

EVENT REPORT

TITLE:

Regional cooperation on skills and qualifications in Central Asia

SUBJECT:

DARYA Thematic Module 2 – Stakeholder driven flexible and permeable approaches to qualifications

DATE AND LOCATION: 15- 17 OCTOBER 2024, BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN

URL: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/events/darya-regional-cooperation-skills-and-qualifications-central-asia>

The event aimed to explore sustainable scenarios of cooperation on qualification and skills for the region of Central Asia (CA). It built upon initiatives undertaken between 2023 and 2024, which sought to identify opportunities for regional cooperation among CA countries. Key activities included the preparation and the outcomes of a DARYA regional feasibility study, the development of support tools for cooperation (e.g. multilingual glossary of terms of national qualifications systems, comparison and mapping of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs)), and the ongoing work on the development of multicountry occupational profiles. The next sections provide further details for each of these activities. Additionally, the report highlights lessons learned shared by partners from the Western Balkans, Latvia, and France, and concludes with the description of a most preferred scenario for regional cooperation as developed and voted by participants.

DARYA Feasibility study on regional cooperation on skills and qualifications

The feasibility study ([direct link to full text](#)) explored the ongoing economic, political and social collaboration in Central Asia, as well as looked at international examples of regional and international cooperation on skills and qualifications. Based on these inputs, it developed four potential scenarios for regional cooperation with different intensity. The study combined desk research and focus groups discussions. Main conclusions of the study include:

- Political cooperation between CA countries is increasing;
- CA youth need more productive jobs, which requires investment in skills and qualifications;
- Regional cooperation has the potential for economic development and diversification and more sustainable quality growth;
- Regional and expanded cooperation to Europe, Middle and East Asia will strengthen CA, identity and improve the global image of the workforce and human potential and reduce reliance on commodity trade and political dependency on Russia and China.

Four potential scenarios of cooperation proposed to the countries of Central Asia included:

Scenario 0: Minimal cooperation to support national systems. Under this scenario, the countries of Central Asia sign up for collaboration in the framework of DARYA project. This scenario entails minimal cooperation approach that limits the potential for regional integration and harmonization of qualifications systems.

Scenario 1: Partnership for Improvement. Under this scenario, countries of Central Asia partner to improve their national qualification systems through collaborative efforts, such as exchange of best practices and materials, collaboration within professional networks (including various mobility schemes), and pulling together information on skills and qualifications from different Central Asian countries. This scenario entails cooperation at technical level, and limited impact benefitting involved actors.

Scenario 2: Regional transparency. Under this scenario, countries of Central Asia establish mutually understandable qualifications systems to enhance the transparency and comparability of qualifications between member states, and to facilitate the mobility of learners and workers within the region. This entails actions such as implementing a Regional qualifications framework, linking databases of qualifications and labour market evidence, developing common qualifications. The scenario entails commitment of countries at system and political level, and is expected to provide benefits at regional, national and system level.

Scenario 3: Integration for a Regional Brand. Under this scenario, countries of Central Asia seek to integrate their national qualification systems into a single, cohesive framework that is recognised and valued both regionally and internationally. Processes of cooperation can entail developing and implementing common policy frameworks (including for Qualifications, Quality Assurance, Career Guidance and Lifelong Learning), automatic recognition of qualifications, jointly developed and applied resources, and others. Such integration processes would require commitment and political and system level, and are likely to benefit mobility and recognition of qualifications within the region and internationally.

Multilingual glossary of terms of NQS of Central Asian countries

Multilingual glossary was developed in the framework of DARYA project by the national working groups from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan in coordination by DARYA project and DARYA international experts, led by Olav Aarna. The glossary reflects the current terminology in the field of lifelong learning, qualifications, qualification frameworks and qualification systems used in the European Union and Central Asian countries. It should be considered as a work in progress that will evolve throughout the DARYA project, in particular in the process of developing of multicountry occupational profiles and national qualifications, as well as in the process of updating national legislations.

Link to Multilingual glossary of terms:

<https://skillsproof.kz/restful/v1/domain/registry/documents/624445/>

Information about the process of compilation of the glossary, clarifications on its use and a series of conclusions: <https://skillsproof.kz/restful/v1/domain/registry/documents/624447/>

Conceptual model of the qualifications system to facilitate understanding of the relationships between the terms included in the Glossary: <https://skillsproof.kz/restful/v1/domain/registry/documents/624449/>

Comparison and Mapping of National Qualifications Frameworks in Central Asia

The aim of this assignment was to assess the prerequisites and prospects for the development of a

regional qualifications framework (RQF) in Central Asian countries by comparing: a) the processes of development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in the countries, b) the structure and content of the NQF (comparability of reference criteria and level descriptors), and by linking the qualifications of the selected sectors to the NQF. The comparison shows differences and similarities in the approaches among Central Asian countries. Development of regional qualifications frameworks in Central Asia requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that takes into account both national specificities and the common goals of improving mobility and integration. Currently NQFs in the countries of Central Asia are not used to their full potential and this can hinder the development of an RQF.

[Multicountry occupational profiles](#)

The development of multicountry occupational profiles is a pilot activity under the DARYA project. Piloting will be implemented in 5 sectors: tourism (guide), construction (surface finisher), transport and logistics (logistics specialist or international truck driver), housing/utilities management (energy efficiency specialist), e-commerce (marketplace/e-commerce specialist). These profiles can be seen as linking elements of in regionally relevant sectors and occupations, applied for transparent, sustainable and mutually beneficial labour migration, promotion of corporate investment and regional cooperation between educational and training institutions in Central Asia. A guideline for the development of multicountry occupational profiles has been prepared and according to it, the structure of such profiles include:

- Name of the occupational profile;
- Reference level of qualification in the National Qualifications Framework;
- Brief description of professions and work processes related to the profile;
- Role and place of qualifications related to the profile in the relevant economic sector;
- Units and competences of the occupational profile;
- Assessment specifications and recognition of competencies/qualifications: assessment and recognition bodies, procedures, resources.
- Links to national qualifications and standards of Central Asian countries;
- Links to other international qualifications and standards.

Key messages about experiences presented by partners from the Western Balkans, Latvia, and France

[Regional cooperation on skills development in the region of Western Balkans \(ERI SEE\)](#)

Tina Šarić, the director of ERI SEE Secretariat, presented the background, areas and model of cooperation of Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE). ERI SEE was established as a result of collaboration process started in 1999. ERI SEE involves Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, as well as partner institutions supporting ERI SEE (Regional Cooperation Council, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Research and Science, European Training Foundation). Key areas of cooperation are pre-tertiary education (VET, VET quality assurance, teacher education and training) and tertiary education (recognition of qualifications, quality assurance).

ERI SEE governance model involves multilevel coordination (ERI SEE Governing Board, Secretariat, Consultative Body, Partners). It ensures the coverage of both national and regional dimensions, and of a full policy cycle from definition of strategic directions, to planning, implementation and monitoring of activities and results. Funding model is based on an integration of annual donations from member countries, annual donations from donors, and project-based funding.

The long history and experience of developing regional cooperation in the field of education and training in South-Eastern Europe/Western Balkans allow us to draw the following conclusions:

- Establishing regional cooperation in the field of education and training is a long-term process, which sometimes requires support from international partners;
- Sustainability of cooperation is important and it is ensured by four main factors:
 1. political will of partner countries;
 2. the use of a balanced governance model with participation of all key stakeholders (see figure below);
 3. the existence of an effective executive office (secretariat, agency, etc.);
 4. putting in place a fair funding mechanism.

Using international/regional cooperation - the Latvian experience

Tatjana Danilova, Senior expert of the National Centre for Education of Latvia presented Latvia's experience of using international and regional cooperation in skills and education to advance national goals. Highlights of her contribution are the following

- International and regional cooperation is a catalyst for successful reforms in the field of lifelong learning, in particular vocational education and training;
- The use of European transparency instruments (EQF, ECTS, ECVET, EQAVET, etc.) ensures a more coordinated approach to the development of national policies and instruments for the development of qualifications, and creates conditions for their comparability and recognition;
- Wide understanding, capacity building and implementation of mechanisms of national qualifications systems (such as occupational/qualification standards with full engagement of stakeholders, NQFs) is important to benefit systems at national level and to contribute to trust and transparency at regional/international level
- There is a need to strengthen the capacity of sectoral councils in the development and quality assurance of qualifications.

The experience of the French National Agency for Adult Vocational Training (Afp)

Svetla Guillemot, Training manager at the National Agency for Adult Vocational Training of France (Afp) shared how occupational and evaluation standards are developed and used at Afp. The development of standards is grounded in continuous observation of job market. They are revised every 5 years. All standards are structured by blocks of skills that correspond to groups of typical work activities. Blocks of skills can be acquired (and assessed, and certified) progressively or in isolation.

There are several ways of application of standards by Afp:

- For training – to design training programmes (modular based), both in school location, and in the company,
- For in-course assessment – to develop in-course assessment tasks
- For validation on non formal and informal learning – as a reference point for describing personal dossier and assessment,
- For final assessment examination – to develop final assessment tasks (both for graduates of training courses, and for candidates validating informal and non formal learning).

Afp's experience leads to the following conclusions:

- In a lifelong learning context, vocational training is not limited to the initial training;
- It is essential to have a coherent national vocational training system, including adult learning;
- The quality of qualifications shall be ensured by a meaningful alignment between occupational profiles, qualification standards and assessment standards.

Scenarios for cooperation in Central Asia

Building on the scenarios presented in the DARYA Feasibility study event, participants collectively shaped a proposal for a future scenario of cooperation. The title of the developed scenario is: Integration in the area of skills and qualifications. Its objective is the integration of national qualification systems of Central Asian countries into a single, comprehensive system, recognized and highly valued both at the regional and international levels

Activities of regional cooperation under the proposed scenario can be grouped around 3 clusters: 1) **sharing of existing information and peer learning** in the area of education and training, qualifications, labour market, 2) **jointly shaping new skills in Central Asia**, through jointly created and applied resources (regional portal on labour market data, common occupational profiles and curricula, and connecting national databases of qualifications), and 3) **integration of systems in Central Asia**, through a regional qualifications framework and mechanisms for mutual recognition of educational and occupational qualifications.

According to participants, **funding of regional cooperation activities** should establish synergies between international funds and donors (EBRD, GIZ, EU, other international partners), national budgets, private donors, business associations and sectoral structures, as well as crowdfunding.

Participants drew on various **risks and challenges** in implementing this scenario including complexity in seeking for political agreements, absence of funding sources, institutional instability, absence of a follow-up in implementing decisions and priorities. In order to tackle these risks and challenges, participants suggested several measures: creating the foundation for support and engagement of international donors, capacity building of local experts, exchange of experience with other CA countries, engagement of NGOs in developing qualifications, development of mechanisms for involvement of employers in the design of qualifications and sectoral frameworks.

Participants proposed a roadmap of milestones and results to be achieved through the implementation of the scenario e.g.:

- By 2027, a draft of the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) of Central Asia will be created based on the adoption of a political decision by the heads of state, signing of memorandum agreements between Central Asian governments; furthermore, a regional coordination body will be established, etc.
- By 2035, the RQF will be recognised, approved and operational; a classifier of occupations, skills and qualifications (ESCO alike) for Central Asia will be created;
- By 2050, a sustainable regional system of CA qualifications will be put in place.

From the perspective of CA countries and societies, the main benefits of the regional cooperation scenario relate to: economic as well as human capital development, sustainability, creation of new jobs and tackling of skills mismatches improved access to qualifications at regional level, increased opportunities for personal development, advancement of training, presence of mechanisms for recognition of qualifications, and recognition of competences at regional level.

Next steps

Follow-up steps have been identified by ETF/DARYA team:

- Consolidation of the proposed scenario of regional cooperation in a document in English and in Russian, by end November 2024,
- Sharing the proposed scenario of regional cooperation at DARYA Regional steering committee meeting (13 November 2024), at DARYA high level group event in Tashkent (4-5 December 2024), and among national and international stakeholders.