

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – PALESTINE*



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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 NQF snapshot

Palestine plans an eight-level qualifications framework (NQF) based on learning outcomes and covering all education and training sectors.

An NQF Working Group developed a draft NQF in 2010, but the Cabinet did not approve it. No law on a Palestinian NQF has been adopted yet. At the time of writing, work on the framework is in abeyance. Once work is resumed on the framework, the Government plans to assign responsibility for its development to a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Commission.

International donors play a major part in supporting development of the country's VET system, including the NQF.

Authorities have defined the purpose, scope and objectives of the NQF; a working group has been established; international experts and donors are supporting the initiative; and engagement of some local stakeholders has been undertaken to raise awareness and signal the state's intention to build an NQF. However, no law has been adopted yet and no roles or functions allocated to actors and stakeholders. Palestine is therefore in the early phases of the design stage.

1.2 Policy context

Palestine's economy was contracting before COVID struck in 2020. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2019 had declined by 1.6% compared to 2018, as population growth exceeded that of GDP. GDP is significantly higher in the West Bank than Gaza, which suffers even more from the prevailing political and economic conditions. Palestinian and international bodies, such as the World Bank, were predicting further contraction even before the 2020 pandemic. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Palestinian Monetary Authority (PMA) estimate that COVID could potentially cut GDP by up to 7%.

Palestine has a young and rapidly growing population, which puts pressure on the labour market and education and training capacities and provision. Between 2000 and 2016, the working-age population in Palestine increased by 83%. Jobs are hard to come by, especially for younger people.

Employment rates are very low, at 33.1% in 2019, and particularly for women, 10.6% in 2019. Unemployment levels are high and persistent – in 2019, the overall unemployment rate for Palestine stood at 25.3%. Figures are higher for women at 41%; young people 15–24, 40.1%, and in Gaza, 45%.

The country is over-reliant on public sector employment, which employs 20% of the workforce. About 13.2% of workers work in Israel and the settlements, while the remaining 66.1% are employed in the private sector.

Responding to the COVID 19 pandemic, all schools closed in March 2020. There was little prior experience of online and remote learning, but a combination of government, stakeholder, civil society, private sector, and international donor initiatives ensured continuity of service, for the most part. The Ministry of Education (MoE) issued a five-page guideline to teachers on distance learning. Higher education institutions, especially the technical colleges, used distance learning techniques and

platforms. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHE) helped technical colleges through offering special training programmes in e-learning for teachers and instructors. The Ministry also provided 9 colleges with programming software. In Jericho, the YMCA Vocational School used online methods to teach a course in sustainable agriculture, with students using home gardens and video reports to complete assignments.

1.3 NQF legal basis

No law has been adopted.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

2.1 Education and training reforms

The National Policy Agenda 2017–2022 recognises the importance of education for economic growth and sustainable development. It identifies quality education for all as a national priority. Sectoral strategies have been developed within the Agenda. In education and training, the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017–2022 comprises three strategic goals:

ensuring safe, inclusive and equitable access to quality education at all levels of the system;

developing a student-centred teaching and learning pedagogy and environment;

enhancing accountability and results-based leadership, governance and management.

Developing the NQF is one of the actions in the Plan. The NQF also supports delivery of the Ministry of Labour Strategy 2017-2022, in particular its aim to equip people for the needs of the labour market

One of the objectives of the newly revised Labour Sector Strategy 2020–2022 is to increase the effectiveness of the TVET system and to make it more relevant to the needs of the labour market. It also highlights the need for a functioning TVET governance system that is regulated by legislation in line with international standards.

The National TVET Strategy dates from 2010 and is being revised.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for general education from kindergarten to upper secondary school, while the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is responsible for higher education in universities and technical colleges. In VET, in addition to the MoE, other players are the centres affiliated to the Ministry of Labour (MoL), the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Former Detainees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), civil society organisations (CSOs), including those that are faith-based, and private for-profit training providers e.g. the Electricity Company.

The Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) are non-formal VET providers, either operated and overseen by the Ministry of Labour or privately run. They offer flexible provision, day and evening courses. The state-run centres number circa 15-29, while the private sector runs almost 200. The VTCs overall are popular, often having to turn down requests for places.

Due to the fragmented VET system, it is difficult to say with certainty what the enrolment rates are in VET. ETF estimates that about 15% of students in the upper secondary education age cohort (16–18 years), pursue VET paths.

But it does appear that enrolments in VET are increasing, partly due to government efforts, which include diversifying the programmes available. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has made efforts to increase enrolment in VET and to lower the barrier between VET and general education by introducing vocational units and a technology track in general education. VET subjects have been included in grades 7-9 in general education. Technical education is provided by 41 colleges in the West Bank and Gaza, offering a range of specialisations.

In higher education, some universities are now also providing technical education. ETF's Network for Excellence includes a Palestinian Centre, Al-Quds University, which operates a dual study programme, academic study combined with work experience and other exposure to the workplace.

VET levels are linked with the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) as follows: 1. Semi-skilled worker; 2. Skilled worker; 3. Craftsman 4. Technician and 5. Specialist.

Providers offering programmes at these levels include:

- the Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), at ASCO 1 and 2;
- the Vocational Secondary Schools (VSSs) at ASCO 3;
- the technical colleges and universities at ASCO 4 and 5.

2.2 Aims of NQF

Authorities intend that the planned NQF:

- improve understanding of qualifications and levels of qualifications; and give a clear picture of the relevance of educational outcomes to individuals and employers;
- define the meaning of qualification and introduce learning outcomes into the education and training system;
- contribute to structuring an integrated system of qualifications, by facilitating progression and pathways between qualifications and programmes in different institutions, providers and education sectors;
- through use of labour market analysis and standards, ensure the relevance of qualifications to labour market and employer needs;
- support regional and international recognition of qualifications;
- enable recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- act as the national reference point for qualifications, to allow recognition both at home and abroad of national qualifications;
- be the basis of a comprehensive accreditation system;
- contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

3. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

3.1 NQF scope and structure

Authorities and stakeholders have agreed in principle on an 8-level framework spanning all levels of qualifications and all education and training sectors. The proposed draft descriptors are knowledge,

skills and competences, plus a range of technical and social competences e.g. maintenance of information and flexibility.

Experts and officials have been guided in NQF development by drawing on the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations system (referred to above), which classifies occupations by the categories of Specialist, Technician, Craftsman, Skilled worker, and Semi-skilled worker. Mapping these categories to the proposed NQF qualifications levels resulted in the following comparisons:

Qualifications for ASCO Specialist would map to NQF level 6;

Qualifications for ASCO Technician would map to NQF level 5.

Qualifications for ASCO Craftsman would map to NQF level 4.

Qualifications for ASCO Skilled Worker would map to NQF level 3.

Qualifications for ASCO Semi-skilled Worker would map to NQF level 2.

3.2 Types of qualifications

Officials from the engaged ministries and GIZ have provisionally mapped vocational qualifications types to the proposed NQF model.

This analysis provisionally allocates the following types by NQF level (see also the graphic in Section 10):

NQF level 8, Doctorate and similar advanced university degrees;

NQF level 7, Master's degrees; and the Higher Diploma;

NQF level 6, the Technical Baccalaureate, taken in higher technical education;

NQF level 5, the Technical Diploma;

NQF level 4, the Secondary Vocational Certificate;

NQF level 3, Certificate of Education, taken in 10th grade; and vocational training certificate level II;

NQF level 2, Certificate of Education, taken in 6th grade; and vocational training certificate level I.

Vocational school students take the vocational general secondary examination, leading to the Secondary Vocational Certificate, at Level 4. Technical college students take the comprehensive applied examination. VTC students take practical and theory examinations.

3.3 Quality assurance of qualifications

The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) licenses higher education institutions and colleges and accredits their programmes.

The Ministries of Education and Labour run the systems for accrediting and licensing VET institutions and the adoption of their programmes. However, there is not yet a systematic availability and application of qualification standards, and assessment and certification standards and guidelines, to quality-assure qualifications and their assessment and award.

3.4 Use of learning outcomes and standards

Learning outcomes are the conceptual basis of the planned level descriptors and future qualifications. In 2016, a pilot exercise was conducted to reference existing qualifications in the fashion design sector to the framework. Results from this exercise can inform a future levelling methodology which would guide referencing of qualifications to the framework.

Curriculum development for vocational training has been developed in accordance with the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations at the first and second NQF levels and was approved and launched by the Ministry of Labour at the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year.

3.5 Credit systems

No credit systems operate yet in VET or HE.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Until 2019, the Ministries of Labour, Education and Higher Education steered the NQF's development, cooperating with the TVET Development Centre, which was concerned with technical and operational issues. The government plans that the planned TVET Commission will lead and initiate development of the NQF. The Commission was approved by the cabinet in 2020 but is still awaiting approval from the Prime Minister's office. So, there is currently no designated institutional leader of the framework.

4.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

A range of stakeholders, including those ministries in charge of TVET provision, social partners, public and private education providers, learners, students, parents, employment offices, awarding bodies and quality assurance agencies, were engaged in the formulation of the first proposal for an NQF in Palestine.

Labour market data to support identification of in-demand occupations and so required occupational standards and qualifications, is scarce. The Palestinian Federation of Chambers and Commerce (FPCCI), the Palestinian Federation of Industry (PFI) and the trades unions are obvious partners in informing authorities of such need.

Local Employment and Training (LET) councils, established by the MoL with the support of GIZ, and which comprise representatives from the government, the private sector and civil society, are an additional potential stakeholder platform to draw on.

However, there is currently no active committee or NQF working group engaging stakeholders given that work on the NQF has halted.

5. RECOGNISING AND VALIDATING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

5.1 VNFIL arrangements¹

Establishing a system for validation of nonformal and informal learning is one element in the NQF plan, but it is lower in the priority list behind adopting legislation, defining the level descriptors etc., so no work has been undertaken yet.

6. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

6.1. Key achievements and main findings

Given that the NQF has not been legally established and is not operational, there is no impact or use by citizens or stakeholders. TVET stakeholders have been developing technical documents necessary for operationalisation of the framework, but none is yet completed or can be applied.

6.2 Career information and guidance

In recent years, career guidance in TVET institutions has improved significantly, and a number of systemic and sustainable changes, for instance the establishment of career guidance units in universities have been made. Career guidance services for adults are also available.

7. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORK/ OTHER FRAMEWORKS

7.1 Referencing to regional frameworks

The Arab Standard Classification of Occupations has been the key external reference tool in developing the NQF.

7.2 International donor support

The first design of the NQF was developed with support from GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), a German development agency. ETF has worked with GIZ and national authorities in developing the NQF.

ENABEL, Belgium's development agency, is active in supporting VET in Palestine broadly e.g. in work-based learning methodologies and projects.

UNRWA was an early actor in establishing the TVET system. The agency offers training to refugee students and refugees' children in its TVET institutions.

8. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Although the Ministries of Labour, Education and Higher Education have approved the NQF design, there is still no law and progress has been limited to piloting some methodologies in a few sectors in cooperation with donors. Future development depends on settled leadership of the NQF, which in turn depends on activating the planned new TVET Commission by providing it with sufficient financial and human resources.

Levels of vocational education and training TVET	Levels according to the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO)	Qualifications covered by the level	Levels according to the National Qualifications Framework NQF	ISCED levels
Higher technical education (Technical Baccalaureate)	Specialist	Third university degree (PhD) and equivalent qualifications from previous learning	8	8
		Second University Degree (Master's) and Higher Diploma at Master's level, courses and specialized training programs equivalent to the Masters degrees and equivalent qualifications obtained from previous learning	7	7
		First university degree (baccalaureate), specialized courses and training programs of the level of baccalaureate and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous learning	6	6
Technical Education (Technical Diploma)	Technician	Intermediate and technical diploma certificate, and specialized training programs and courses equivalent to the diploma and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous learning	5	4
Vocational secondary education (Secondary Vocational certificate)	Craftsman	Academic and vocational high school diplomas and equivalent qualifications from previous learning	4	3
Vocational training (Long-term training programs)	Skilled worker	Certificate of basic education for the tenth grade and certificate of vocational training level II (long-term training programs) and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous education.	3	2
Vocational training (Short Term Training Programs)	Semi- skilled worker	Certificate of basic education for the sixth grade and certificate of vocational training level I (short-term training programs) and the equivalent qualifications obtained from previous education.	2	1
		Pre-school certificates and unskilled qualifications obtained by experience	1	0

Once activated, any working group or committee should prioritise completion of, and agreement to, the levels descriptors, and engaging stakeholders to advise on these. Further, a law encompassing the NQF e.g. within a wider VET law, should be adopted, phrased in flexible language to allow for more specific secondary regulations later to cover implementation arrangements e.g. stakeholder roles and functions, institutional arrangements, QA systems and tools and validation arrangements.

9. MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/regions-and-countries/countries/palestine>

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/trp-assessment-reports/palestine-2020>

<https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/trp/torino-process-2018-2020-palestine-national-report>

<https://www.enabel.be/content/enabel-palestinian-territory>

<https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/379.html>

10. INFOGRAPHIC: DRAFT TVET LEVELS FRAMEWORK

Source: General Directorate for Vocational Training - Ministry of Labour

Note: the above table is a provisional analysis of existing qualifications types against ASCO classifications, and NQF and ISCED levels. It has no official status.

ABBREVIATIONS

ASCO Arab Standard Classification of Occupations

CVET Continuing Vocational Education and Training

ENABEL Belgian development agency

EQF European Qualifications Framework

GDP Gross domestic product

GE General Education

GIZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (development agency)

HE Higher Education

ISCED International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO)

IVET Initial Vocational Education and Training

MoE Ministry of Education

MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development (MoSD)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCBS	The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNWRA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VTCs	Vocational Training Centres

REFERENCES

ETF Country Fiche (2020):

https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/Country%20Fiche%202020%20Palestine%20-%20Education_%20Training%20and%20Employment%20Developments.pdf

ETF Quality Assurance fiche (2020): https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-01/quality_assurance_in_vet_palestine.pdf

Where to find out more

Website

www.etf.europa.eu

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<https://openspace.etf.europa.eu>

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