

# INVENTORY ON THE VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Country report 2023: Tunisia

## Disclaimer

This report was prepared for the ETF by Patrick Werquin and reviewed by Monika Auzinger (3s), Michał Kowal, Zbigniew Włosek (Greatvisory), Arjen Deij and Maria Rosenstock (ETF).

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# 1 Introduction

Validation of all learning outcomes and competences gained from experience – either at the workplace or as a result of any kind of activities in the private sphere – is a key element for lifelong learning (LLL) to become a reality and for employability to increase. This statement is highly relevant for Tunisia where a large number of individuals, in particular manual workers, do not have their various competences and learning outcomes<sup>1</sup> recognised by a formal document.

Despite early pilot schemes (2005-2007) and a very convincing system designed from 2015 onwards, at the time of writing this report, there is still no national legislation or official definition regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). The main national legislation that is somewhat relevant to VNFIL remains Framework Law No 2008-10 dated 11.02.2008 on Vocational Education and Training (*Loi n° 2008-10 du 11 février 2008 relative à la formation professionnelle*), in particular Article 61. However, it falls far short of providing a legislative framework sufficient to set VNFIL in motion.

Tunisia provides an interesting case as the VNFIL system has been technically well designed, although only in the technical vocational education and training sector. Currently, VNFIL falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Education and Training (MEFP, *Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Formation professionnelle*), but the system is not operational and there have been no developments beyond vocational training. This creates obstacles for Tunisians who need to prove and substantiate the skills they possess, for instance when seeking a promotion, trying to get a decent job or even just applying for a job in the formal economy for the first time.

Since the mid-2010s and the beginning of PEFESE (*Programme d'appui budgétaire aux secteurs de l'éducation, de la formation, de l'enseignement supérieur pour l'employabilité des diplômés* [support programme for education, training, higher education and employability]) training programme, Tunisia has been able to learn from its many experiences and to adapt the VNFIL system to the conditions in the country. However, at the time of writing, it is not possible for Tunisians to have their skills or learning outcomes recognised when they have been obtained outside the walls of training institutions. Only those acquired within the formal learning system carry value and have currency in the labour market (despite employers repeatedly complaining about the actual skills possessed by graduates leaving the formal education and training system).

In the period 2005-2007, Tunisia benefited from the French cooperation, represented by the Agency for Adult Vocational Training (*Agence nationale pour la formation professionnelle des adultes*, AFPA), and therefore the French term 'Validation of Experiential Learning Outcomes' (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE) is that which still has currency in 2023 in Tunisia<sup>2</sup>. It was a thorough experiment with the drafting of guidelines and specific tools for each stage of the VAE process, for example.

Based on a decree of 2005, a trade test system has been in operation for some craft sectors<sup>3</sup>. It allows applicants with no qualifications but with occupational experience of at least 3 years to be assessed and receive a 'Certificate of labour market competences'<sup>4</sup>. This certificate allows the holder to prove their workplace skills, in particular for the launch of small projects or to start a process of legal immigration in various activities requiring a certificate of labour market competences<sup>5</sup>. It was a convincing approach

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<sup>1</sup> This report will not reopen the question of the difference between "competences" and 'learning outcomes'. They are taken as synonymous, and the entire report focuses on the validation and recognition of competences and learning outcomes that are acquired in non-formal and informal learning context(s), not on the cognitive process.

<sup>2</sup> The term VNFIL will be used, herein, to designate the process in general, while the term VAE will be used to designate VNFIL in Tunisia. The term 'French VAE' will be used to refer to the French approach, which is now different from the Tunisian approach; and this has been a convincing measure (see, for instance, Werquin, 2021; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/17454999211063480>).

<sup>3</sup> See examples in East Africa (e.g. Kenya, Malawi or Uganda). See <http://www.emploi.gov.tn/fr/68/certificat-dattestation-de-qualification-professionnelle> for Tunisia.

<sup>4</sup> In accordance with the terms and conditions of the tests set by a decision of the Ministers of Trade, Crafts, Education and Training dated 27 February 2007.

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with Decree No 3078 of 29 November 2005, fixing the list of small trades and handicrafts and determining the activities requiring vocational qualifications.

because it was easy to organise (all the stakeholders know one another), there was an assessment of workers, and the employers of the sectors would recognise this certificate of labour market competences. However, this process cannot be considered a validation of the non-formal and informal learning system. For example, it leaves out unemployed people and individuals outside the labour force. In addition, it does not lead to a fully-fledged formally recognised qualification that would be part of the national register. The Arab Spring, from December 2010, and the 2011 Revolution in Tunisia temporarily interrupted the application of this approach, or of any approach in fact.

In 2013, a new decree was published following the same 'Trade Test' rationale. It was at around this time that the PEFESE project came into play. It provided an opportunity to step up the approach used for the existing 'Trade Test' system to make it an actual VNFIL system. PEFESE was funded by the European Union, and it was an opportunity to bring expertise from other countries, again from France. It provided Tunisia with an opportunity to redesign its system from scratch, in a holistic manner. Three pilot schemes were carried out in the context of PEFESE, which heavily relied on schools and training institutions to organise the assessment and top up education and training. The pilot schemes were organised in three industries: hospitality, construction and fishing. Since then, however, no major steps forward have been taken as the baseline legislation has not yet been adopted.

Things are always easier to analyse in retrospect, but the approach proposed under PEFESE was brilliant because the qualification – '*certification*' in French<sup>6</sup> – was placed at the centre of the work. It was therefore easy to link it to the other components of the National Qualifications System, of which a national qualifications framework, a VNFIL system, a quality assurance system, a financing system and an apprenticeship system are natural and strategic components. The proposed approach would also have made it possible to link with lifelong and lifewide learning, and there were many attempts to reach out to the regions (governorates) in Tunisia.

This holistic approach would have been fully consistent with the National Vocational Training System Reform set in motion in November 2013 (MFPE, 2013) and reconfirmed in 2018<sup>7</sup>. It comprised 14 components. At the time of writing in 2023, it is unclear what has happened to this reform, but it has not been implemented as planned. Only some components still seem to be on the agenda, as confirmed for example by Tunisia's choice to focus on the register of qualifications, VAE, quality assurance and governance under the current Torino Process. The content of the reform was very relevant with regard to promoting lifelong learning, designing a thorough National Qualifications System and, in particular, establishing a universal VAE system.

After designing a VAE system with the support of the PEFESE project, Tunisia continued with the EU-funded IRADA project (regional initiative to support sustainable economic development<sup>8</sup>) with the aim of actually implementing VAE. IRADA built on the work of PEFESE. Its implementation in the field of vocational education and training was consistent with the regional development policy promoted by IRADA, which aims to link the world of work and the world of education. IRADA's work was centred on bringing in a single validation and certification system, as designed under PEFESE. However, the political context had changed, and the VAE system stalled, including the implementation in the regions.

The legal texts exist and have all been drafted – the drafting started with support of PEFESE and were improved with support from IRADA – and they compare quite favourably to similar laws passed in other countries, but there has not yet been a political decision to adopt them. The government is the main regulator and supplier of formal education and training. VNFIL is being requested by the social partners, especially the employers' union UTICA and the sector's professional federations (construction, ICT, mechanical engineering).

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<sup>6</sup> In French the term 'qualification' also exists, and the NQF in Tunisia is e.g. named the Classification nationale des Qualifications, but 'qualification' in French is much closer to the term 'competence' than to formally acknowledged competences through certification. This has created endless issues in Tunisia's communication strategy.

<sup>7</sup> [Reforme FP Tunisie-Fr.pdf \(emploi.gov.tn\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> The '*Initiative régionale d'appui au développement économique durable*', funded by the European Union for an amount of EUR 32 million was designed to provide sustainable and inclusive economic development and improve the employability of women and men in eight pilot governorates.

In short, at the time of writing, it is only the long-existing 'Trade Test' system (*Certificat d'attestation de qualification professionnelle*, CAQP) that currently allows workers with experience to be assessed. It is a form of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes – and would have been absorbed into the new VAE system if it had come into existence – but it falls short of meeting the needs of the population with no formal qualifications in Tunisia.

## 2 National perspective

### 2.1. Overarching approach to validation

The term used in Tunisia to designate validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is 'validation of experiential learning outcomes' (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE). This dates back to the very first pilot schemes that took place in Tunisia, with the help of the French National Agency for Adult TVET (AFPA) in 2005-2007. Validation of experiential learning outcomes (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE) is the term used in France since the Law of Social Modernisation of 2002. The pilot schemes were organised by the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment (MFPE) in the clothing and automotive industries.

Despite these early pilot schemes<sup>9</sup>, the convincing system design and potential demand, there is still no national legislation or official definition regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). The main national legislation relevant to VNFIL remains Framework Law No 2008-10 dated 11.02.2008 on Vocational Education and Training (*Loi n° 2008-10 du 11 février 2008 relative à la formation professionnelle*<sup>10</sup>), and in particular Article 61. This is because the system that has been developed for VAE concerns only technical vocational education and training and falls short of providing the legislative framework to set VNFIL in motion.

Article 61 of Law 2008-10 states: 'The qualifications mentioned in t Articles 9 and 13 above, except for the vocational upper secondary education qualification (*Baccalauréat professionnel*), can be awarded through Validation of Occupational Learning Outcomes, i.e. only skills acquired at the workplace. The conditions for certifying prior occupational learning outcomes are decided by the Minister overseeing technical vocational education and training.'

Article 61 of the 2008-10 Law states that it is possible to award all vocational qualifications through the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, namely:

- secondary vocational education: Certificate of vocational aptitude (CAP, *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*);
- secondary vocational education: Professional technician's certificate (BTP, *Brevet de technicien professionnel*);
- post-secondary vocational education: Higher technician's certificate (BTS, *Brevet de technicien supérieur*) or an equivalent qualification;
- Certificate of labour market competence (Trade Test) *Certificat d'attestation de qualification professionnelle*, CAQP.

As stated in the last sentence of Article 61, the conditions for the validation must be set by a decree of the Ministry of MFPE (which later became the MEFP). This decree has not yet been published.

As stated above, during the period 2005-2007 the MEFP carried out an experiment in building a VAE system, supported by French cooperation, represented by the Agency for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA). It was a thorough experiment with the drafting of guidelines and specific tools specified at each stage of the VAE process, for example. However, these early experiments were not very successful because the approach was built on the exact competency-based approach APC (*Approche par les compétences*) used for developing curricula. This approach was based on a pedagogical model that worked from a broader basis to further specialisation but did not allow separate sets of skills to be assessed. This is probably the most difficult issue to understand for an external observer.

<sup>9</sup> It has not been possible to find statistics regarding these pilot schemes. The only certainty is that no full-fledged qualifications were awarded on that occasion.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.anm.nat.tn/useruploads/files/gaztte0142008.pdf>



In short, any VNFIL approach demands that the country uses a competences-based approach, and the VAE approach in particular. Most countries do this. Despite its name, APC is not VNFIL-friendly. Tunisia adopted the APC in the 1990s, and therefore the VAE pilot schemes in 2005-2007 were based on the APC but the APC is education/training-based not qualifications-based. Pedagogical progress is very present in the way in which the standards are drawn up, whereas a qualification-based approach only looks at the skills mastered by the applicant at the time of the assessment. More importantly, the APC does not provide a context for skills to be demonstrated and used. The APC goes into painstaking detail about the way in which the skills are described with an assessment for each individual learning outcome rather than a coherent set of outcomes that consider the applicant's full experience. It is the ability to combine competences to reach a result in a given context that matter in the VAE approach. It is the potential to become a good professional that is being assessed, not the superposition of sometimes 40 competences taken in isolation. The 2005-2007 pilot was therefore a dead-end.

Nevertheless, validation of non-formal and informal learning remains an apparent priority for Tunisia, and the MEFP strategy focuses on VAE among other aims:

- a social and political consensus;
- a coherent and comprehensive regulatory framework;
- qualification standards designed with reference to VAE requirements;
- developed funding tools;
- trained and involved staff;
- developed tools and instruments;
- adapted human and technical resources;
- "individualised" training allowing applicants to complete their journey.

However, VAE activities in Tunisia were scarce until the mid-2010s when a decree published by the government put VAE back on the agenda. It was also the time when PEFESE was proposed to Tunisia.

It quickly became obvious that the existing approach used in the formal education and training system (APC) was indeed based on competences (or tasks for that matter – see above). However it was also clear that it was an approach suitable for designing education and training course content, but not for qualification (or assessment) standards. The PEFESE project provided an opportunity to Tunisia to revamp its VAE system or, rather, to start from scratch. Under PEFESE, a redesign of certification standards (*référentiels de certification*) was undertaken on a pilot basis, based on assessing sets of competences or *champs de compétences* professionnels<sup>11</sup>.

This is also an issue that is essential to understand in the context of VNFIL in general: it is no less and no more than another route to a qualification. VNFIL is not an education and training process. VNFIL is a process used to assess learning outcomes and skills which are already there. Of course, it is somewhat a learning activity, because applicants always learn by being assessed, but it is mainly an assessment process. Section 2.2 will describe in detail the work carried out under PEFESE, because it was only meant to cover access to qualifications from the vocational education and training system.

Once PEFESE had put the principles of the 'new' Tunisian VAE system on paper, the EU-funded IRADA scheme then provided an opportunity to move to the next and final step: implementation. This stage is also described in Section 2.2 as it is part of the same unfinished story.

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<sup>11</sup> 40 such standards exist, but their legal status is still in limbo.

## 2.2. Validation in education and training

The VAE system as developed under PEFESE concerns only technical vocational education and training (and merely one level/qualification: see Graph 1). There are currently no plans to provide VAE opportunities in literacy, secondary academic education, or tertiary education. For example, there is no assessment of current learning outcomes before offering second-chance courses, and there is no possibility of accessing higher education through the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. An experiment was planned between the Montpellier Business School (France) and the Central University of Tunisia to carry out VAE in higher education but did not lead to any concrete results.

As mentioned above, VAE benefited from a fresh start in the mid-2010s with PEFESE. It provided Tunisia with an opportunity to revisit the VAE system's design (*ingénierie de la VAE*), since the very first pilot schemes had established with certainty that the education and training system design were a hindering factor to VAE.

Among the first objectives directly targeted under PEFESE was the development of **standards** that would be adapted to the VAE approach so that VAE applicants could be assessed without having to rely on the approaches used in the APC system (for education and training). They are, in essence, qualification standards. The drafting of these standards was supported by the Ministry. They were adapted to VAE and could be used without calling into question the entire construction of the formal education and training system. The idea was that the education and training standards on the one hand and the qualifications standards on the other were both based on the definition of blocks of competence – previously called blocks of education and training in Tunisia (*champs de formation*) – that were totally autonomous. The competences then describe the practice of a trade job and the criteria that are related to the practice of this trade job. The newly developed standards contained assessment criteria. They also contained a clear description of the type of learning outcomes that would be accepted for assessment in the context of VAE. This made it possible to carry out a seamless assessment of VAE applicants, and also to invite professionals from the trade to act as assessors. It was a win-win situation. With this contribution, Tunisia could have fully entered into an era where consistency between qualifications delivered in the VAE system and the labour market was guaranteed.

The next step would have been to roll out the use of qualifications standards across the formal education and training system to address the almost systematic employers' complaint that graduates did not have the competences their qualifications said they had. This was too much of a jump for Tunisia at that time. The labour market stakeholders remain an intrinsic partner in the design of qualifications. It is also true that the concept of blocks of competences is consistent with many other approaches such as micro-credentials, increasing employability, occupational mobility and lifelong learning.

This is because, in practice, a block of competences (*champs de compétences* in Tunisia) is a set of modules that concern a set of knowledge, know-how and transversal skills. The main contribution here is the consideration of the necessary combination of these competences. It is indeed a combination of modules that leads to these different blocks of competences. The idea is that there is knowledge that is common to several blocks. In the formal education and training system, this makes it possible to construct pedagogical progression for initial education and training in a more certain way in relation to all the blocks. With regard to VAE in particular, it also makes it possible to provide additional learning opportunities for a single block of competences – if applicants were to lack them during the assessment – because it is now possible to organise top-up education and training in relation to this block only, on the basis of standards defined in this way.

Another objective was to decolonise the VAE system and to adapt the French approach to the Tunisian context. There was the introduction of an **interview** with the applicant between the initial information and guidance stage and the actual – or final<sup>12</sup> – assessment. With hindsight, it is possible to think that the approach initially adopted for VAE in Tunisia was not sufficiently adapted to the Tunisian context, or too similar to the French approach from which it was inspired thanks to AFPA involvement. This interview

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<sup>12</sup> The full VAE process is about assessment, but the last stage is more closely focused on assessment. That is why the final stage is often called direct assessment or final assessment, i.e. in relation to the standards and the target qualification.

part interspersed between the initial information and guidance and the assessment itself is somewhat innovative, and it is an ideal replacement for the eligibility condition based on number of years of experience in the field, which was a rather inefficient way of screening out illegitimate applicants. The interview aims to ascertain whether the applicant reasonably masters the competences or blocks of competences subject to the final assessment. It is a kind of guarantee that is put in place for all stakeholders. It is indeed costly for the system to set up the assessment by block of competence, and the chances of success must be optimal. In a way, it is also costly for the applicants who may find themselves in a situation of great frustration if they unexpectedly fail. This 'eligibility interview' is clearly a welcome protection for the system and for the applicants. It confirms the areas of expertise that will form the final assessment, if necessary. To give an order of magnitude and clarify ideas, an assessment can focus on three blocks of competence, and an applicant may be denied the right to be assessed in some or all of them.

Another important contribution proposed under the PEFESE project concerns information and guidance (see Section 7.2).

PEFESE has made it possible to lay the foundations for a high quality VAE system. Tunisia therefore wished to take advantage of IRADA (Regional Initiative to Support Sustainable Economic Development) project to move on to the **implementation** phase. By the end of the 2010s when PEFESE ended, Tunisia had designed a convincing VAE system. It was still theoretical, but it was convincing, especially because it was adapted to Tunisia. Two opportunities arose then: the International Labour Organisation (ILO) 'Making Competences Visible (RCV)' project and the 'Regional Initiative to Support Sustainable Economic Development (IRADA)' project funded by the European Union.

These two projects were simultaneous, but the RCV insisted on the rapid implementation of VAE even though the texts had not yet been published. The choice was therefore to roll out only part of the RCV and, at the same time, to use IRADA to think about the implementation of VAE once the bills were available. It is pertinent that Tunisia then chose to prepare the ground at all levels to be ready to roll out VAE as soon as possible. Given that Covid had just hit the entire planet, the choice was to run an **awareness** and **capacity** building campaign.

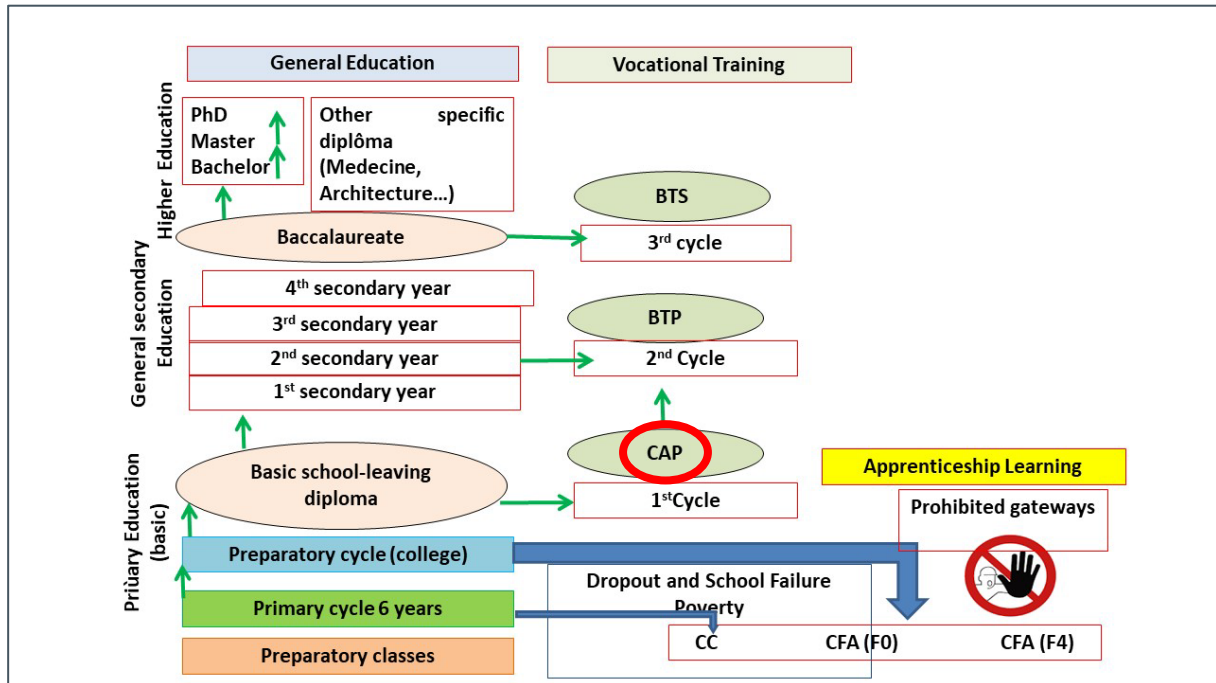
Training/awareness-raising sessions for all the key stakeholders then ensued. These included the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Traditional Crafts (UTICA), the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), the Ministry (with the departments of vocational training and employment, and institutions under its supervision) and some professional federations. It was a question of taking as much professional advantage as possible (in spite of Covid) from this training with tools developed on purpose.

The capacity-building phase began shortly thereafter. This was also an essential step because Tunisia innovated once more, compared to its immediate past, by allowing unemployed people, in addition to workers, to participate in VAE. The status of unemployed jobseeker was approved as giving the right to participate in VAE. There was therefore an explicit recognition that former workers also have potentially accumulated learning outcomes and competence gained before becoming unemployed or during unemployment. Including unemployed people was another decisive move on the part of Tunisia. Indeed, though workers already had the National Centre for Continuing Training and Occupational Promotion (CNFCPP) to help them in their efforts, unemployed people could not rely on the National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (ANETI) to gain the opportunity to have their learning outcomes acquired outside of formal education recognised. The Making Competences Visible project has therefore made it possible to raise awareness among all stakeholders, for workers and unemployed people. The approach is gradual, careful about explaining why unemployed people represent potential in terms of human resources and development of competences for Tunisia.

Another welcome innovation in VAE was the possibility of directing applicants who had failed the VAE assessment towards additional training. VAE remains, above all, a process of assessing learning outcomes and competences that applicants already possess. It is not an education and training process. Nevertheless, it is always possible that an applicant does not have all the knowledge and skills to meet the qualification standard against which they are assessed, essentially because a professional rarely makes use of all the skills of the standards when at work. There is a tendency to specialise and to repeat

the same activities every day at work. In these cases, directing applicants to top-up education and training gives a second chance to applicants that fell short of meeting the qualification standards.

**Figure 1. The Tunisian Education and Training System and the VAE Pilot (in red)**  
**Limited coverage**



Source: ILO (2018)

At the end of the RCV/IRADA period, Tunisia had significantly raised awareness about VAE and was in possession of all the necessary documents to move forward:

- training and raising awareness among the different stakeholders;
- training of information and advisory staff;
- training and raising awareness among VAE coaches;
- training of assessors;
- training of staff in charge of administrative processing.

IRADA promoted a regional approach that needed some pilot regions to be designated for implementation.

However, VAE does not exist in practice in Tunisia and the number of individuals who ever received a qualification through VAE is nil.

## 2.3. Validation in the labour market

The closest system to VAE that actually exists in Tunisia is the Trade Testing System (a literal translation would be: ‘Test justifying occupational competences in the skilled trades sector’), or Certificate of Labour Market Competences (CAQP, *Certificat d’attestation de qualification professionnelle*<sup>13</sup>). Again, *qualification* in French is a false cognate and the French term *qualification* is much closer to the concept of competences. *Qualification* in French refers to the workplace, and therefore to the capacity of an individual to occupy a job. *Qualification* in French is by no means a document attesting competence as in the national qualifications framework. Nevertheless, a *qualification* may be a condition for having the qualification.

In practice, the CAQP is a solution that industries put in place to ensure that they are hiring workers able to do a job. It is close, in essence, to VAE because there is an assessment, but it is only valid within a specific industry sector. It is clearly not regarded as a qualification by people in Tunisia and may even suffer from some stigma, even on the part of the professionals in the field.

The test justifying occupational competence aims to ensure that applicants have the necessary competences to practise an occupation, considering the requirements of quality, hygiene, professional safety and environmental protection.

The candidate<sup>14</sup> for the CAQP test must meet the conditions of being at least twenty years old at the time of application and having practised the target occupation for a minimum of three years, including any period of up to a year in education and training not resulting in a qualification, provided the applicants have provided proof that they have received training in a specialty compatible with the target occupation.

The CAQP brings about enhanced occupational skills, in particular for the launch of small projects or to start a process of legal immigration in various activities requiring a CAQP. The main target groups are stated in the Decree No 2005-3078 of 29 November 2005, establishing the list of small trades and crafts activities and determining the activities that require a CAQP to practise (Box 1).

### Box 1. List of activities requiring a CAQP (certificate of competences)

#### I. Activities in small trades

1. Various activities and services
2. Activities and services related to the building sector
3. Maintenance-related activities
4. Domestic maintenance-related activities
5. Hygienic maintenance-related activities
6. Miscellaneous activities
7. Plastics-related activities
8. Chemical-related activities
9. Paper and printing-related activities
10. Metal, mechanical, and electrical-related activities
11. Leather and footwear-related activities
12. Weaving and clothing-related activities
13. Wood, cork, halfa, and palm-related activities
14. Ceramics, glass, and construction materials-related activities

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.emploi.gov.tn/fr/68/certificat-dattestation-de-qualification-professionnelle>

<sup>14</sup> Order of the Ministers of Commerce and Traditional Crafts, Education and Training of 27 February 2007, setting the conditions and procedures for organising the test justifying professional qualification in the trades sector

## 15. Food-related activities

### II. Crafts/trades

1. Glass trades
2. Clay and stone trades
3. Metal trades
4. Goldsmith and silversmith trades
5. Vegetable fibre trades
6. Wood trades
7. Leather and footwear trades
8. Weaving trades
9. Clothing trades

Source: Decree No 2005-3078 of 29 November 2005, which establishes the list of activities in small trades and crafts and determines the activities that require professional qualifications in Tunisia.

In addition to this specific provision that exists in the Tunisian legislative framework (CAQP), labour market stakeholders are also key to any future fully-fledged VAE system. They are thoroughly involved in the assessment process, for example. And they should be involved in drawing up qualification standards.

## 2.4. Validation in the third sector

Despite having a very active third sector, Tunisia has not yet started to introduce validation of non-formal and informal learning here.

### 3 Links to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

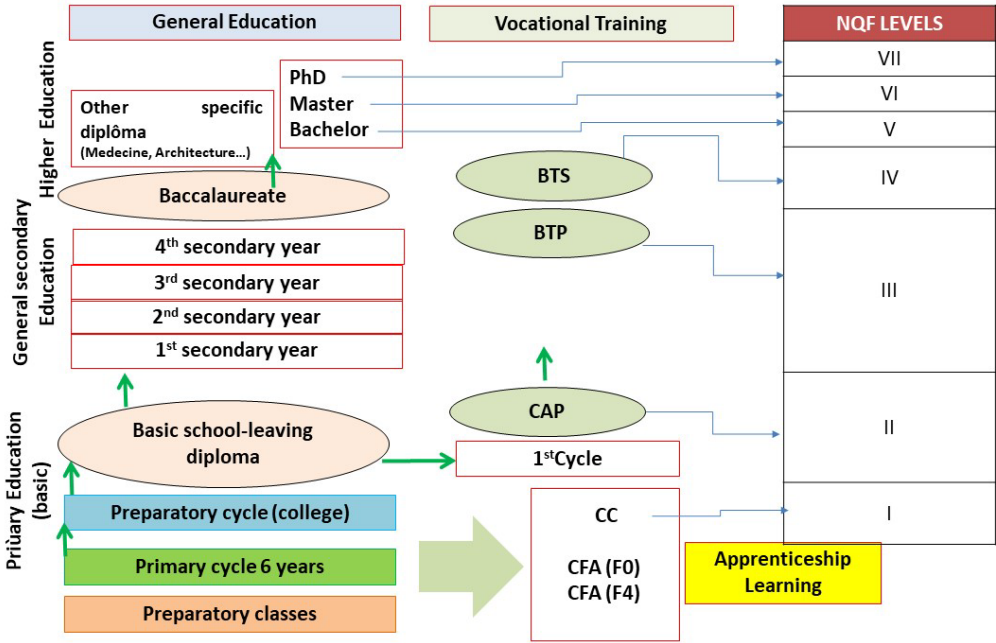
The question of the links between the VAE system and the national qualifications framework (NQF) is difficult because neither the Tunisia national qualifications framework or the VAE systems are operational. It is therefore difficult to report on the links with relative confidence. The Tunisian NQF – *Classification nationale des qualifications* – has an unusual name which sounds like a too-literal translation of the English term qualification, whereas the French term *certification* would sound more correct, especially when all stakeholders use the term *certification* to talk about the catalogue/repertory.

The National Qualifications Framework (*CNQ*) was established and put into use in 2009. It has seven levels and six descriptors. It is not operational in the sense that it is not well known and even less used by economic operators (e.g. employers). It is somewhat difficult to find information regarding its structure and usage. Learners cannot systematically accumulate or transfer credits. In fact, on the face of it, the concept of credits is missing from the CNQ in the sense that qualifications are not based on credits. Nevertheless, the NQF is said to be based on learning outcomes. The National Qualifications Catalogue (or Repertory) is regularly mentioned but not operational.

In order to make the NQF operational, the ETF has been working with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training and there is now a concept and a roadmap for developing and implementing a Repertory for Vocational Training and the NQF (*Répertoire de la FP et la CNQ*). The idea of this repertory starts from vocational training, using European tools like ESCO (the EU's multi-lingual classification for occupations and skills) and the European Learning Model (an agreed data model for describing qualifications, learning opportunities, providers, quality assurance systems and digital credentials) and brings the data on Tunisian qualifications together in a way draws comparisons and links within the VET system and between VET, general education, higher education and adult learning and qualifications from European and other neighbouring countries.

At the time of writing, the theory is that the future VAE system will directly link into the national qualifications framework. It could also start from vocational training and then expand. This is, again, because the full system has been designed in a holistic way. The VAE system and NQF are meant to be launched together and to support each other.

Figure 2. The national qualifications framework





## 4 Standards and reference points

VAE-friendly standards are probably the most telling step forward under the PEFESE project. The inability of the 2005-2007 pilot schemes to reach a positive result was largely due to their inability to assess individuals with non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes.

In addition – and this is part of the reason why the introduction of this report described the VAE system as perfect on paper – a method was put forward during the PEFESE project to connect the traditional approach used in Tunisia to draw up education and training standards (the APC) and the suggested approach for drawing up qualification standards.

PEFESE paved the way for the smooth implementation of VAE at all possible levels of education and training. All the documents produced at all stages took on board the context, the mores of Tunisia and proposed feasible solutions. Although the PEFESE project started with three standards for the pilot schemes in the project, there are now 40 such standards. However, current development of new standards has been halted due to a lack of legal standing.

A key question – and source of tension – in the process was and still is whether the entire education and training system should move toward a National Qualifications System, with a focus on qualification rather than on education and training. It is more than a theoretical question. It implies a change of mindset to where curricula are designed around identifying assessment standards rather than the other way around. It is about having in mind what kind of graduates should come out of the system and what kind of competences they would need to have to be able to act and solve real problems in the workplace.

Identifying competences starts with an Analysis of the Working Situation (*Analyse des situations de travail*, AST). The APC rightly insists on the AST as a key step. Nevertheless, the question is where to go from here. It is not about training individuals in the identified task. If the result of the AST leads directly to drawing up the curriculum, then the labour market is lost and employers will continue complaining that education and training graduates do not possess the competences their qualifications say they have. It is about how individuals will be able to combine tasks to solve real problems. This requires appropriate assessment.

## 5 Organisations and institutions involved in the validation arrangements and their coordination

Many public bodies are involved in developing VAE systems and potentially in its implementation:

- MEFP and regional directorates, for oversight. Non-formal learning is not monitored by government departments. MEFP is leading the national policy of implementing all lifelong-learning mechanisms. The Directorate of Standards and Accreditation of Training Centres is responsible for advocating in favour of the national VAE system, approaches and tools;
- Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Crafts;
- Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fishing;
- Ministry of National Defence;
- ATFP, for non-formal learning. It offers monitoring and effective training. It follows the F0 training levels (for insufficient educational level individuals) and certification (recognised by a certificate of competences);
- CENAFFIF/National Centre for Continuing Education and Professional Promotion – CNFCPP (and regional units)/National Agency for Employment and Self-employment – ANETI (and employment offices);
- AFMT, AVFA, National Institute for Agricultural Education and Continuing Training – INPFCA, public stakeholders on the formal apprenticeship, and providers of non-formal training and certifications;
- regional private VET organisations;
- Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Traditional Crafts – UTICA, Tunisian General Labour Union – UGTT, Tunisian Hospitality Federation – FTH, and Tunisian Textile Clothing Federation – FTTH (professionals' organisations), as employee representative partners.

The roles of organisations and institutions are not clearly defined in VAE policies and regulations. There were therefore eventually some tensions about which body was in charge of the assessment of VAE applicants as several of them see themselves as overseeing assessment.

On the face of it, all actors and key stakeholders are legitimate, but there is no coordination mechanism. The lack of involvement at a political level is again part of the issue.

## 6 VNFIL service providers

The pilot schemes carried out as part of the PEFESE project heavily relied on schools and training institutions to organise the assessments and the top up education and training. Pilot schemes ran in three industries: hospitality, construction and fishing.

Under the schemes, professionals from these three industries were called in to act as assessors.

# 7 Information, outreach and promotion. Advice and guidance

## 7.1. Information, outreach, and promotion

Due to the fact that the VAE system is not yet operational, information, outreach and promotion – i.e. for outsiders and potential VAE applicants – is not yet operational either. Communication has not yet been agreed, especially for reaching out to the individuals most in need, of whom there are many in Tunisia.

Sourcing for the three pilot schemes was done by education and training providers and, as such, information has not proven a priority.

Nevertheless, there is a high level of awareness about the need for Tunisia to reach out to the individuals and workers who need it most, but the practical arrangements are still lacking.

## 7.2. Advice and guidance

On the other hand, it is another major achievement of PEFESE that advice and guidance to the applicants who engage in VAE will be improved. The new approach consists of distinguishing the validation of prior learning outcomes from the choice of target qualification. This is all the more relevant as the Vocational Training Reform (MFPE, 2013) provided for a national system of lifelong information and guidance. It plans to have two levels of information and guidance:

- the first refers to explanations – a form of simplification – on the validation of experiential learning outcomes itself (e.g. the rights of applicants, the purpose of VAE in and for life and the labour market and the possible results, or even funding). It is after this stage that the potential applicant decides whether to engage in the VAE process, take a period of reflection, or give up; and
- the second level allows applicants to choose the target qualification they want to aim for and make use of tools such as the Tunisian Catalogue of Trades and Competences (RTMC, *Référentiel tunisien des métiers et des compétences*<sup>15</sup>). The RTMC is being updated to ensure everyone involved has a coherent understanding of the occupations and skills, to get endorsement from sectoral bodies and professionals and to bring it in line with ESCO.

As a reminder, this is followed by the guidance stage, then the interview, and then the final assessment.

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<sup>15</sup> [http://196.203.175.146/dm/index.php/fichemetier/rtmc\\_resp/E1103](http://196.203.175.146/dm/index.php/fichemetier/rtmc_resp/E1103)

## 8 Validation practitioners

### 8.1. Profile of validation practitioners

There is no clear indication regarding the profile of validation practitioners and this stage.

The pilot schemes carried out in the context of PEFESE showed that at least four categories of staff were necessary:

- information officers,
- guidance officers,
- assessors,
- trainers (for top-up education and training).

The pilot schemes also showed that assessors were professionals in their field and trainers. The VAE system should follow the same path when it is set in motion.

### 8.2. Qualification requirements

The exact qualification requirements of the practitioners have not yet been decided.

### 8.3. Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

Awareness raising and capacity activities were organised during the RVC/IRADA projects, but it is difficult to derive from them what the exact services provided will be when the VAE system is up and running.

## 9 Quality assurance

Quality assurance is currently being discussed in the context of lifelong learning in Tunisia but there is no specific provision for VAE.

A quality agency is one option that is being considered, but the work is too early in development to be able to provide relevant details.

## 10 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

### 10.1. Funding

The funding for the VAE system has not been made public. All the funding systems are at the design stage and neither funding nor cost distribution has been agreed.

### 10.2. Distribution of costs

This preparatory work for rollout under the IRADA project also made it possible to address the question of financing the price<sup>16</sup> for VAE applicants.

The National Centre for Continuing Education and Professional Promotion (CNFCPP) had already decided that applicants would bear half of the fees for VAE. Where they needed top up education and training, applicants would also pay 50% of the price. Applicants would therefore be invited to contribute either once or twice to the VAE process.

Tunisian stakeholders realised very early on that there was a great risk of not having any or enough applicants because of the high price relative to the incomes in Tunisia unless the government again made use of international aid to finance VAE, which is not a sustainable solution. There needs to be a calculation of the order of magnitude and a final price for VAE set. This would also be an opportunity to think about the actual cost of VAE.

Tunisia worked on drafting legal texts addressing the financing of VAE as part of the Making Competences Visible (RCV) project, but they do not go into details on price. However, two scenarios are being mooted. There may be a price list, by specialty or block of competences. There could therefore be price differences between occupations and qualifications. This may make it difficult to attract in VAE individuals with learning outcomes corresponding to the most expensive qualifications. Alternatively, it could be decided to introduce a flat cost, which would mean all specialties and blocks would be at the same price. The uniform price has the advantage of being simple, easy to communicate and egalitarian.

At the time of writing, it seems that the first solution – with a differentiated price list – holds the most sway. The decision – if there is a decision – should be made by ministerial order. It will have to consider the situation of unemployed people who currently have no income.

Free qualifications does not seem to be a good idea since it is associated with low motivation and could degrade the value of the certificate in the minds of employers. The CNFCPP and ANETI seem well placed to contribute to this discussion, which was reopened in 2022.

Applicants for CAQP must pay a fee to the assessor.

### 10.3. Evidence of benefits to individuals

Due to the absence of any individual ever being awarded a qualification in the VAE system, it is not possible to provide evidence as to the benefits.

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<sup>16</sup> It is more correct to talk about the 'price' of the VAE rather than 'cost' because the price is visible. It is what stakeholders in the VAE process will pay (applicants, employers and the Public Employment Service, typically). The cost of the VAE relates to the whole system and must include infrastructure and human resources costs. There is no such a thing as an estimate of what might be the cost in Tunisia. Only the breakdown of the price has been discussed.

## **10.4. Beneficiaries and users of validation processes**

### **10.4.1. Validation trends**

N/A

### **10.4.2. Validation users**

There are no users as such of the Tunisian VAE system. Even the rare pilot schemes that were carried out under PEFESE could not have led to the awarding of a qualification because the legislative framework was not there. In fact, individuals who went through VAE in the context of the pilot were told that they would not be awarded a qualification even if they were successful at assessment.

### **10.4.3. Validation and disadvantaged groups**

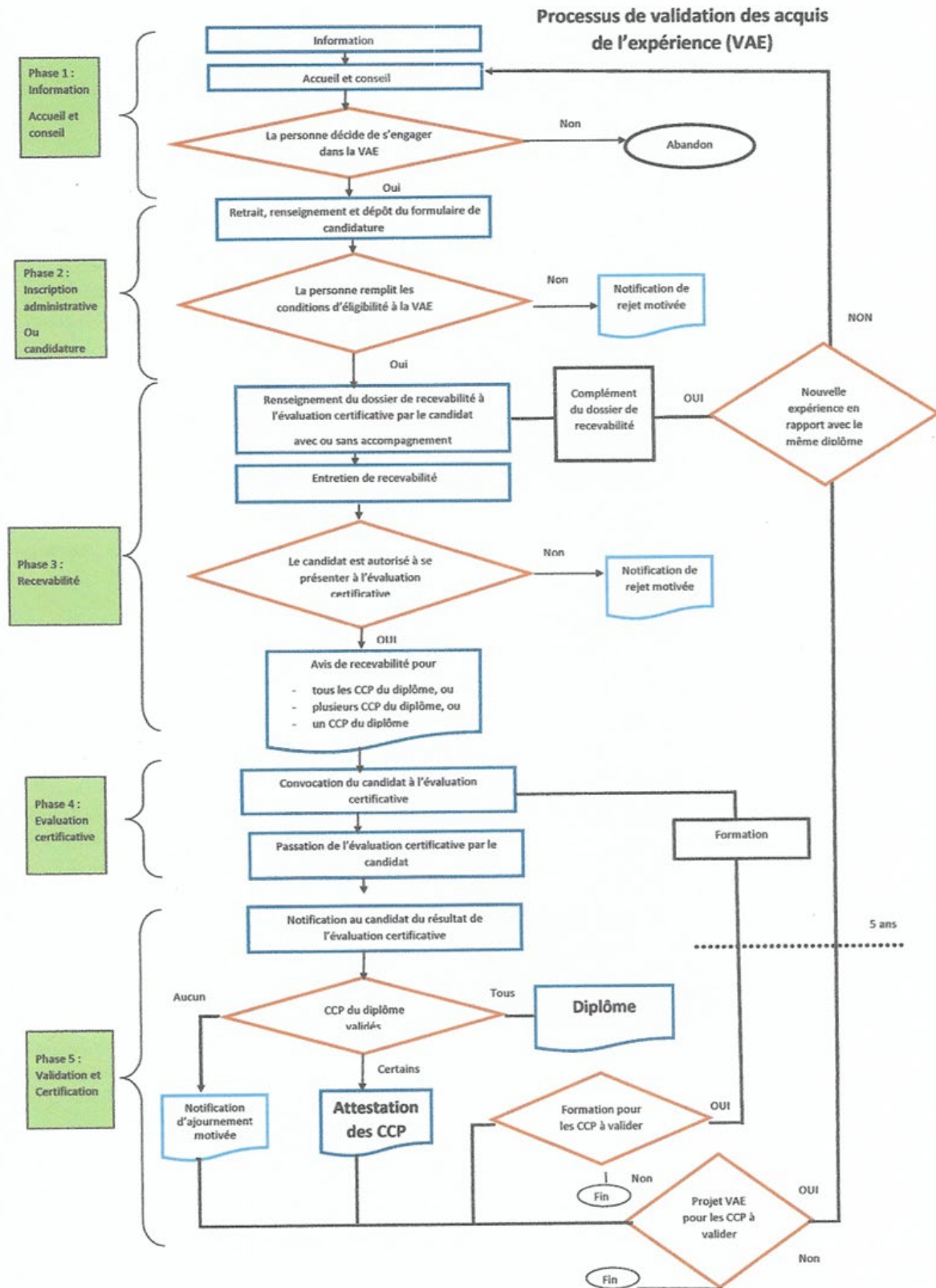
Disadvantaged groups are among the natural targets for VAE in Tunisia but none have been validated, even during pilot schemes.



# 11 Validation methods

The different phases of validation and most common methods of the target (projected) VAE process will be:

- information and guidance;
- registration and administrative admissibility;
- support and technical eligibility (interview);
- assessment;
- validation and awarding of a qualification to successful applicants;
- to improve education and training for unsuccessful applicants willing to have a second chance.



Source: MEFP

## 12 Use of ICT in validation

Although the matter is regularly discussed as a potential way of reaching and assessing more applicants in a given period of time, there are no digital tools being developed to be used in the VAE system once it is set in motion.

## 13 The position of validation in society

At the time of writing, VAE is only known by a small group of technicians and evidence is too scarce to provide any significant vision of whether qualifications delivered by VAE would be recognised by society.

## 14 Recommendations

At time of writing, **the key recommendation is to adopt the legal texts drafted during the PEFESE project and improved under the RVC and IRADA schemes.** The VAE system has been set to paper and it is persuasive. The technical work has been completed and the main missing element is the legislative framework. VAE needs high-level political commitment to be brought to light.

Focussing in greater detail, VAE requires a **more collaborative approach between institutions** to get better results. There seems to be too much fragmentation in institutions and therefore roles, and the coordination mechanism is unclear or lacking. Better collaboration can be achieved by stepping up the responsibilities of the VAE. One option would be to create an interministerial delegation. Setting up a **focal point for VAE** within the ministry is another, complementary one. Issues such as legislation, information and guidance, and funding need to be addressed as a priority.

As mentioned on several occasions, all the relevant documentation, guidelines and support exist for each stage of the VAE process. There is even a method for linking the existing and well entrenched traditional routine – the APC approach – with the proposed modern VAE system. VAE-friendly qualifications standards could be drawn up from the education and training standards developed in the context of the APC.

The recommendations are:

- all existing texts on VAE should be promulgated, and VAE should be implemented;
- Tunisia should move to a qualification-based system for the entire lifelong learning system;
- there should be a communication and promotion strategy so that TVET qualifications are valued and have currency in the labour market;
- qualifications achieved in the VAE system should carry the same weight in society and have the same currency in the labour market as traditional educational qualifications;
- there should be a communications policy to inform the broader public about VAE;
- when it becomes a reality, the VAE system should be rolled out rapidly across the regions;
- a funding mechanism should be developed so that VAE applicants do not to bear most of the cost of VAE;
- companies should be incentivised to invest in the VAE system (drafting qualification standards, assessing VAE applicants, hiring people who hold VAE qualifications);
- capacity for VAE should be stepped up by preparing a workforce;
- capacity building of support units within professional federations should also be developed;
- VAE centres should be accredited;
- the national qualifications framework should be implemented, and micro-credentials should be part of the national qualifications framework (CNQ).

The details of these recommendations should be worked out together with government officials and stakeholders in order to set priorities and make them operational.

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## 17 Acronyms

AFMT	Training Agency in Tourism Professions
ANETI	National Agency for Employment and Self-employment
ATFP	Tunisian Agency for Vocational Training
AVFA	Agricultural Extension and Training Agency
CENAFFIF	National Centre for Training Trainers and Training Engineers
CNFCPP	National Centre for Continuing Education and Professional Promotion
CNQ	Classification Nationale de Qualifications [National Qualifications Framework]
ESCO	European Skills, Competences and Occupations
ETF.	European Training Foundation.
FTH	Tunisian Hospitality Federation
FTTH	Tunisian Textile Clothing Federation
INPFCA	National Institute for Agricultural Education and Continuing Training
IRADA	Initiative régionale d'appui au développement économique durable [regional initiative to support sustainable economic development]
MEFP	Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training
PEFESE	Programme d'appui budgétaire aux secteurs de l'éducation, de la formation, de l'enseignement supérieur pour l'employabilité des diplômés [support programme for education, training, higher education and employability]
TFP	Vocational training tax
UGTT	Tunisian general labour union

UNFT	National Union of Tunisian Women
UTICA	Union tunisienne de l'industrie, du commerce et de l'artisanat [Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Traditional Crafts]
VAE	Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience