

# NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – SERBIA

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Qualifications Framework of Serbia (NQFS) was adopted in 2018. It has 8 levels, with two sublevels each at levels 6 and 7, and includes four types of qualifications: general and vocational qualifications covering pre-university education, and academic and professional qualifications covering higher education.

Serbia is an EU candidate country and participates in the EQF Advisory Group. It referenced the NQFS to the EQF and self-certified against the QF-EHEA in 2020. The NQFS has fulfilled all the criteria of the activation stage and has reached the operational stage.

## 2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

### 2.1 Policy context

Serbia is an EU candidate country. The Economic Reform Programme 2023-2025 identifies three key challenges for competitiveness, economic growth and employment as priorities for related structural reforms: increasing employment, especially among young people, women and vulnerable groups and social protection against poverty, creating a business environment more favourable for investments as well as greening the energy sector and fully opening the energy market<sup>1</sup>.

The general objective of the National Employment Strategy 2021-2026<sup>2</sup> is the establishment of a stable and sustainable employment growth based on knowledge and decent work. This objective refers to the development of a high-quality labour force, including through the development of occupational and qualification standards, dual education programmes, developing a network of non-formal education service providers and a system for recognition of prior learning.

In 2022, the youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) decreased to 24.4% compared to 27.5% in 2019, with a reduced proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) 13% compared to 15.9% in 2020. These rates are still high compared to the EU averages of 14.5% and 9.6% respectively. The employment rate of recent graduates (aged 20 to 34) was 72.2% in 2022, compared to the EU average of 82.4%<sup>3</sup>.

Serbia has a remarkably high proportion of students (about 74%) who go into upper-secondary vocational education and training (VET). Furthermore, participation in adult learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, is among the highest in the region (5.9% in 2022, up from 3.7% in 2020), though this remains well below the EU average level of 11.9%<sup>4</sup>. With one in four workers overqualified, skills mismatch remains high overall and seems to be becoming structural issue<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Reform Program (ERP) 2023-2025 [Ministry of Finance \(mfin.gov.rs\)](https://mfin.gov.rs)

<sup>2</sup> [Strategija zaposljavanja u Republici Srbiji 2021-2026 engleski.pdf \(socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs\)](https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs)

<sup>3</sup> European Training Foundation. [ETF CrossCountry Monitoring Report 2023 FINAL \(1\).pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

<sup>4</sup> European Training Foundation. [ETF CrossCountry Monitoring Report 2023 FINAL \(1\).pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

<sup>5</sup> European Training Foundation. *Key policy developments in education, training and employment – Serbia 2023* [Country Fiche Serbia 2023 EN web.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

## 2.2 Education and training reforms

The new Strategy for the Development of Education by 2030<sup>6</sup> sets general objectives and measures for increasing the quality of teaching and learning, equity and accessibility of pre-university education, and strengthening the role of educational institutions, as well as for improving the accessibility, quality, relevance, and equity of higher education. Specific measures are focused, inter alia, on developing new and improving existing qualification standards and education programmes; strengthening the work of Sector Skills Councils and their role in developing qualification and occupational standards; improving quality assurance system in pre-university education and training and recognition of adult education providers; development of a system for recognition of prior learning (RPL); inclusion of data into Qualifications Register and connecting it with the Europass platform; improving relevance of higher education and the development of post-secondary education at the NQF level 5.

Serbia has committed to implementing European frameworks (Osnabrück Declaration on VET, EQAVET, EQF, ENQA). The National Implementation Plan for the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration defines general objectives and measures in VET until 2025<sup>7</sup>:

- increasing the relevance of VET at all levels of education (strengthening social partnership in modernising qualification standards, VET programmes and graduate tracking; developing new and improvement of the existing qualification standards, IVET curricula and CVET programmes based on qualification standards; improved offer of vocational (applied) and dual study programmes in higher education);
- increasing flexibility and permeability of VET at all levels of education (expanding the network of RPL providers; integrating short cycle qualifications into NQF, developing of post-secondary education programmes at NQF level 5);
- improving quality assurance policies and practices in VET (improving the quality assurance system in IVET (school-based and dual VET), non-formal CVET and for RPL procedure; introduction of appropriate EQAVET standards and indicators).

## 2.3 NQF legal basis

There is one main legal act for the NQFS, the Law on the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia, adopted by parliament in April 2018<sup>8</sup>. Amendments to the Law on the NQFS adopted in 2023 are related to the introduction of the General Matura examination (for secondary school graduates), qualifications at NQF level 5; the work of the NQF Council and Sector Skills Councils; determining career guidance and counselling services, the responsibilities of the Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework in the area of qualifications, procedures for recognition of primary and secondary schools and other organisations as organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA)<sup>9</sup> and the procedure for recognition of prior learning.

The Law on Foundations of the Education System<sup>10</sup>, the Law on Secondary Education<sup>11</sup>, the Law on

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<sup>6</sup> [Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine: 63/2021-4 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Serbia National Implementation Plans for the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration](#), National Implementation Plans - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

<sup>8</sup> [Zakon o Nacionalnom okviru kvalifikacija Republike Srbije: 27/2018-3, 6/2020-3, 129/2021-15 \(dr. zakon\), 76/2023-19 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)  
<http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Law-on-National-Qualifications-Framework-in-Serbia-6.docx>

<sup>9</sup> Publicly recognized organizers of adult education activities

<sup>10</sup> [Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja: 88/2017-3, 27/2018-3 \(dr. zakon\), 27/2018-22 \(dr. zakon\), 10/2019-5, 6/2020-20, 129/2021-9, 92/2023-332 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Zakon o srednjem obrazovanju i vaspitanju: 55/2013-15, 101/2017-19, 27/2018-3 \(dr. zakon\), 6/2020-24, 52/2021-3, 129/2021-9 \(dr. zakon\), 129/2021-15, 92/2023-338 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

Higher Education<sup>12</sup> and the Law on Adult Education<sup>13</sup> are consistent with the NQFS.

Based on the Law on the NQFS, the following bylaws have thus far been adopted by Ministers<sup>14</sup>:

- Rulebook on the methodology for the development of qualification standards ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 156/2020)<sup>15</sup>;
- Rulebook on the content and appearance of the initiative form for the development and adoption of qualification standards (Official Gazette of RS, No. 53 of April 9, 2020)<sup>16</sup>;
- Rulebook on standards and manner of conducting the procedure of recognition of prior learning ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 148/2020)<sup>17</sup>;
- Rulebook on standards of career guidance and counselling services (Official Gazette of RS, No. 43 of June 19, 2019)<sup>18</sup>;
- Rulebook on detailed programmes, staff, premises, equipment, and teaching aids related requirements for acquiring the status of Publicly recognized organizer of adult education activities ("Official Gazette of RS ", No. 130/2021)<sup>19</sup>.
- Rulebook on standards for self-assessment and external assessment of the quality of operations of publicly recognized organizer of adult education activities ("Official Gazette of RS " No. 27/2022)<sup>20</sup>;
- Rulebook on the content and manner of keeping the Register of the National qualifications' framework of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 159/2020)<sup>21</sup>;
- Rulebook on the system for classification and coding of qualifications in the National qualifications' framework of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 159/2020)<sup>22</sup>.

The NQFS features in several strategic documents, such as the Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia by 2030<sup>23</sup>, the National Employment Strategy 2021-2026<sup>24</sup> and the National Youth Strategy 2015-2025<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> [Zakon o visokom obrazovanju: 88/2017-41, 27/2018-3 \(dr. zakon\), 73/2018-7, 67/2019-3, 6/2020-3 \(dr. zakon\), 6/2020-20 \(dr. zakon\), 11/2021-3 \(Autentično tumačenje\), 67/2021-3 \(dr. zakon\), 67/2021-7, 76/2023-23 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Zakon o obrazovanju odraslih: 55/2013-27, 88/2017-3 \(dr. zakon\), 27/2018-3 \(dr. zakon\), 6/2020-3 \(dr. zakon\) \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> [http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/zakoni-i-propisi\\_2/](http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/zakoni-i-propisi_2/) <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/laws-and-regulations/>

<sup>15</sup> [Rulebook-on-methodology-for-developing-qualification-standards.docx \(live.com\) Pravilnik o metodologiji za razvoj standarda kvalifikacija](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Rulebook-on-the-content-and-format-of-the-initiative-for-the-development-and-adoption-of-qualification-standard.docx \(live.com\) Pravilnik o sadržaju i izgledu obrasca inicijative za razvijanje i usvajanje standarda kvalifikacije: 53/2020-5 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Pravilnik o standardima i načinu sprovođenja postupka priznavanja prethodnog učenja: 148/2020-183 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\) Rulebook-on-standards-and-manner-of-implementing-the-procedure-of-recognition-of-prior-learning.docx \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Standards-of-career-guidance-counseling\\_eng.pdf \(mpn.gov.rs\) Pravilnik o standardima usluga karijernog vođenja i savetovanja: 43/2019-11 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Rulebook-on-detailed-programmes-staff-premises-equipment-and-teaching-aids-related-requirements-for-acquiring-the-status-of-Publicly-Recognised-Adult-Education-Organiser.doc \(live.com\) Pravilnik o bližim uslovima u pogledu programa, kadra, prostora, opreme i nastavnih sredstava za sticanje statusa javno priznatog organizatora aktivnosti obrazovanja odraslih: 130/2021-146 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Rulebook-on-standards-for-self-assessment-and-external-assessment-of-the-quality-of-operations-of-Publicly-Recognised-Adult-Education-Organiser.docx \(live.com\) Pravilnik o standardima za samovrednovanje i spoljašnje vrednovanje kvaliteta rada javno priznatog organizatora aktivnosti obrazovanja odraslih: 27/2022-110 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Rulebook-on-the-content-and-manner-of-keeping-the-Register-of-the-National-qualifications-framework-of-the-Republic-of-Serbia.docx \(live.com\) Pravilnik o sadržaju i načinu vođenja Registra Nacionalnog okvira kvalifikacija Republike Srbije: 159/2020-80, 46/2022-31 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Pravilnik o sistemu za razvrstavanje i šifriranje kvalifikacija u Nacionalnom okviru kvalifikacija Republike Srbije: 159/2020-77 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine: 63/2021-4 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Strategija zapošljavanja u Republici Srbiji 2021-2026\\_engleski.pdf \(socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Nacionalna strategija za mlade - ENG.pdf \(mos.gov.rs\)](#)

## 3. NQF OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS

### 3.1 NQF Objectives

The aim of the NQFS is to structure and improve the qualification system in such a way that it is aligned with the requirements of socio-economic development, supports lifelong learning and facilitates workforce mobility<sup>26</sup>.

NQFS objectives are:

- ensuring the readability and transparency of qualifications, as well as their interconnection;
- developing qualification standards based on the needs of the labour market and society as a whole;
- ensuring a learning outcomes-based education system;
- improving access and flexible learning paths in both formal and non-formal education;
- ensuring identification and recognition of non-formal education and informal learning;
- affirming the importance of key, general and cross-curricular competencies for lifelong learning;
- enhancing cooperation between relevant stakeholders and social partners;
- establishing a quality assurance system for the development and acquisition of qualifications;
- ensuring comparability and recognition of qualifications acquired in Serbia with those acquired in other countries<sup>27</sup>.

### 3.2. NQF functions

The implementation of the NQFS is seen as significantly contributing to the promotion of different types of activities in different sectors, such as education, employment, labour, social policy, public administration<sup>28</sup>. In particular, the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2023-2025 emphasises the role of the National Qualifications Framework in ensuring the diversification and improvement of the relevance of the educational offer in the system of higher education and lifelong learning, the transparency of the national qualifications system, comparability and recognition of qualifications obtained in the Republic of Serbia with qualifications obtained in other countries<sup>29</sup>.

## 4. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

### 4.1 NQF structure and level descriptors

The NQFS consists of eight levels, with two sublevels each at levels six and seven. NQFS level descriptors are learning outcome-based, defined for each level and sublevel, and increase in complexity. They follow the domains “Knowledge”, “Skills” and “Abilities and Attitude”.

The qualifications level descriptions include also the methods and minimum requirements for acquiring

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<sup>26</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

<sup>27</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

<sup>28</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Economic Reform Program \(ERP\) 2023-2025 Ministry of Finance \(mfin.gov.rs\)](#)

qualifications in terms of workload and prerequisites.

## 4.2 NQF scope and coverage

The NQFS includes qualifications of four types:

- General qualifications: covering primary education and general secondary (gymnasium) education.
- Vocational qualifications: covering vocational secondary education and training and adult education. This type of qualification also includes secondary artistic qualifications.
- Academic qualifications: covering higher education based on accredited academic study programmes (bachelor, masters, specialised and doctoral studies). This type of qualification also includes academic artistic qualifications.
- Professional/applied qualifications: covering higher education based on accredited applied study programmes (bachelor, specialised and master studies).

General qualifications correspond to NQFS levels 1 and 4, vocational qualifications correspond to NQFS levels 2-5, academic qualifications correspond to NQFS levels 6.1 – 8 and professional qualifications correspond to NQFS levels 6.1 – 7.1<sup>30</sup>.

Qualifications belonging to regulated professions are determined by a separate law<sup>31</sup>, in accordance with EU Directive 2013/55 /EU, and are an integral part of the NQFS<sup>32</sup>.

# OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IN SERBIA

NQFS levels	Qualifications	EQF level
8	doctoral studies volume of 180 ECTS credits (with previously completed integrated academic, i.e. master academic studies)	8
7	7.2 specialised academic studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits (with previously completed master academic studies)	7
	7.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ integrated academic studies scope of 300 to 360 ECTS credits</li> <li>■ master academic studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits, with previously achieved bachelor academic studies scope of at least 240 ECTS credits,</li> <li>■ master academic studies scope of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved bachelor academic studies scope of 180 ECTS credits),</li> <li>■ master applied studies scope of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved bachelor applied studies scope of 180 ECTS credits)</li> </ul>	
6	6.2 bachelor academic studies scope of at least 240 ECTS credits, specialised applied studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits	6
	6.1 bachelor academic studies scope of at least 180 ECTS credits bachelor applied studies scope starting from 180 ECTS credits	
5	craftsman, i.e. specialist education lasting up to two or one-year, non-formal adult education lasting minimum of six months	5

<sup>30</sup> <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/comparative-table-of-the-qualification-levels-and-types-of-education/>

<sup>31</sup> [Zakon o regulisanim profesijama i priznavanju profesionalnih kvalifikacija: 66/2019-7 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>32</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

4	four-year secondary school education (vocational education, arts education, general education)	4
3	secondary vocational education lasting three years, non-formal adult education with training duration of minimum 960 hours	3
2	vocational training lasting up to one year, education for work lasting up to two years, non-formal adult education with 120-360 hours of training	2
1	primary education, primary adult education, primary music education, primary ballet education	1

Source: [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

### 4.3 Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards

The NQFS ensures that qualifications, educational and training programmes, and assessment are based on learning outcomes. Qualifications are included into the NQFS based on qualification standards (for general and vocational qualifications), or accreditation of a higher education programme (for academic and professional qualifications)<sup>33</sup>. Learning outcomes are one of the key elements of educational and qualification standards, and education and training programmes for qualifications of all NQFS levels.

Educational standards include *standards of achievement and general cross-curricular competencies*<sup>34</sup> describing the goals and outcomes of general pre-university education, as well as the key competencies based on the European framework of key competencies for lifelong learning.

Standards in higher education include *standards for the accreditation of higher education institutions and standards for accreditation of study programmes*<sup>35</sup>. The first standard is respecting the Dublin Learning Outcome Descriptors for a given study level. The second, concerning study programmes, describes general and subject-specific competencies of graduates in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes of a programme must be in line with relevant NQFS level descriptors.

Qualification standards include learning outcomes statements based on a description of the duties, tasks and competencies required for a specific job, occupation or group of occupations (e.g. in the occupational standards or job descriptions) and cover knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes at the level of the overall qualification<sup>36</sup>.

Assessment of learning outcomes for general and vocational qualifications is based on the standards of achievement for general education subjects and on qualification standards.

### 4.4 Quality assurance of qualifications

The development of qualifications entails the development of a qualification standard. Qualification standards are developed by the Qualifications Agency according to the procedure established by the

<sup>33</sup> Law on the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia [Zakon o Nacionalnom okviru kvalifikacija Republike Srbije: 27/2018-3, 6/2020-3, 129/2021-15 \(dr. zakon\), 76/2023-19 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>34</sup> [General standards of achievement for the end of general secondary education and secondary vocational education in the part of general education subjects \(2013\), General Standards of Achievement for the end of compulsory education \(2010\), General Standards of Achievement for Primary Adult Education \(2013\).](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Standards and procedure for accreditation of higher education institutions \(2019\), Standards and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes \(2019, 2023\)](#)

<sup>36</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)



NQFS Law<sup>37</sup> and based on the Methodology for the development of qualification standards<sup>38</sup>. An initiative for developing and adopting standards for a qualification or for updating the existing qualification standard can be submitted by a Sector Skills Council, the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the National Education Council, the National Council for Higher Education, the National Employment Service, a higher education institution, a state body or other legal entity (a company, a PROAEA, etc.). Qualification standards are validated by the NQFS council and adopted by the Ministry of Education.

Qualification standards are the basis for the development of education programmes for qualifications at all levels of education<sup>39</sup>. In pre-university education, programmes are defined at national level and developed by the Institute for the Improvement of Education, in higher education by higher education institutions, and in adult education by publicly recognised organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA)<sup>40</sup>.

Schools delivering programmes in pre-university education are externally evaluated by the Institute for Evaluation of Education Quality; in higher education, study programmes are subject to accreditation by the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education; and in adult education, providers of non-formal education are accredited by the Ministry of Education for primary and secondary schools, and by the Qualifications Agency for other providers. Primary and secondary schools recognised as organisers of non-formal adult education (PROAEA) can also be recognised for the RPL activity<sup>41</sup>.

## 5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

### 5.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQFS law defines bodies and institutions responsible for the NQFS' development and implementation: the NQFS council, the Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework, the Ministry of Education, the Qualifications Agency and Sector Skills Councils.

The *NQFS Council* is an advisory body appointed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia whose main tasks include: providing recommendations on the process of planning and development of human resources in accordance with public policies in the field of lifelong learning, employment, career guidance and counselling, and on improving links between education and labour market needs; validation of qualification standards for all NQFS levels and making recommendations for repealing educational programmes that do not meet them; making proposals for establishing Sector Skills Councils, monitoring and providing recommendations on improving their work; providing opinion on the enrolment policy in secondary schools and in higher education institutions.

The *Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework*<sup>42</sup> performs administrative

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<sup>37</sup> Chapter IV Quality Assurance in the implementation of the NQFS [Zakon \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Rulebook-on-methodology-for-developing-qualification-standards.docx \(live.com\) Pravilnik o metodologiji za razvoj standarda kvalifikacija](#)

<sup>39</sup> Article 25 of the NQFS law [Law \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>40</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

<sup>41</sup> Law on the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia [Zakon o Nacionalnom okviru kvalifikacija Republike Srbije: 27/2018-3, 6/2020-3, 129/2021-15 \(dr. zakon\), 76/2023-19 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>42</sup> The Government established the Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework in November 2022,

and technical tasks for the NQFS Council; prepares draft legislation and monitors the implementation of the legal framework for the NQFS; prepares development projects in a qualification area, monitors their implementation and the impact of (new) qualifications on employment and lifelong learning; performs the activities of the National Coordination Point and on referencing NQFS with the EQF.

The *Qualifications Agency*<sup>43</sup> is responsible for considering initiatives for introducing new qualifications or modernising the existing ones; developing qualification standards; providing professional, administrative and technical support to sector skills councils; registering qualifications and maintaining the NQFS Register; classification and encoding qualifications according to the CLASSNQFS system; accrediting and external evaluation of non-formal adult education providers; recognition of foreign qualifications, including professional recognition of higher education qualifications and validation of foreign education programs; evaluation of public documents obtained in religious education institutions; monitoring career guidance and counselling activities and implementation of career guidance and counselling service standards; preparation of development projects, analysis and research of importance for the development of qualifications and proposes quality assurance measures throughout the entire education system.

*Sector Skills Councils (SSC)* are expert and advisory bodies established by the Government at the proposal of the NQFS Council based on the principle of social partnership<sup>44</sup>. Their main role is to define the need for qualifications within a certain sector of the labour market in Serbia. Sector Skills Councils analyse existing qualifications within a certain sector, identify those needing to be modernised and that no longer meet the needs of the sector; develop proposals for qualification standards within the sector; articulate the expected knowledge and skills outcomes within the sector; promote dialogue and direct cooperation between the world of work and education; promote opportunities for education, training and employment and identify opportunities for adult training within the sector; examine the implications of the NQF on the qualifications within the sector; analyse the connection of qualifications with relevant occupations in the sector and examine the need to update qualification standards after five years of application.

## 5.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Education is the main governing body responsible for the development and implementation of educational policy. It adopts qualification standards, accredits primary and secondary schools as publicly recognised organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA), adopts acts within the legal framework for the NQFS, promotes its implementation.

The *NQFS Council* brings together representatives of decision-makers from education, employment, youth, economy, local self-governments, health sector and those for dual education and NQF, representatives of advisory bodies in the field of education, representative employers' associations, trade unions, representatives of youth and civil society organisations.

In addition to the NQFS Council, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, relevant representative employers' associations and professional associations, trade unions, higher education and vocational schools, and ministries are also members of the *Sector Skills Councils*.

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taking over the competencies over dual education and NQFS from the Ministry of Education:

[Dual Education – The Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework \(dualnok.gov.rs\)](#)

<sup>43</sup> [noks :: Home \(azk.gov.rs\)](#)

<sup>44</sup> In total, 12 sector skills councils were established by the end of 2021 <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/decisions-on-the-establishment-of-sector-skills-councils/>

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## 6. RECOGNISING AND VALIDATING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

### 6.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

VNFIL has been introduced for vocational qualifications at levels 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the NQFS. The term “Recognition of prior learning” (RPL) has been adopted as being equivalent to the VNFIL. The NQFS Law defines RPL as an adult education activity that can be implemented only by primary and secondary schools having the status of publicly recognised organisers of adult education (PROAEA)<sup>45</sup>. Assessment of learning outcomes and competencies within the RPL process is based on qualification standards.

A legal framework for RPL includes the NQFS Law and the Law on Adult Education. The standards for quality assurance and operational details for the RPL procedure have been established<sup>46</sup>. The assessment commission is formed by the school and includes two assessors from the school and an assessor from the business sector. A candidate can recognise learning outcomes and competencies for the qualification as a whole, or part of it, at least at the level of one occupation, confirmed by a public document in adult education<sup>47</sup>. The school can also issue a certificate for learning outcomes/competencies validated during assessment<sup>48</sup>.

The VNFIL system in Serbia is in its initial phase. So far six secondary vocational schools have been accredited for RPL activity for 16 qualifications, and two more qualifications were in the accreditation process by the end of 2023.

### 6.2. Credit systems

Credits (ECTS) are used in higher education only. In VET and adult education, the volume of qualifications and education programmes is expressed in years and hours.

### 6.3. Promoting lifelong learning

The NQF law establishes progression pathways between qualification levels in terms of minimum requirements for acquiring qualifications. Vocational qualifications can be acquired either by completing a formal education programme, or through non-formal adult education, or recognition of prior learning.

## 7. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

### 7.1 Stage of implementation

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<sup>45</sup> NQFS Law [Law \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>46</sup> Rulebook on standards and manner of conducting the procedure of recognition of prior learning [Pravilnik o standardima i načinu sprovođenja postupka priznavanja prethodnog učenja: 148/2020-183 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#) [Rulebook-on-standards-and-manner-of-implementing-the-procedure-of-recognition-of-prior-learning.docx \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>47</sup> Certificate on the achieved qualification standard or credential of partially achieved qualification standard/ achieved standard of professional competencies (Rulebook on the type, name and content of forms and the method of keeping records and the name, content and appearance of forms of public documents and certificates in adult education, "Official Gazette of RS", no. 89/15, 102/15, 102/22.) [Ordinance on the type, name and content of forms and the manner of keeping records and the name, content and appearance of forms of public documents and certificates in adult education: 89/2015-297, 102/2015-64, 102/2022-551 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>48</sup> Certificate of partially achieved standard of professional competence [Untitled 1 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

Following adoption of the NQFS law in 2018, the institutional framework for the NQFS has been established. The NQF Council, the Qualifications Agency and the Sector Skills Councils have been established and are operational. The methodology for developing qualification standards has been developed and, by the end of 2023, 107 qualification standards have been developed and published in the NQFS register. Further progress has been made with the development of the RPL system: RPL procedure has been adopted and piloted, accreditation of schools as RPL providers has started, and first candidates are receiving certificates. An important milestone was the referencing of the NQFS to the EQF in February 2020.

The NQFS is gradually strengthening its role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications at the national and international level. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in public documents (certificates, diplomas) for qualifications at the pre-university education level, including qualifications acquired in adult education. NQFS register includes information on NQF/EQF level and on learning outcomes for vocational qualifications based on qualification standards. The NQFS has fulfilled all the criteria of the activation stage and reached the operational stage.

## 7.2 Indicating RQF/NQF levels

NQF and EQF levels are indicated in public documents (certificates, diplomas) for qualifications at the pre-university education level, including qualifications acquired in adult education. NQFS register includes information on NQF/EQF level for all types of qualifications included in the NQFS.

## 7.3 NQF dissemination

Methodologies, instructions and handbooks to facilitate the implementation of the NQFS have been developed. These documents aim at supporting stakeholders in submitting initiatives for the development and adoption of qualification standards, and application of the list of qualifications of the Republic of Serbia<sup>49</sup>; in the accreditation process for acquiring the PROAE status for non-formal adult education, the RPL and Career Guidance and Counselling services<sup>50</sup>; in development of training programmes based on qualification standards<sup>51</sup>, and in preparation of instruments for competence assessment<sup>52</sup>.

## 7.4 Qualifications databases and registers

The NQFS Register was established in 2021 and is available through the NQFS portal<sup>53</sup>. The register is managed by the Qualifications Agency. It consists of three sub-registers:

- Sub-register of national qualifications,
- Sub-register of qualification standards, and
- Sub-register of PROAEA with a list of employers with whom the PROAEA conducts practical work.

General and vocational qualifications are entered into the sub-register of national qualifications based on the adoption of qualification standards (NQFS level 1-5), with higher education qualifications being based on accreditation of relevant higher education programmes (NQFS level 6.1-8). By the end of 2023, 3 189 archived and 1 518 active qualifications had been included into the register, of which 107 active

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<sup>49</sup> РКИПВС центар - АГЕНЦИЈА ЗА КВАЛИФИКАЦИЈЕ - АЗК ([azk.gov.rs](http://azk.gov.rs))

<sup>50</sup> ЈПОА центар - АГЕНЦИЈА ЗА КВАЛИФИКАЦИЈЕ - АЗК ([azk.gov.rs](http://azk.gov.rs))

<sup>51</sup> <https://azk.gov.rs/dokument.php?tip=1&token=6qxn7oc72ps04cg.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Metodologija-za-polaganje-ispita-za-proveru-stru%C4%8Dnih-kompetencija.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> [noks :: Search national qualifications \(azk.gov.rs\)](http://noks.gov.rs)

vocational qualifications (NQFS levels 3-5) were entered into the register based on qualification standards<sup>54</sup>.

Qualifications entered into the sub-register of national qualifications are classified according to type, NQFS/EQF level and national classification of qualifications CLASSNQFS based on ISCED-F. Only qualifications based on qualification standards include learning outcomes descriptions.

The NQFS register is integrated into the Unified Information System of Education. Serbia is connecting the NQFS register to the Europass platform<sup>55</sup>.

## 7.5 Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications

The NQFS Law distinguishes between recognition of foreign school documents and professional recognition of foreign higher education documents. The recognition procedure is carried out by the ENIC/NARIC Centre, which is housed within the Qualifications Agency<sup>56</sup>. Academic recognition is carried out by higher education institutions. Foreign qualifications receiving recognition are considered equivalent to the corresponding public document obtained in Serbia. The recognition decision shall contain the NQFS level to which the recognised qualification corresponds.

## 7.6 Career guidance and counselling

Career Guidance and Counselling services are regulated by the NQFS law. They shall be provided in accordance with the Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services (CGS standards)<sup>57</sup> by the National Employment Agency and PROAEA, higher education institutions, youth offices, civil society organizations, employment agencies, as well as primary and secondary schools.

CGS standards establish special conditions for acquiring the PROAEA status for providing career guidance and counselling services, including as part of the RPL activities. They include standards for developing career management skills, competencies of career practitioners, organisation of career guidance services and of the programme. The providers of career guidance and counselling activities are career practitioners who work with individuals or groups of different ages, helping them to manage the processes of learning, work, career changes and other aspects of personal development and who have the competencies determined by the NQFS law.

## 7.7. Awareness and use of the NQF

Information about relevant NQF principles and procedures for qualification development and accreditation of providers of adult education activities is available for education and labour market stakeholders. National employment service, Central Register of Compulsory Social Insurance and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia that are using data on qualifications, are expected to connect their databases with the NQFS register.

## 7.8. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

No systematic evaluation of the NQF use or impact has yet been carried out. The Office for Dual Education and National Qualifications Framework is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the NQF. The first draft of the monitoring methodology is currently in preparation phase and will be improved and piloted in the near future.

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<sup>54</sup> The NQFS Register integrates data from the Qualifications Database that was managed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development before the establishment of the Qualifications Agency.

<sup>55</sup> Supported by the ERASMUS EQF IBA project "Connecting the NQFS Register with the Europass online platform"  
[noks.mpn.gov.rs](https://noks.mpn.gov.rs)

<sup>56</sup> [ENIC/NARIC Centre - Qualification Agency \(azk.gov.rs\)](https://enik-naric.gov.rs)

<sup>57</sup> Rulebook on standards of career guidance and counselling services (Official Gazette of RS, No.43 of June 19, 2019)  
[Standards-of-career-guidance-counseling\\_eng.pdf \(mpn.gov.rs\) Pravilnik o standardima usluga karijernog vođenja i savetovanja: 43/2019-11 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](https://www.mps.gov.rs/Pravilnik%20o%20standardima%20usluga%20karijernog%20vođenja%20i%20savetovanja%2043/2019-11%20(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs))

## 7.9. Impact of the NQF

The NQFS law ensures that qualifications, educational and training programmes, and assessment are based on learning outcomes. The development of qualifications continues in line with the national methodology for qualification standard development. The NQFS has influenced the system of quality assurance of adult education and the development of a system of recognition of prior learning, as well as supporting dialogue and cooperation between education and labour market stakeholders.

# 8 REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORK/ OTHER FRAMEWORKS

## 8.1 Referencing to the EQF

Serbia referenced its NQF to the EQF in February 2020 and self-certified in the same report against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process). A joint report has been published on the Europass portal<sup>58</sup>.

## 8.2 International cooperation

As an EU candidate country, Serbia receives financial assistance to support education and labour market reforms under the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)<sup>59</sup>. It is a member of the regional ERISSE projects<sup>60</sup> and of the EQF Advisory Group. The National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA) is an ENQA affiliate<sup>61</sup>.

The Ministry of Education, the Office for Dual Education and National Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Agency receive support from the Erasmus+ projects to support updating qualification standards and improve transparency and comparability of national qualifications at the national and international level, including entering data on qualifications and PROAEA into the NQFS register and linking the register to the Europass platform<sup>62</sup>.

The Office for Dual Education and National Qualifications Framework receives support from the Swiss Agency for development and cooperation (SDC) to improve the system of dual education and support the NQFS implementation<sup>63</sup>. The German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ) supports selected secondary vocational schools in expanding their offer to adult education and RPL activities<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

<sup>59</sup> [IPA III programming framework \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>60</sup> [Home - ERI SEE Secretariat](#)

<sup>61</sup> [NEAQA - National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education • ENQA](#)

<sup>62</sup> ERASMUS EQF IBA project "Connecting the NQFS Register with the Europass online platform" [noks.mpn.gov.rs](http://noks.mpn.gov.rs), ERASMUS-AGENDA-IBA project "Implementation of the revised priorities of the European Agenda for Adult Education" <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/implementation-of-updated-priorities-for-the-european-adult-education-agenda/>

<sup>63</sup> SDC project "Support to dual VET and NQFS system reform in the framework of lifelong learning in Serbia"

[http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/sr\\_lat/support-to-dual-vet-and-nqfs-system-reform-in-the-framework-of-lifelong-learning-in-serbia/](http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/sr_lat/support-to-dual-vet-and-nqfs-system-reform-in-the-framework-of-lifelong-learning-in-serbia/)

<sup>64</sup> GIZ DECIDE project "Dialogue on Employment Creation, Initiative and Dual Education" [Vocational education and training for better employability of young people in Serbia - giz.de](#)



## 9 REFLECTIONS AND PLANS

The implementation structure for the NQFS has been established, and the main working methods and instruments developed and put in place. The work of the Qualifications Agency, the development of qualifications standards and the NQFS register, as well as the development of the RPL system have been supported through numerous donor projects<sup>65</sup>.

Both the Education Strategy 2030 and the National Employment Strategy 2021-2026 prioritise the development of qualifications in line with labour market needs through the development of qualifications standards and programmes based on them. The related actions will focus on improving capacities of social partners in the development and updating of qualification standards and PROAEA in developing training programmes, including support for Sector Skills Councils, as well as improving the key competencies framework for qualification standards in line with the revision of educational standards (standards of achievement/ standards of key competencies)<sup>66</sup>.

An important milestone was the referencing of the NQFS to the EQF in February 2020. The NQFS register is now connected to the Europass platform, the NQF/EQF levels are indicated in public documents for qualifications in vocational and adult education, contributing to building trust, transparency and comparability of national qualifications at an international level. Promoting the use of the NQFS by all relevant stakeholders beyond the education and training system and the public will be important to promote lifelong learning and adult participation.

Qualifications are introduced into the NQFS following the development and adoption of qualifications standards. For the moment, the NQFS register includes qualification standards only for vocational qualifications. Improving and piloting the methodology for the development of qualification standards for higher education has been made a priority<sup>67</sup>. In 2023 three qualification standards for higher education were passed and approved, and will be added to the NQFS register in the upcoming period. Alignment of the development of qualification standards with the accreditation and development of education programmes will be important to ensure full integration of the higher education sector into the NQFS system.

The integration of NQFS into higher education is supported by the ongoing SDC project<sup>68</sup>, aimed at the development of qualification standards for higher education as of 2024, improvement of the methodology for the development of qualification standards considering the specificities of the process in higher education, and drafting the amendments to the regulations on accreditation of study programmes within the NQF system. Further activities planned include piloting and promoting the improved methodology for developing qualification standards and the NQF system in higher education.

There are plans to explore the possibility of establishing a more flexible and comprehensive NQFS system in which partial qualifications, i.e. qualifications for employment, would be integrated<sup>69</sup>. For the moment, Serbia does not foresee partial qualifications being included in the NQF, although through non-formal education in accordance with a qualification standard, it is possible to recognise sets of learning outcomes or individual professional competencies acquired, or to obtain a certificate for a partially accomplished standard of professional competencies.

Other important measures are the integration of short cycle qualifications into NQFS and the development of post-secondary education programmes at NQFS level 5<sup>70</sup>. This will improve the higher

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<sup>65</sup> <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/>

<sup>66</sup> [Serbia National Implementation Plans for the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration](#), National Implementation Plans - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

<sup>67</sup> Economic Reform Program (ERP) 2023-2025 [Ministry of Finance \(mfin.gov.rs\)](http://mfin.gov.rs/)

<sup>68</sup> SDC project "Support to dual VET and NQFS system reform in the framework of lifelong learning in Serbia"

[http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/sr\\_lat/support-to-dual-vet-and-nqfs-system-reform-in-the-framework-of-lifelong-learning-in-serbia/](http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/sr_lat/support-to-dual-vet-and-nqfs-system-reform-in-the-framework-of-lifelong-learning-in-serbia/)

<sup>69</sup> Adult education plan for 2023 [Odluka o utvrđivanju Godišnjeg plana obrazovanja odraslih u Republici Srbiji za 2023. godinu: 28/2023-80 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

<sup>70</sup> [Serbia National Implementation Plans for the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration](#), National Implementation Plans - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

VET offer and will enhance the permeability of VET and higher education.

One of the main priorities in the field of lifelong learning remains the development of a system of recognition of prior learning in a way that is transparent and comparable to the existing qualifications system<sup>71</sup>. Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is an area where work has advanced in the past two years. However, only primary and secondary schools can be accredited as PROAEA for the RPL activity. There are still numerous challenges for the national VNFIL system, such as increasing the number of RPL service providers, the inclusion of labour market stakeholders and assessing the possibility of introducing VNFIL in higher education and other organisations.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
CGS	Career Guidance and Counselling Services
CLASSNQFS	National Qualifications Classification System
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
NES	National Employment Services
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQFS	National Qualifications Framework of Serbia
PROAEA	Publicly Recognised Organiser of Adult Education Activities
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

## REFERENCES

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2020). Report on referencing National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and Self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. [EQF Referencing Report | Serbia | Europass](#)

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2021). Strategy for education development in Serbia 2030. [Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine: 63/2021-4 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

The Law on the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia [Zakon o Nacionalnom okviru kvalifikacija Republike Srbije: 27/2018-3, 6/2020-3, 129/2021-15 \(dr. zakon\), 76/2023-19 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)

Overview of laws and bylaws under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia: <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/laws-and-regulations/>

NQFS website hosted by the Ministry of Education [NQFS web presentation \(mpn.gov.rs\)](#)

The Qualifications Agency portal [Агенција за квалификације Републике Србије \(azk.gov.rs\)](#)

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<sup>71</sup> Strategy for the Development of Education by 2030 [Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine: 63/2021-4 \(pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs\)](#)



The NQFS register [noks](http://noks.gov.rs) :: Претрага националних квалификација ([azk.gov.rs](http://azk.gov.rs))

## Where to find out more

Website

[www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)

Online platform

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

Twitter

[@etfeuropa](https://twitter.com/etfeuropa)

Facebook

[facebook.com/etfeuropa](https://facebook.com/etfeuropa)

YouTube

[www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa](http://www.youtube.com/user/etfeuropa)

Live&Learn

<https://issuu.com/etfeuropa/>

Instagram

[instagram.com/etfeuropa/](https://instagram.com/etfeuropa/)

LinkedIn

[linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation](https://linkedin.com/company/european-training-foundation)

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