

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN TUNISIA

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IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National context

Tunisia is a country in North Africa that had 11.6 million inhabitants in 2019.¹ It is a key partner of the European Union, which is by far its main economic partner (80 % of its trade) and with which it signed a free trade agreement in 1995.

The country's economic growth fluctuated significantly during the period 2000-2015, with rates of almost 7 % in 2007 but also negative growth in 2011 (-2.38 %). From 2016, this rate improved somewhat, reaching 2.5 % in 2018 before dropping to 1 % in 2019 and further decreasing by over 8 % in 2020.

The Tunisian economy is largely focused on services, which account for over 60 % of its GDP and employ almost half the active population.

The overall labour force participation rate has stabilised over the last ten years at around 47 % with a rate for men two and a half times higher than for women. The employment rate also remained steady over the same period at around 40 %, while the rate for men was three times higher than for women.

In terms of human development, Tunisia was ranked 95 in the world in 2020 with a HDI of 0.740.

1.2 Statistics

TABLE 1: POPULATION

	Population in millions of inhabitants	Percentage of young people (15-24)
2010	10 566	24.4
2014	11 007	21.1
2017	11 446	21.1

Source: National Institute of Statistics

TABLE 2: EMPLOYMENT

	Employment rate (15 years +)	Youth employment rate (15-24)
2010	40.8	22
2015	39.9	18.7
2017	39.8	19.7

Source: National Institute of Statistics

¹ Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators (WDI) database.

TABLE 3: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF THE ADULT POPULATION (15 YEARS +)

	Low level	Medium level	High level
2010	58.7 %	21.2 %	20 %
2013	56.6 %	22 %	21 %
2015	56.4 %	22.8 %	21.1 %

Source: National Institute of Statistics

TABLE 4: VOCATIONAL TRAINING PARTICIPATION RATE

	Secondary (ISCED level 3)
2010	9.1 %
2016	9.6 %

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Equivalence with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): low level = ISCED levels 0-2; medium level = ISCED levels 3-4; high level = ISCED level 5.

TABLE 5: EDUCATION SPENDING

	2010	2014	2017
% of GDP	6.1	6.5	6.1
% of public spending	24.4	22.8	21.1

Source: INS and UIS

1.3 Vocational education and training (VET) system

Governance and management

Policymaking, monitoring and evaluation in the field of vocational training form part of the tasks assigned to the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment (MFPE). For this purpose, it is supported by a network of institutions, including the Tunisian Agency for Vocational Training (ATFP), the National Centre for Training of Trainers and Training Course Design (CENAFFIF), the National Centre for Continuing Training and Career Development (CNFCPP) and the National Agency for Employment and Independent Work (ANETI). Furthermore, the Ministry jointly supervises public training institutions that operate under the authority of other ministerial departments. Its role mainly involves monitoring all pedagogical aspects, evaluation and certification. It is also required to monitor private vocational training institutions.

The National Council for Social Dialogue, established in 2017, and the standing committee on the coordination of vocational training, formed in 2003, two thirds of the members of which represent social partners, are the main consultative bodies.

The role of civil society in the governance of the system remains limited.

Funding

The State provides almost all funding for initial training, both for the investment and the operational costs of the public entities responsible for initial training. Little account is taken of the performance of public training institutions for this funding, and the budget allocated is calculated on a historical basis.

Learners and their families cover the costs of training in private institutions. However, and given the national priorities in human resource development and the needs of businesses for intermediate-level qualifications, the State covers all or a portion of the training costs through the training cheque given to training applicants.

Regulatory framework and strategic development

The VET system is governed by three separate laws passed in 2008: the first on vocational training, the second on higher education and the third on education and school teaching.

In accordance with Law 10-2008, vocational training includes initial training and continuing education. Initial training involves developing the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to carry out an activity in a professional or artisanal sector and to participate in working life. The purpose of continuing education is to develop workers' knowledge and professional skills, to improve the productivity and enhance the competitiveness of businesses, to provide the conditions for workers' career advancement, to enable them to increase the level of their qualifications, and to enable them to develop, if applicable, the skills needed to engage in a new profession.

Vision for the sector and major plans for reform

The overall goal of the reform of the national vocational training framework, started in 2014, was to 'develop a national vocational training framework that meets the needs of individuals, businesses, the regions and society as part of an overall and shared vision of a human resource development system'; its success depends on 13 structural projects:

- Establish a national human resource development body.
- Develop a unified national system for vocational information and guidance.
- Set up a scheme for the training and integration of early school leavers.
- Establish an integrated system for monitoring, forecasting and identifying skill needs.
- Develop training course and teaching design.
- Develop a training programme for teaching, supervisory and vocational training support staff.
- Establish a national system for the certification of learning outcomes.
- Restructure and modernise vocational training centres and develop their attractiveness.
- Develop continuing education to improve its effectiveness for the benefit of businesses and social partners.
- Introduce a new system to manage the national vocational training framework that promotes partnership.
- Establishment of an employment/vocational training integrated information system.
- Establishment of a performance measuring system for the national vocational training framework based on performance indicators.
- Introduce a communication strategy on vocational training.

Main training providers

Vocational training in Tunisia is provided by a range of operators:

- the ATFP, operating under the MFPE and with 136 schools that offer over 300 training specialisms;
- the other sectoral ministerial departments: the Agency for Agricultural Vulgarisation and Training (AVFA) under the Ministry of Agriculture with 39 schools, the Ministry of National Defence with 10 schools and the Training Agency for Tourism Trades (AFMT) under the Ministry of Tourism with 8 schools;
- The private vocational training sector comprises 1 169 schools that provide initial vocational training and only around 250 that offer training certified by a recognised certificate.

Main training programmes or types of training

Vocational training includes:

- initial training** provided by public and private institutions with two training modes: work-based training and centre-based training. According to the National Observatory for Employment and Qualifications (ONEQ), in 2017, 85 % of learners in the public system were engaged in work-based training, with 79 % in the work-linked training mode and 6 % in the apprenticeship mode. Only 15 % of learners were attending centre-based training.
- continuing education** mainly provided by private institutions (of which there are around 3 873) within the framework of funding instruments managed by the CNFCPP, which also provides training cycles that lead to a certificate for workers and promote their career advancement.
- further training courses are provided for the unemployed in active employment programmes run by the ANETI.

Organisation of initial training (diplomas and certificates)

Initial vocational training has three cycles corresponding respectively to qualification levels 2, 3 and 4, which lead to the recognised CAP (Certificate Of Vocational Aptitude), BTP (Vocational Technician Diploma) and the BTS (Advanced Technician Diploma).

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Overview

The quality assurance system is managed by the Directorate for evaluation and quality in education within the MFPE. It is structured as follows:

- a 'product' component, which concerns the quality of the qualifications awarded by the training system, in particular as regards the compliance of learning outcomes with the descriptors in the national qualifications classification;

- a 'process' component, which ensures the adoption of a quality approach in training institutions, in particular based on the national quality standard for vocational training (RNQFP).

2.2 Quality assurance related to key VET areas

Quality assurance in the vocational training systems is monitored in the following areas:

- statistical monitoring and measurement using performance indicators;
- monitoring of the diploma and certificate system;
- monitoring of training providers;
- monitoring of training for trainers.

Evidence –statistics, and research and development

The provision of information on labour supply and demand is based primarily on the use of the following elements:

- the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics through households surveys;
- the studies carried out by the ONEQ, the latest of which (in 2019) addressed the addition of certificates to the national vocational training system;
- the work of the CENAFFIF;
- the data provided by the ANETI.

In addition, as already mentioned, the package of reforms, which is being implemented, envisages the establishment of an integrated system for monitoring, forecasting and identifying qualification needs.

The information system on training provision is in operation. The data gathered concern: numbers of learners and pass rates, the employment of graduates according to level of qualification and business sector, and unemployment rates according to education/qualification level. Furthermore, the aforementioned data is systematically included in the annual performance report (APR) produced by the ministerial unit for budget management by objectives.

Quality assurance and the qualifications cycle

The CENAFFIF designs training programmes centrally and makes them available to training centres. The programmes are designed in close cooperation with employers' associations according to the competency-based approach, divided into modules and revised every five years.

In 1994, Tunisia adopted a national employment classification which recognises vocational training certificates and diplomas through a diploma recognition system. To date, a total of almost 350 certificates have been recognised, 15 % of which were issued by around 250 private institutions. Following the enactment of Law No 10-2008, this classification was revised and replaced by the 'national qualifications classification (CNQ)', which has seven levels and uses the following six descriptors: complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, knowledge, competence and behaviour. The CNQ was established in 2009 by Decree No 2139 of 8 July 2009. As part of efforts to establish the principle of lifelong learning, it helps to strengthen links between the human resource development framework and the needs of economic sectors, and also to improve the transparency of certificates for businesses, individuals and education, training and higher education institutions.

Furthermore, based on the results of the PEFESE² programme (2014-2016) and in order to enhance the quality of certificates awarded following an initial training course, a project was launched to standardise the diploma recognition system, including the areas of training and certification of learning outcomes. Its implementation is still ongoing.

Quality assurance and VET provision/provider institutions

The quality assurance mechanisms of training providers vary according to whether they are public or private institutions.

Public institutions, particularly those within the ATFP, are encouraged to use the national vocational training quality standard (RNQFP) to determine their positioning, which may result in an improvement plan. Self-positioning is similar to a self-assessment. However, the use of this standard is at the training centre's discretion: they may choose to implement it or not to, as they are not required to share the results of this positioning internally with their teams or externally.

The ATFP only adopted the eight-part standard in 2019; it includes the following components:

- the seven key processes for the organisation and management of a vocational training centre (managing the training centre, managing the finances, providing general resources, managing human resources, developing training courses, organising training courses, holding training courses);
- a quality management process implemented in the centre called 'continuous quality improvement'.

The ATFP has begun updating these eight processes, particularly by introducing a digitisation process, and has started to carry out procedures to position its centres by referring to the quality standards contained in the RNQFP. It should be noted that the ISO process to certify the training centres under the ATFP based on the RNQFP started in the early 2000s but stopped in 2012. It is important to rekindle this process, to extend it to all public and private training institutions and, above all, to take the necessary steps to ensure its sustainability.

However, private training institutions are free to establish the quality assurance systems that suit their needs.

Quality assurance and VET teacher/trainer qualifications standards and continuing professional development

The ATFP employs almost three quarters of trainers and almost all learning advisors who are educationally trained at the time of their recruitment and before starting work. There are no university courses to prepare students for training professions. Under the terms of the 2008 law, the trainers and learning advisors must be evaluated regularly, but this does not seem to be implemented systematically.

The CENAFFIF is responsible for training and continuing education, for both technical and pedagogical aspects, for trainers in the public and private sector. Furthermore, in 2018, the CENAFFIF launched discussions on teacher training for trainers as part of a broad project to adopt the ISO 17024 standard; in particular, this involved an initial attempt to launch the project through an internal call for

² Support Programme for education and training linked to graduate employability.

tenders, which was not successful. In addition, as part of the ETF Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, the Ministry held a peer visit in April 2019 with representatives of 15 countries from both shores of the Mediterranean on the subject of certification of pedagogical competences of vocational teachers in Tunisia, and in particular the evaluation of its very advanced design process. ***In the light of this work, it was recommended to stabilise the design process and complete its regulatory framework.***

3. DEVELOPMENTS, EMERGING NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

New developments

In the ATFP, and in addition to the work to update and implement the RNQFP, a project to establish inter-company training centres has been ongoing since early 2020, with the support of the German agency for international cooperation (GIZ). This project involves establishing centres within companies, setting up entrepreneurship centres and accrediting the ‘training companies’.

A technical quality assurance committee set up in the ministry carries out regular monitoring and evaluation work in order to discuss issues relating to the two aforementioned quality components and exchanges with the ETF, as part of Tunisia’s participation in the ETF Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training. The aim of the work of the Directorate for evaluation and quality is also to support the work of the future national Committee for evaluation and quality assurance in vocational training provided for by Article 57 of Law 2008-10 on vocational training.

In 2018, the CENAFFIF achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification on the design of training courses for trainers, and more specifically on the development of training course design and upskilling for training, support and guidance providers.

In the area of continuing education for employees, in 2008 the CNFCPP introduced a quality system in accordance with the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard. It is therefore committed to improving the services that it offers its clients, mainly workers, companies, organisations and professional bodies.

In addition to the ISO 9001 certification and ensuring that the certification audit is duly carried out every 3 years by a competent organisation, the CNFCPP launched a project in 2019, in collaboration with the National Institute for Standardization and Industrial Property, on ‘a quality label for continuing education’ to be awarded to companies making efforts in this direction. In 2021, the first cohort of companies obtained this label from the CNFCPP.

As for ANETI, mention should also be made of a project that has been ongoing since early 2020, which involves the implementation of a quality management system according to the ISO 9001:2015 standard in ANETI’s central management and employment offices. After a mock audit and an external audit conducted by an awarding body, the project will result in the award of the certificate before the end of 2021.

Needs

The needs of the national vocational training system in the field of quality assurance are centred around the key RNQFP instrument, with the aim of making it the most appropriate benchmark for the quality and performance of the system.

In fact, the system requires technical assistance to, firstly, implement the new digitisation process introduced in the RNQFP and, secondly, establish a self-evaluation procedure for training centres or an internal audit based on the RNQFP indicators and standards, with a view to certification or preparation for certification, acceptance as a centre of excellence in the ENE network, or accreditation of training centres in line with the accreditation system to be implemented according to the provisions of Law No 10-2008.

4. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

As part of the participation of the ministry responsible for vocational training and employment in the vocational centres of excellence initiative, launched by the ETF, in 2019 the Tunisian team prepared four examples of good practices in the fields of initial and continuing vocational training and promotion of employability. Each example is from one of the four structures supervised by the Ministry. The example proposed by the CENAFFIF involves an innovative conceptual approach to enable generic lessons to be incorporated into a training programme following the competency-based approach and to be implemented. The example put forward by the ATFP concerns specialisation training by targeting higher education or other graduates and teaching them specialisation-specific skills, with employers that have high recruitment needs. The example proposed by the CNFCPP focuses on vocational training or higher education at the *École Ouverte des Travailleurs* (Open School for Workers) where around 10 000 workers register each year to obtain a certificate after completing a *blended* online learning course. The example provided by the ANETI relates to tailor-made training to improve the employability of young participants (40 in total) as part of a short targeted training course to meet the immediate needs of a business sector (textiles and clothing) in a particular region (Monastir).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFMT	Training Agency for Tourism Trades
ANETI	National Agency for Employment and Independent Work
APR	Annual performance report
ATFP	Tunisian Vocational Training Agency
AVFA	Agency for Agricultural Expansion and Training
BTP	Vocational technician diploma
BTS	Advanced technician diploma
CENAFFIF	National Centre for Training of Trainers and Training Course Design
CNFCPP	National Centre for Continuing Education and Training and Professional Promotion
CNQ	National qualifications classification
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	German agency for international cooperation
HDI	Human development index
INNORPI	National Institute for Standardisation and Industrial Property
INS	National Institute of Statistics
MFPE	Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment
ONEQ	National Observatory for Employment and Qualifications
PEFESE	Support programme for education and training linked to graduate employability
RNQFP	National vocational training quality standard
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VET	Vocational education and training
WDI	World Development Indicators