide general remote support, and provide integration, maintenance and troubleshooting in a wide area network environment. A candidate has to register for a practical exam for each of the four competence units to obtain the full qualification. Each competence unit is comprised of two to four tasks that the candidate must do during the practical exam. The length of the practical exams varies between 1.5 hours and 4 hours. All examinations are practical and include the candidate interacting with a PC and with other people (simulation of professional situation).

OECD Recommendations for Croatia

To ensure the assessment is both thorough and cost-effective, the OECD recommends a combination of gathering evidence via indirect methods (portfolio) and direct methods. The Croatian government is proposing to use a portfolio in the documentation phase, and then a direct assessment for the assessment phase. **The OECD recommends that the portfolio include a self-assessment questionnaire**, similar to that used in Germany, where the candidate indicates which learning outcomes they have met. The portfolio could also include documentation of products or artefacts produced by the candidate (such as financial reports, lesson plans, musical compositions, publications, websites, photographs, etc). A self-assessment questionnaire should be developed by the adult education institution for all new validation programmes, and the Agency for Adult Education and VET should provide a self-assessment questionnaire template to aid institutions. The direct assessment could be an interview, work simulation, role play or practical exam.

The OECD recommends that the candidate receive support from an advisor to understand the RPL process and to gather documentation (portfolio). The advisor should be provided by the adult education institution at no additional cost to the candidate. The candidate should have access to an overview of learning outcomes associated with the validation programme (e.g., through an online portal).

The OECD recommends developing RPL standards which propose assessment methods and include evaluation criteria that are more detailed than those currently in the CROQF. The RPL standards should be rooted in the CROQF qualification standards but should additionally spell out evaluation criteria and assessment methods that could be used to assess learning outcomes in new validation programmes. The RPL standards should be developed ideally by a teacher of the corresponding education programme and verified by at least one industry representative to ensure they meet labour market needs. This would be in addition to the approval required by the Agency. The RPL standards would provide examples of possible assessment methods, but the specific tasks that would be assigned are confidential and developed on a case-by-case basis by the Evaluation Committee.

The OECD recommends that the Evaluation Committee be responsible for creating task sheets on a case-by-case basis to be used during the direct assessment. The task sheet should illustrate the connection between the assigned tasks and the RPL standards, outline equipment and material needed, as well as provide a description of the task-specific evaluation criteria. It should take into account the personal characteristics of the candidate (such as language abilities, skill level).

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Annex 1: Validation system in French-speaking Belgium

Validation in French-speaking Belgium (from here on referred to as Belgium) is provided by a partnership of five major training providers in the region. The partnership is coordinated through the *Consortium de validation des compétences* (CVDC). The system offers validation for 70 regulated occupations and 177 skills certificates. Validation is free and offered to all candidates over the age of 18. There are 49 accredited skill validation centres belonging to one of the five partners.

Certification

A Skills Certificate is a professional certification "composing a coherent and significant set of learning outcomes aimed at further training, insertion or retention in the job market, or professional specialisation". The Skills Certificate is approved by the Government and recognised by sectoral social partners, employment, education and training operators. Certification are organised around Skill Units (SU). One occupation is comprised of one or more SUs. Each SU has one practical test (meaning that if an occupation is comprised of three Skill Units, the candidate must carry out three practical tests and obtain three skills certificates to obtain a certificate for the whole occupation). However, candidates can choose to obtain one or more SU certificates without obtaining the certificate for the whole occupation. Skills Certificates are not equivalent to formal VET qualifications.

RPL standards and assessment methods

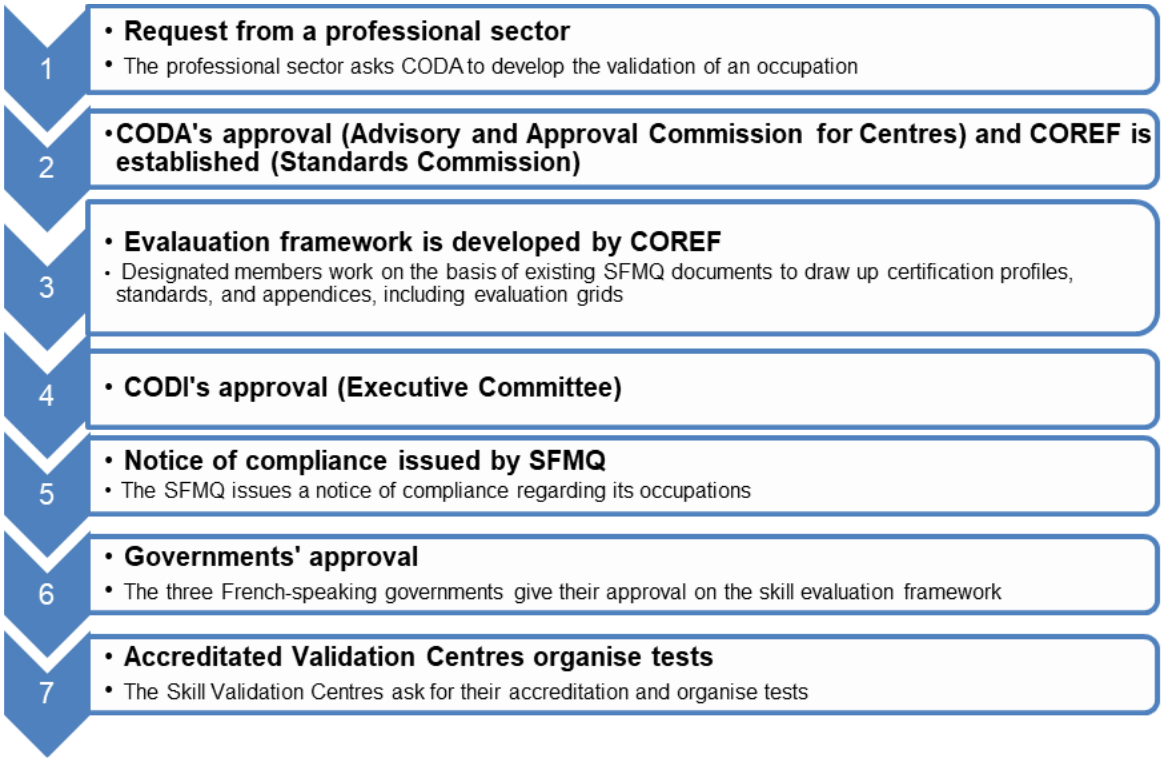
The Francophone Service for Trades and Qualifications (SFMQ) is the official body that makes occupational standards and evaluation profiles. Together, occupational standards and evaluation profiles

are the official standards that all general education, VET training providers and validation providers must base their operations on. Occupation standards include key activities, skills associated with those key activities, knowledge needed to carry out the tasks associated with the occupation, and the learning outcome units that need to be included in a training programme. The SFMQ framework is very recent and still under development and standards have not been developed yet for all occupations.

The CVDC develops the skill evaluation framework (RPL standards) to be used for validation based on the occupational standards developed by the SFMQ. The CVDC does not decide for which occupations a skill evaluation framework is developed; rather, the skill evaluation frameworks are developed upon request by a professional sector (employer organisation or trade union) or the government. The CVDC is mandated to create validation programmes for all levels of qualification. In practice, most validation is for level 2-5. The CVDC has recently received mandates by the government to prepare skill evaluation frameworks for level 7 and 8 qualifications, particularly for jobs in ITand project management.

Once a skill evaluation framework has been produced, validation centres can start offering validation and organising tests. The development of standards (Step 3 in the figure below) takes 3-4 months with 3-4 hour long meetings every 2 weeks. The whole process (Steps 1 to 7) can take up to a year (Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**.2).

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**.2. Process for creating RPL standards and offering validation**



The Skill Units, evaluation criteria and practical tests for validation are developed by the Coref (CVDC's Standards Commission). The Coref is composed of the president of the Standards Commission (representative of the private sector), a methodology expert (from CVDC), VET providers, public employment services, social partners (trade unions and employers), and technical experts. The Coref produces three key documents:

- Certification profile: defines which competences are the most important ones (core skills) for validation. Not all competences included in the SFMQ occupational standards must be tested. The certification profile includes a definition of the occupation/job, key activities and professional competences, and distribution of Skills Units (which contains learning outcomes from the occupational standard by the SFMQ).
- Validation referential: outlines the tasks that will be asked of the candidate during the assessment, required equipment, and the evaluation criteria that must be observed for each task/activity. They are based on the SFMQ occupational standards, but they are more detailed and adapted to the validation process.
- Support document: guidance tools and mapping of the Skill Certificate to the Belgian National Qualification Framework. Mainly used in the guidance phase.

As part of the validation referential, the assessment grids is used by the evaluator to assess whether the candidate has achieved the necessary outcomes in the practical test to certify a SU (Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**.3). Assessment grids contain evaluation criteria, general indicators (taken from the SFMQ profile), and operational indicators which are more specific and measurable (taken from the Coref). The assessment grid prompts the evaluator to evaluate whether a candidate demonstrates each operational indicator.

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**.3. Example of assessment grid for Cook**

General criteria	General indicator	Operational indicator	Level of success	Evaluation	Comments
4. Compliance with the rules for security, hygiene, environment and storage	4.1 Good practices for hygiene and security are respected	4.1.1 The candidate is dressed in the appropriate outfit (cap, jacket or blouse, apron, work trousers, safety shoes) throughout the test	Indicator must be observed	YES/NO	
		4.1.2 The candidate follows instructions for hand washing	One mistake tolerated	YES/NO	
		4.1.3 The candidate does not wear jewelry or nail polish	Indicator must be observed	YES/NO	
		4.1.4 The candidate avoids any cross contamination (compliance with the principle of forward movement, materials that have fallen on the ground etc)	Indicator must be observed	YES/NO	
		4.1.5 The candidate respects the safety rules	Indicator must be observed	YES/NO	
		4.1.6 Candidate uses clean spoon when tasting a dish	One mistake tolerated	YES/NO	
		THRESHOLD FOR THIS CRITERIA	**5/6 passed, obligatory passing of 4.1.1 and 4.1.2**	**YES/NO**	

Evaluation Committee

The Evaluation Committee, known as a jury in Belgium, is comprised of three members: an evaluator, an observer, and the manager of the validation centre.

The evaluator is often a trainer within the occupation being validated. They have experience in assessing candidates in formal education and are knowledgeable in carrying out practical tests. All evaluators are

trained by the CVDC, and the training covers methodology, main principles, how to use the assessment grid, how to decide the final outcome, and what are the candidate's rights.

The observer is an active professional from the labour market (or retired less than 2 years). Their role is to ensure the practical test is in line with labour market practices, and the equipment and products used in the practical test are up to date with what is used in the labour market. The observer does not assess the candidate, rather they serve as a quality check measure to ensure the practical test is relevant. Observers cannot influence the outcomes of the validation process, but if they find the test to not be in line with labour market practices they can submit a request to the CVDC to change the practical test.

The validation centre manager is on the evaluation committee to ensure the practical test is carried out correctly with the appropriate equipment, and that all candidates are treated fairly.

Each member of the jury is given a supporting document that details how the test will be caried out, which criteria will be assessed, what tasks will be given to the candidate, what must be observed to pass the test, which questions should the candidate be asked by the jury, and what are the margins of error. This document is detailed and can even contain pictures of final products for the jury to consult before passing judgement. The jury cannot deviate from the test description, to ensure the test is carried out in the same manner across all validation centres. The jury has no room to adjust the test to the candidate, other than submitting a request to the CVDC for improvement. The document is in practice a plug-and-play of the practical test and is confidential.

Guidance

Guidance is provided via an individual interview with a candidate that is free of charge. Guidance is organised within the validation centres, and is conducted by the evaluator (though sometimes the manager or trainer can carry out the guidance) to provide information and guidance on the assessment. The objective of the guidance phase is to assess whether the candidate has a high likelihood of succeeding in validation. The guidance advisor considers: 1) the candidate's experience and knowledge of the job, and 2) the nature of the skills assessed during the test and the specific test procedures. In case of negative opinion, the guidance advisor may recommend the candidate to further training, self-motivated learning on specific topics, or validation of different SU and occupations. The intention is to prevent candidates from participating in a validation test if they have a low chance of success, as failure can be demotivating for some candidates. However, the candidate may choose to carry on with validation even if the guidance advisor gives a negative opinion.

Guidance is also provided at the end of the validation process ff the candidate fails the validation test. This guidance includes feedback on why the candidate failed, and recommendations on what further activities (such as training) could increase their likelihood of passing the test next time.

Skill Validation test

A candidate can take the same test twice in six months, and if they fail twice then there is a six-month delay before they can register for validation again.

In the Belgian system, the validation is conducted exclusively through simulated professional tests. Portfolios are not used for validation in the Belgium system. The practical test is conducted in an accredited validation centre. The test is overseen by a three-person jury comprised of the manager of the centre, one evaluator and one external observer. Several candidates can undertake the test at the same time, overseen by the same jury. The requirements/limits on how many candidates a jury can oversee is dependent on the validation programme and set out in the validation referential. The validation referential also details the length of the tests, the tasks, the requirements, and equipment needed.

Validation centres can choose which tests they want to schedule and when. Some centres choose to have set dates for testing (this applies to the in-demand occupations), while other centres wait until enough candidates have registered for a test to set the date. Validation centres can choose whether to offer a given validation programme, and the role of the CVDC is to encourage centres to offer tests to promote geographic coverage of validation.

The evaluation centres cover the cost of equipment while the CVDC offers the cost of consumables. Validation is free for the candidate.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.**.4. Features of the Belgian and Croatian system and further considerations**

Topic	Features in Belgian system	Similar feature in Croatia	Further consideration?
Evaluation Committee	Three person jury comprising a validation centre manager, evaluator (trainer/teacher), and observer (professional). Evaluator carries out evaluation while manager ensures smooth running of test and observer ensures relevance with labour market practices	Will include representative from labour market in Evaluation Committee	Should the labour market representative also evaluate the candidate or just make sure the evaluation is in line with labour market practices?
Eligibility	All individuals aged 18+ with some work experience (work experience requirement dependent on occupational profile and Skill Unit tested)	All individuals aged 14+ with a minimum of 3 or 4 years of work experience, depending on the validation programme	
Guidance	Mandatory guidance provided by the evaluator. Purpose is to assess whether the candidate has a high likelihood of obtaining validation based on work experience and knowledge. Guidance advisor (evaluator) gives opinion to candidate, and the candidate can choose whether to respect the opinion or not. If guidance advisor thinks candidate is unlikely to obtain validation, they must suggest further training or identify areas of improvement.	All candidates will receive guidance through the identification and documentation process. The guidance advisor may end the validation process if the candidate is unlikely to succeed in the assessment	Should the guidance advisor be able to end the validation process if the candidate does not display enough knowledge or skills in the identification and documentation phases? Should the guidance be carried out by a member of the adult education institution or by a member of the Evaluation Committee?
RPL standards	The information in the validation referential is more detailed and adapted to the validation process than the SFMQ occupational standards that they are based on. The validation referentials include a description of the occupation, key competence areas, task, and evaluation criteria. The	To be determined	Who should be responsible for developing the RPL standards in Croatia? This would involve identifying which learning outcomes from the CROQF should be prioritised for validation and adding tasks and evaluation criteria adapted for validation.

	Coref develops the validation referentials.		
Assessment	Assessments are always practical assessments in Belgium. Evaluators also choose from a list of questions to ask throughout the practical assessment to guage the candidate's knowledge. Tasks, questions, and equipment are pre-determined through the validation referential, and there is no opportunity for evaluators to adjust the assessment to the candidate.	Practical assessment will be the norm, but there are discussions on allowing oral tests and interviews as a supplementary tool. There are discussions on allowing evaluators to tailor the assessment to the candidate.	Should tests be standardized? Or can Evaluators tailor the test based on the individual?
Assessment location	All assessments are carried out at validation centres, which need to be pre-approved by the CVDC. The validation centres supply and cover the cost of equipment, while the CVDC covers the cost of consumables.	Assessments will be conducted mainly at adult education institutions, however, there are options to carry out assessments at the applicant's workplace or with another business entity with which the adult education institution has a contract.	Should assessments be limited to validation centres, or are other assessment locations (e.g. workplace) permissible? Who will be responsible for funding the validation test (equipment + consumables)?
Certification	Certification given to Skills Units which combined can comprise a full qualification. Skills Certificates are not recognized as equivalent to formal VET qualifications.	Certification given to full qualifications and micro-credentials. Adult education institutions can offer validation for a combination of micro-credentials that originate from different qualifications. The outcome from validation will be recognized as equivalent to formal qualifications.	How to ensure that it is straight-forward to stack micro-credentials into full qualifications? (One possibility: require adult education institutions to offer all micro-credentials needed for a full qualification, and only if all the learning outcomes in a given micro-credential originate from the same qualification) Should validation for regulated professions (e.g. health sector) be limited to micro-credentials and partial qualifications?
Introducing new validation programmes	RPL standards are developed at the request of the Government or professional sector. Validation programmes do not exist for all occupations. The CVDC can create validation programmes for all education levels, though most validation programmes are for level 2-5. However, there is increasing demand for high-level programmes 7-8 such as IT professions and managerial occupations.	Validation only offered for level 1-4.	Should validation be extended to higher levels to capture increasing demand for high-level qualifications, particularly in IT sector?

Annex: International templates of RPL standards and task sheets

Annex 1: RPL standard for Cook in France: Referentiel d'Evaluation du Titre Professionnel Cuisine

Annex 2: RPL standard for Cook in Germany: Tätigkeitsprofil Köchin

Annex 3: RPL standard for Chef in Germany

Annex 4: Task sheet for Cook/Chef in Germany: Aufgabenstellung für Fremdbewertung

Annex 5: RPL standard for cook in Spain: Cualificación Professional Cocina nivel 2

Annex 6: RPL standard for Cook in French-speaking Belgium: SFMQ Profil Formation Cusinier(e) travaillant seul(e)

Annex 7: RPL standard for Web Developer in France: Referentiel d'Evualuation du Titre Professionnel Développeur web et web mobile

Annex 8: RPL standards for IT Specialist in Germany: Tätigkeitsprofil: Fachinformatiker/-in, Fachrichtung Systemintegration

Annex 9: RPL standard for Web Developer in Spain