

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – KOSOVO*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kosovo adopted in law its National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2008. It consists of 8 levels, defined by three sets of descriptors; and is a comprehensive lifelong learning framework, encompassing qualifications from all sectors of education, plus non-formal qualifications. It is managed by an autonomous agency, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA). Kosovo is a potential candidate for EU accession, is a member of the EQF Advisory Group, and referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016. Its NQF is at the activation stage.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 Policy context

Kosovo gained independence in 2008. A Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union (EU) and Kosovo came into force on 1 April 2016. The SAA supports the implementation of reforms and seeks to move Kosovo closer to the EU.

Kosovo's NQF and VET system must be placed within the context of its recent history, ongoing political uncertainty, and the resulting economic, social, and educational challenges. Unemployment levels remain high, growth is slow, the private sector is small and foreign investment limited. The country largely depends on remittances from the many Kosovars abroad and on donor support.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, labour market indicators had improved, although Kosovo still lags other Western Balkan countries against most indicators. High numbers of new labour market entrants every year and the lack of jobs translate into high inactivity and unemployment rates. In the Western Balkan region, Kosovo records the lowest female activity rate at 18.2% in 2019, and the highest youth unemployment rate at 49.4% in 2019 (though improved from 55.4% in 2018).

ETF estimated in 2019 that 52.4% of the upper secondary cohort, ISCED 3, are in VET schools. On leaving school, most young people, including those obtaining the VET Matura leaving certificate, aspire to enter higher education institutions (HEIs), given that university graduates usually fare better in the job market. Even so, employment opportunities are still limited, so that many young people access HE to defer entry into an unpromising labour market.

A national programme for the period 2017 to 2021 (Kosovo Government, 2017) was adopted, consisting of four main elements:

1. Rule of law - combatting corruption and organised crime by introducing changes in legislation and conducting a full review of the rule of law sector.
2. Economic development and employment – aiming to bring sustainable economic development to an average annual growth rate of 5–7%.
3. Euro-Atlantic integration – strengthening Kosovo's position in the international community by increasing recognition of the state by other countries and ensuring its membership in relevant international organisations.
4. Sectorial development – with a focus on education, health, social welfare, environment, and spatial planning, as well as culture, youth, and sport.

In its Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2021-2023¹, the government addresses education and training and labour market issues by committing itself to:

- increasing inclusiveness and quality of education in early childhood.

¹ [Guidelines on the content and format \(rks-gov.net\)](https://rks-gov.net)

- implementation of the new curricular framework in the vocational education and training system.
- reinforcing quality assurance in higher education by strengthening the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and raising the profile of higher education institutions.

In addition, ERP 2022-2024 addresses reform in pre-university education and seeks to support inclusion in early years education.

National strategies supporting these efforts, which address education and training and other sectors, are the following:

- the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2030²;
- the National Programme for the Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.
- the Strategy on Education and Career Orientation 2015–2019.
- the Quality Assurance Strategy for Kosovo Pre-University Education 2016–2020.
- Kosovo's Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017–2021 (MES, 2016); and the forthcoming KESP 2022-26.
- the Sector Strategy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 2018–2022 (MLSW, 2017a).
- the Action Plan: Increasing Youth Employment 2018–2020 (MLSW, 2017b).

KESP 2017-2021 strategic objective 6, which covers Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (VET & AE), gives the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) an important role in reforms to VET in Kosovo.

2.2 NQF legal basis

Law No 03/L-060 on national qualifications, adopted on 7 November 2008, established the Kosovo NQF.

Related legal and regulatory measures are the Law on Pre-University Education (Law No.04/L-032, 2011), the Law on Higher Education (Law No. 04/L-037, 2011), the Law on Adult Education and Training (Law No. 04-L-143, 2013) and the Law on Vocational Education and Training (Law No. 04/L-138, 2013).

Under the provisions of the Law on national qualifications, cited above, the National Qualifications Authority regulates the awarding of qualifications in the framework with the exception of qualifications which are regulated under the provisions of the Law on Higher Education and qualifications explicitly regulated by other legislation.

Relevant secondary legislation includes:

- Administrative Instruction No 28/2014 on criteria and procedures for the verification of occupational standards.
- Administrative Instruction No 31/2014 for prior learning recognition.
- Administrative Instruction No 32/2014 on criteria and procedures for quality assurance in VET institutions' internal processes.
- Administrative Instruction No 35/2014 on criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of national qualifications and accreditation of institutions providing qualifications in Kosovo.

² [National Development Strategy - 2030 - Zyra e Kryeministrit \(rks-gov.net\)](#)

Administrative instruction No. 09/2019 on criteria and procedures for the accreditation of institutions that implement recognition of prior learning in Kosovo.

NQF-related legislation includes:

- the Law on Vocational Education and Training (No 02/L-42, 23 February 2006) defines occupational standards, whereas the Law on national qualifications (No 03/L-060, 7 November 2008) provides a more general definition of standards.
- Law No 04/L-032 on pre-university education (20 August 2011) addresses levels of qualifications.
- Law No 04/L-037 on higher education (20 August 2011), addressing the levels and accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions, is carried out by the KAA, while the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad is carried out by MES.
- Law No 02/L-42 on vocational education and training (23 February 2006) defines qualifications standards, relating to the level of entry and several other definitions (student, diploma, etc.).
- Law No 02/L-24, on adult education and training (22 July 2005) defines certification as well as informal and non-formal learning.

Other relevant laws are:

- Law No 04/L-143, on adult education and training (2012).
- Law No 03/L-068, on education in the municipalities of Kosovo (2008).
- Law No 03/L-018, on final examination and the State Matura examination (2008).
- Law No 02/L-52, on pre-school education (2006).
- Law No. 06/L-046 on the education inspectorate (2019).

3. NQF OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS

3.1 NQF objectives

The objectives of the National Qualification System, based on the NQF, are to:

- improve the recognition of qualifications at all levels of formal and non-formal education and training.
- ensure that qualifications meet the needs of the labour market, economy, and society.
- regulate qualifications, assessment, and certification, based on quality and standards.
- improve access to assessment, including recognition of prior learning.
- make the qualifications system flexible and transparent.

3.2 NQF functions

The Kosovo Qualifications Framework is central to the government's aim to improve the quality of the education and training system and to drive it towards EU standards.

The Kosovo NQF is explicitly intended as a reform instrument and is perceived as a key tool in building and structuring the national education system. It should therefore not only relate or link the different sub-sectors of the national system but initiate and stimulate curricular and qualifications redesign and promote institutional change.

Kosovo's vision for VET system development is for an inclusive education system, based on lifelong learning principles, and offering quality education to all. The Government is continuing education reform towards increasing quality in pre-university education, improving the teacher career system, better reflection of economic demand in VET programmes and expansion of practical components.

The country's current guiding document in education and training is the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021. It is the second KESP, following the first, which ran 2011 to 2016. KESP 2017-21 was drafted by drawing on the evaluation of KESP 2011-2016, and the National Development Strategy, which recognised the need for investment and improvements in education, including VET, to turn Kosovo's labour force into an engine for development. KESP 2017-2021 intends to link education policy to the National Development Plan, emphasising the need for a more labour market-responsive education and training system. KESP 2017-2021 specifies measures to improve governance and to increase the quality of education in general.

A new KESP 2022-2026, is under preparation.

In VET, the strategy focuses on improving the relevance of school programmes in the light of labour market needs, the development of a VET-specific core curriculum in alignment with the Kosovo Curriculum Framework, offering systematic provision of high-quality work experience and professional practice, and, specific to Kosovo, the further development and sustainability of the six Centres of Competence.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST, now the Ministry of Education and Science - MES) established the Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE) and the Council for VET and Adult Education (CVETAE) in 2014. The full functioning of these two institutions is a challenge and a prerequisite for creating a more coherent approach in VET and adult education. In essence, their function is bringing together the full range of VET stakeholders for better cooperation between the public and private sectors.

4. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

4.1 NQF structure and level descriptors

The Qualifications Law (2008)³ defines the NQF as the national mechanism for classifying qualifications awarded within the national Qualification System according to a set of criteria.

The Kosovo NQF consists of eight qualifications levels, covering general education, higher education, and vocational education and training sectors. It is a lifelong learning framework, so that its qualifications cater to all types of learning contexts, such as formal, non-formal and informal learning. The qualifications levels are learning outcomes-based, as per the existing levels descriptors, distinguishing knowledge, skills, and wider competences.

The descriptors, as well as the framework overall, are strongly influenced by the EQF and draw on elements of other existing NQFs, such as the Scottish Qualifications Framework. They have been designed and developed, though, for Kosovo's conditions.

³ LAW NO.03/L-060 Law on National Qualifications

4.2 NQF scope and coverage

There are six specified types of qualification recognized in the NQF:

- Higher Education Qualifications
- General Education Qualifications
- Combined National Qualifications
- National Professional Qualifications
- Qualifications Based on International Standards
- Customized qualifications.

Qualifications are developed on unit or modular structures, in both VET and HE.

NQA is giving particular attention now to support expansion of provision of Level 5 qualifications.

Kosovo Qualifications Framework

KQF level	Qualifications		EQF level
	Award type	Qualification type	
8	Doctorate - Bologna 3rd cycle	A	8
7	Master - Bologna 2nd cycle	A	7
6	Bachelor - Bologna 1st cycle	A	6
5	Diploma from formal providers Certificate from non-formal providers	A, C, D, E	5
4	Matura certificate (general or vocational education) Vocational education diploma	B, C, D, E, F	4
3	Vocational education certificate (two years) Certificates from non-formal VET providers	B, C, D, E, F	3
2	Certificates from non-formal providers	B, C, D, E, F	2
1	Certificates from non-formal providers	B, C, D, E, F	1

Types of NQF qualifications: Higher Education Qualifications (A); General Education Qualifications (B); Combined National Qualifications (C); National Professional Qualifications (D); Qualifications Based on International Standards (E); Customized Qualifications (F). Source: National Qualifications Authority.

4.3 Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards

The NQF is built on the principles of learning outcomes. The qualifications are defined through the learning outcomes which state what the learner is expected to know and to be able to do on the successful completion of the module or of the full programme. For professional qualifications, the learning outcomes derive directly from the competences identified in the occupational standards.

Law No. 03/L-060 (Article 2) defines standards as measurable indicators of achievement, defined either in terms of qualitative or quantitative criteria that are required to be achieved by candidates for the award of qualifications.

In the context of the development of a system of professional qualifications for Kosovo, there are two main applications of the term “standards”. Occupational standards are descriptions of expected work tasks and responsibilities in an occupation. Learning outcomes within the adopted qualification standards are measures of assessed learning achievements.

As indicated above, defining occupational standards should be the starting point for development of curricula and assessment for outcomes-based VET qualifications and competence-based VET programmes. This is not yet the case for the Combined National Qualifications, not even with the latest, ongoing VET curriculum reform, which is implemented by teachers under the guidance of MES.

The specifications for a vocational education and training qualification also include a description on how the qualification links to employment structures, and evidence of consultation with labour market stakeholders.

4.4 Quality assurance arrangements

The legal basis for quality assurance is provided by Law No 03/L-060 on qualifications: Article 5 (NQF), Article 15 (Regulation of the award of qualifications).

NQA is responsible for standard-setting for the validation (approval) of qualifications and the accreditation of providers (authorisation to develop, offer and assess qualifications). Qualifications/modules are developed by MES, AVETAE, relevant ministries and other providers, public, private and third sector. NQA itself does not develop qualifications.

VET qualifications must be based on occupational standards if they are to be placed in the NQF.

Occupational standards are the starting point for outcomes-based curricula and outcomes-based qualifications. Occupational standards are developed in cooperation with MES, MLS and other relevant ministries and social partners. They are verified by the NQA and, in theory, should be approved by the CVETAE. But as CVETAE is still not fully functioning, it is NQA which still approves the standards.

Occupational standards should be used to provide a reference point for identifying the learning outcomes that should be covered in different modules of the qualifications. The main tasks generally identified in the occupational standards will lead to the definition of modules for learning and assessment.

The validation process of qualifications, specified in law, is transparent and consists of four stages. In stage one the institution seeking validation of a qualification/module, makes an application to the NQA, clearly stating the rationale for the qualification/module. In stage two, a panel of experts appointed and supported by NQA evaluates the application. In the third stage, the experts' report and recommendations are presented to the Governing Board of NQA for the final decision and in stage four, the approved qualifications/modules are included in the NQF and made public.

Qualifications or modules that are proposed for validation must state the following⁴:

- title of qualification/module.
- rationale/justification.
- purpose of the qualification/module, target group.
- NQF qualification/module, level, and credit value.
- entry requirements and access.
- opportunity to progress after completion of the qualification/module.
- qualification structure.
- evaluation forms for the qualification/module (assessment).
- quality assurance arrangements.
- other detailed specifications.

Decisions on the level at which each qualification is placed in the NQF are based on their match against level descriptors. Once qualifications are validated and placed in the NQF, the NQA publishes its decisions on the NQA website.

Criteria for the validation of a qualification by the NQA for inclusion in the NQF include ensuring:

- delivery, assessment, and certification of the qualifications are supported by an effective quality assurance system including institutional self-assessment and monitoring.
- candidate records are sufficient to meet the requirements for internal and external quality assurance of the assessment and certification processes and to provide verifiable evidence of candidates' achievements.

Kosovo has adopted a national quality assurance framework (NQAF) in VET in line with the European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (EQAVET), to build a functional system of quality assurance for VET qualifications and to meet the needs of Kosovo society and European standards.

In 2020, NQA reviewed the NQAF in VET, seeking to simplify and clarify the quality principles and indicators for providers offering Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Work based Learning (WBL).

NQAF has six quality principles, each of which is defined by the following quality indicators:

- management responsibilities (15 criteria).
- resource management (9 criteria).
- design and development (12 criteria).
- learning, assessment, and certification (28 criteria).
- self-evaluation (13 criteria).
- continuous improvement (10 criteria).

The NQA administrative instruction defines the process of accreditation⁵. So far, the NQA has accredited 92 providers/institutions, comprising 67 private vocational training centres (VTCs), 10 public VTCs (which provide training for adults, including jobseekers) and other VET providers, 3 public

⁴ National Qualification Authority (2020). *National Qualification Framework*.

https://akkks.rksgov.net/uploads/national_qualification_framework_handbook_2020.pdf.

⁵ Administrative Instruction No 35/2014 on criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of national qualifications and accreditation of institutions providing qualifications in Kosovo.

VET schools, and 12 private VET schools. NQA has admitted 193 VET qualifications to the NQF. These come from:

- Public VET Schools/Centres of Competence, accredited to provide 10 qualifications.
- Private VET Schools, accredited to provide 38 qualifications.
- Public VTCs & other VET public providers, accredited to provide 12 qualifications.
- Private VTCs, accredited to provide 133 qualifications.

As most public VET providers have difficulties in meeting the challenging criteria for accreditation, their qualifications largely remain outside the NQF. Public VET schools simply offer learners what they have available i.e., the prevailing conditions in the schools and the availability of subject teachers determine the programme, rather than what may be identified as labour market need. VET schools and their governing boards, as a rule, cannot freely decide about the courses they provide.

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) is the institution responsible for quality assurance in the higher education system. The criteria for the evaluation and procedures for accreditation of higher education institutions include internal policies and procedures for quality assurance of their study programmes and awards. In higher education, 21 institutes are accredited, and 396 qualifications are levelled in the NQF. KAA is also responsible for accrediting post-secondary VET colleges.

5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQA, established in 2008, has the overall responsibility for implementing the NQF. It has 9 staff members, and a governing board of 13 members who represent VET, general education, higher education, trades unions, employers and employers' organisations, chambers of commerce and voluntary bodies. It is also the designated agency in international cooperation.

NQA's staff comprises a director; professional staff including 1 quality assurance expert, 1 qualifications expert, 1 occupational standards expert, 1 post-accrediting monitoring officer, and 1 recognition of prior learning officer; and administrative staff of a budget and finance officer, an IT and logistics officer and an administrative assistant. To conduct verification, validation, and accreditation processes NQA usually engages about 100 external experts or consultants each year.

5.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

While the NQA leads and coordinates the NQF, it shares responsibility for developing and implementing the framework with MES and the other agencies, KAA for higher education and MEST for general education.

The NQA is responsible for registering VET and adult education qualifications developed by providers such as VET schools or special professional schools or academies, such as the police college, within the framework. As indicated above, it is responsible for the accreditation of VET providers and conducts quality assurance processes relevant to the validation, assessment, and certification of these qualifications to ensure that they are of sufficient quality to be included in the NQF.

MES oversees general education qualifications and develops secondary school-level general qualifications, such as the lower secondary leaving diploma and the upper secondary Matura.

In HE, the KAA oversees HE provision and accredits higher education institutions as providers. Universities generally develop their own qualifications, quality assured by the KAA. KAA is overseen by its governing board, the National Quality Council.

CVETAE is the advisory body on VET and Adult Education policies to the Minister of Education and Science in Kosovo. It is a tripartite body, engaging government, employers, and trade unions in VET. CVETAE consists of fifteen members, who represent the education and labour ministries, other relevant ministries, NQA, AVETAE, the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and the social partners.

CVETAE has statutory responsibility for approving occupational standards for the VET system. It is the responsibility of CVETAE to ensure that the standards proposed meet the needs of Kosovo's labour market as well as ensuring support from all interested parties. It forwards approved occupational standards to the NQA for the verification process.

AVETAE has extensive responsibilities in VET, including the coordination of study programmes concerning VET and adult education, engagement of social partners and supervision and coordination of the development of occupational standards. Although AVETAE is supposed to fulfil this function for all VET schools, it currently does so only for the six so-called Centres of Competence, which are donor-funded VET schools that specialise in one sector e.g., business/commerce. Its relationship with the NQA and other actors and their respective remits needs to be clarified as the agency develops.

Stakeholders from outside the key state institutions are engaged via the CVETAE and NQA Governing Board. The Kosovo Chambers of Commerce, and the Kosovo Business Association and other sectorial representatives, contribute their expertise to the Agency as representatives, and to the NQA Governing Board as co-decision makers.

6. RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

6.1 Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways⁶

Design of a system for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) in Kosovo commenced in 2011, with the endorsement of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the development of the first guidelines on the benefits and uses of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Since then, national policies, secondary legislation, and training modules for the implementation of RPL have been developed. Two bylaws have been developed and endorsed by the Minister of the MES:

- Administrative Instruction No 31/2014 for recognition of prior learning, endorsed in 2014. It outlines scope, general provisions, principles, responsibilities, and procedures for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, within all the levels of the NQF.
- Administrative instruction No. 09/2019 on criteria and procedures for the accreditation of institutions that implement recognition of prior learning in Kosovo, endorsed in 2019. It outlines principles, responsibilities, and procedures for accreditation of VET providers to implement RPL. However, it includes only the accreditation of CVET qualifications and does not cover IVET qualifications.

Both administrative instructions are in alignment with the Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

⁶ This section is based on Danuza, T. (2019). *Implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. One-off report: Kosovo.*

Currently, Kosovo is at the beginning of the implementation of validation in VET. For now, RPL is only possible for National Vocational Qualifications that are quality-assured by validation and approved on the NQF. Currently, there are 125 verified and approved National Professional Qualifications in the NQF.

Implementation of RPL is ongoing. So far, six providers have been accredited to award qualifications via RPL in hairdressing, welding, and electrical installer.

During 2021, NQA developed a digital platform in which candidates register their interest in being assessed for awards by accredited institutions. NQA has also developed an E-accreditation platform for the accreditation process.

NQA has also provided training to providers.

Kosovo presented the one-off report on VNFIL to the EQF Advisory Group in February 2020, describing the legislation developed and the next steps to be taken in implementing RPL.

6.2 Credit systems

The NQA has developed a VET credit system based on ECVET recommendations. One credit is awarded for 20 notional learning hours.

The NQA's credit system uses learning outcomes, categorises qualifications by measuring the volume of learning, and identifies providers that have a role and responsibility in allocating credit. The NQA regulates the credit system by accrediting providers and setting criteria to determine which providers can submit qualifications for inclusion in the NQF. These criteria include strict procedures for allocating credits, which ensures that providers have the necessary capacity and expertise⁷.

A credit system has been established for the higher education sector and is aligned to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

6.3 Promoting lifelong learning

The NQF is lifelong learning in scope. One of its objectives is to facilitate the accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes between different learning contexts or systems; this includes outcomes acquired via formal and non-formal learning. Such transfer supports learners' geographical and occupational mobility by enabling them to accumulate and combine learning outcomes from different settings and use them in different educational pathways.

The framework includes qualifications developed by bodies outside the formal, national system.

Detail on validation of nonformal and informal learning appears above.

7. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

7.1. Stage of implementation

Kosovo has adopted an extensive legal framework, established a dedicated lead agency, placed qualifications in the NQF, and certificates bear level indications. However, the NQF does not yet consistently provide a platform for stakeholders, and it cannot yet be said that it fully supports or influences related reforms e.g., in curricula. Its NQF is therefore at the activation stage.

⁷ National Qualification Authority (2020). *National Qualification Framework*.

https://akkks.rksgov.net/uploads/national_qualification_framework_handbook_2020.pdf

Important progress has been made in populating the framework with qualifications defined in one of six types. Formal and non-formal qualifications are included. Their labour-market relevance is ensured through use of occupational standards, based on dialogue with, and input from, employers and other labour market actors.

Employer-developed qualifications also feature now in the NQF and the register of qualifications. For example, “Shehu” and “Dekoriti”, private companies in the wood and furniture sector, have developed a qualification in carpentry, which is included in the NQF at Level 4. Similarly, the Kosovo Energy Corporation, a public-private company, has developed a Level 4 qualification.

The number of VET qualifications in Kosovo’s NQF has increased significantly since 2020, rising from 27 that year to the current 193. The number of occupational standards adopted has increased from the 2018 figure of 88 to 125 now. A further 30 standards are currently undergoing verification.

Since the 2018 Inventory, there has been progress in preparing the conditions for the implementation of RPL. Secondary legislation has been adopted and the accreditation of providers to conduct RPL has started. Piloting is ongoing. Kosovo presented its one-off report on VNFIL to the EQF Advisory Group in February 2020.

7.2 Indicating RQF/NQF levels

NQF and EQF levels appear on almost all qualifications documents, such as certificates, diplomas and certificates, and on Europass and diploma supplements in VET and HE.

7.3 NQF dissemination

There is no overall communication strategy in place, but media used includes hard copy leaflets, TV advertisements and social media content.

At a more technical level, the NQA issues specific guides to the NQF. It has published a handbook on the NQF: Korniza kombetare e kualifikimeve - brendia anglisht.cdr (rks-gov.net). The handbook covers the most recent revisions to the NQF. It is used by various stakeholders, including government institutions, chambers of commerce, civic associations, schools, and other providers. It both supports stakeholders in their general understanding of the framework e.g., its purposes, its structure etc. and assists active users who can consult the handbook to apply its guidance in processes such as qualifications development. These guidelines have been distributed hard copy to NQF stakeholders.

7.4 Qualifications databases and registers

Validated VET and non-formal qualifications i.e., qualifications developed outside the formal education sectors, are included in the Kosovo Register of Qualifications (KRQ). To date, 193 VET qualifications have been validated and placed in the NQF, at levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. These qualifications are all in the register.

Universities develop their own qualifications, quality-assured by the KAA. 396 HE qualifications have been included in the NQF so far.

Qualifications in general education are awarded at the end of a learning programme by MES. These qualifications are developed and quality-assured by the pre-university education department of MES based on national standards for the qualifications and their curriculum areas. They are automatically included or levelled in the NQF. The standard general school-leaving qualifications is the Matura, at Level 4.

Learning outcomes descriptions are used in the KRQ. Kosovo uses the Europass certificate, and diploma supplements for VET and HE, where short learning outcomes are described.

Kosovo also maintains lists of occupational standards and HE programmes, which are linked to the qualifications register. The register is accessible in Albanian, Serbian, and English.

Until now, the qualifications register has been separated into three categories, VET, HE and general. Information on VET qualifications has been the most structured and detailed, while data for HE and general education qualifications has been more limited. Now, NQA is in the process of developing an integrated KQR, which will provide a single format for all types of qualification, VET, HE, general and qualifications awarded via validation of non-formal and informal learning. A working group (WG) comprising representatives from HE, VET and general education, is underway to review the register and make proposals. This initiative is supported by EU funds.

The new KRQ platform structure will include information on qualifications/modules such as: title, level, learning outcomes, credits points, awarding body, providers, certificates (Certificate Database), occupational standards and other detailed information related to transparency and mobility functions based on NQF principles and guided by Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation 2017.

The working group will define criteria e.g., length, detail, presentation etc. for learning outcomes descriptions to be included in the register. Likewise, the working group will consider procedures for timely updating of data in the register. Digital tools to support search, presentation, analysis, and comparison of qualifications, domestically and internationally, are planned and being pursued by the working group.

NQA plans links to, and interoperability with, EU systems and tools, including linking the KQR to the Europass Platform, and ensuring that the data model developed for publishing information is compatible with the European Learning Models. This new KRQ platform will be hosted on the NQA website and will enable users nationally and internationally to access the register's contents. It will also enable NQA to generate reports, monitor progress, etc.

The current KRQ already exhibits a very close adherence to Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation, which proposes data fields for the electronic publication of information on qualifications with an EQF level. The database includes the following information on individual qualifications:

- title of the qualification.
- field – as described in ISCED Fields of Education and Training 2013 (for VET, the linked occupational standard).
- EQF level.
- NQF level.
- description of the qualifications, in knowledge skills and competences.
- awarding body/competent authority.
- credit points allocated.
- external quality assurance/regulatory body.
- entry requirements.
- ways to acquire a qualification.
- relationship to occupations.

⁸ The European Learning Model, or ELM, provides a single vocabulary for learning and employment data in Europe and is used for the Europass platform.

7.5 Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications

Kosovo's NQF provides a basis for co-operation and mutual recognition of higher qualifications between Kosovo and other countries. A first step is ensuring compatibility with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", developed by ENQA.

7.6 Career guidance and counselling

The MES, with support from LuxDev, has created a platform for professional orientation, career education and guidance: Busulla.com. The platform supports both pupils and students, as well as institutes in career education and guidance.

The platform offers several tools and information on the platform concerning the following steps in career orientation:

- self-recognition through career tests.
- validation of career-related skills – Basic Check Potential Assessment Test.
- exploring the labour market.
- exploring educational institutions in Kosovo.
- identifying job and/or internship opportunities.
- online advisor.

The platform offers institutes, policy makers and business four modules to facilitate interaction between education and the labour market:

- Industrial Liaison
- Training Needs Assessment
- Skills and Knowledge Needs Assessment
- Monitoring and Evaluation

7.7 Awareness and use of the NQF

As indicated at 7.3, Kosovo's National Qualification Authority has developed several campaigns to promote the NQF and its benefits and uses. Awareness of, use of and contact with, the NQF varies by user category.

Bodies exercising functions relevant to NQF implementation such as QA bodies or those regulating occupations or making recognition decisions on foreign qualifications, for academic or employment purposes, or for issues of comparability and equivalence, are generally well-informed through their regular functions, which interface with those of the NQA. This would include the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, which accredits higher education institutions and validates their programmes and qualifications.

Likewise, other institutional stakeholders such as VET schools or training providers come into regular contact with the NQF via their relationship with the NQA in the various aspects of qualifications development, such as accreditation and validation processes.

There is direct NQA contact with learners, teachers and other users via site visits and workshops.

NQA also organises outreach events such as meetings, workshops, public discussions etc. for workers and jobseekers.

Guidance and counselling practitioners in employment offices use the NQF in consultations with people to support their decisions on career paths, qualifications, and programmes.

Stakeholders in industry and commerce and the trades unions are institutionally linked to the NQF via the NQA Board and the Council for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education. Broader contacts with such partners are made include through meetings with chambers of commerce, unions and employment offices, invitations to seminars etc.

7.8 Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

No comprehensive evaluation of the NQF's impact or use has been conducted yet.

7.9 Impact of the NQF

The framework has been the catalyst to introduce outcomes in qualifications and curricula, in particular remaking qualifications. Flexible learning is promoted by use of units in qualifications and modular curricula.

As indicated above, 193 VET and 396 HE qualifications - all designed based on the principles introduced by the NQF - now appear in the register. These qualifications all undergo various quality assurance procedures to be admitted to the register. Indeed, the framework has introduced a set of quality measures hitherto not present in the country's qualification system.

To an extent greater than before the NQF's inception, employers are engaged in the qualifications system. They sit on the NQA Board, which provides strategic direction to the country's qualifications system. Employer-developed qualifications are placed in the framework and database. VET qualifications need to be based on occupational standards or profiles developed with the relevant industry or sector.

The NQF also underpins the country's developing validation system, while the NQA staff coordinate its implementation.

8. REFERENCING TO THE EQF

8.1 Referencing to the EQF

Kosovo has been a member of the EQF Advisory Group since 2015 and referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016. NQA provides regular updates to the Advisory Group on progress of the Kosovo NQF, including its 2020 report on VNFIL.

8.2 International cooperation

A key objective of the NQF, specified in the NQF law, is to provide a basis for cooperation and mutual recognition between the NQF and the EQF. NQA is the designated National Coordination Point for participation in the EQF process.

ENQA has changed the status of the KAA to "under review", a downgrade of its previous assessment. The KAA is full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). For external political reasons, Kosovo does not take part in the Bologna process.

EU assistance to Kosovo under the priority sector Education, employment & social policies (financial assistance under IPA II) focuses on: (i) improving the functioning of the labour market; (ii) raising

education standards; (iii) promoting skills development; and (iv) restructuring the social welfare system.

Both IPA 2017 and IPA 2018 support the further development of the NQF in Kosovo and specifically the further implementation of RPL.

A large international donor community is active in the country. NQA receives donor support from Germany's DVV International. Other donor support to Kosovo's VET system comes from international organizations e.g., the UN, and bilateral donors such as Luxembourg, Austria, and Germany.

9. REFLECTIONS AND PLANS

Kosovo's NQF includes significant numbers of qualifications, of all types and levels, including non-formal. Likewise, progress has been strong in developing new standards. Establishment of a validation system has enabled qualifications to be awarded to applicants who have chosen this route.

While the NQA is a critical actor in VET reform in Kosovo, the overall education governance structure is complex. This hinders the optimal use of the NQF and its further developments. ETF's latest Torino Process Assessment⁹, written in 2019, recommended that the authorities revisit the current governance arrangements in VET to achieve a more coherent structure.

The Law No 03/L-060 on national qualifications has been supported by different secondary legislation to support the implementation. Different objectives have been stated in the law and secondary legislation, but, so far, no monitoring or evaluation has been conducted to examine to what extent these objectives have been met or how far the procedures work. Evaluations could also help to revise procedures based on actual experience to optimise them. Specific attention could be paid to impact on end-users.

Another key challenge that remains is to ensure the full engagement and active participation of the various stakeholders such as departments, social partners, agencies, and institutions necessary to ensure a sustained implementation of the NQF in the long term.

Although the number of occupational standards has substantially increased in recent years, the number of approvals could be increased by identifying priority occupations.

The number of accredited qualifications developed by VET public providers is still limited.

There are plans to develop more Level 5 qualifications. This is welcome, but a challenge is to ensure that candidates completing such qualifications can progress to higher education.

⁹ European Training Foundation (2019). *Policies for Human Capital Development. Kosovo* an ETF Torino Process Assessment*. Torino: ETF

ABBREVIATIONS

AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
CVETAE	Council for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
DVV International	Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband (adult education association)
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAVET	European quality assurance in vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
GE	General Education
HE	Higher Education
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NQA	National Qualification Authority
NQAF	National Quality Assurance Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
VET	Vocational education and training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VTC	Vocational Training Centre

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