

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – NORTH MACEDONIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

North Macedonia's national qualifications framework (NQF) was adopted by law in 2013, amended in 2016, and again in 2025. It is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework, consisting of eight levels, of which levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each.

Coordination of the Macedonian Qualifications Framework (MQF) lies with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Ministry of Economy and Labour, while operational management is the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF.

North Macedonia is an EU candidate country, a member of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG), and has referenced its NQF to the EQF and self-certified against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) within the Bologna Process.

NQF governance arrangements are in place; most of the necessary enabling regulations have been adopted; instruments and systems for quality assurance are being applied; and the framework has begun to play a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications domestically and internationally. However, implementation across education sectors remains uneven.

The MQF is at the activation stage.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 Policy context

North Macedonia is a candidate for EU accession, is committed to European integration, including in education and training, and is a recipient of significant EU funding to support the transition to eventual membership. In vocational education and training (VET) it is implementing the [EU Council Recommendation on VET](#) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience. It also adheres to the [Osnabrück Declaration on VET](#), which encourages countries to upgrade VET, and apply it in support of economic recovery and growth, and to assist the green and digital transitions. North Macedonia's [National Implementation \(NIP\)](#) sets out how the country intends to deliver the goals within the Declaration.

The country's resident population is contracting – it has decreased by 9% in the last 20 years, falling to 1.8 million according to census data gathered in 2021, while the share of young people aged 15-24 in the 15-64 age group decreased from 22% in 2010 to 17% in 2023¹.

Economic recovery after the pandemic remains slow, so that, despite the positive effect of net exports on GDP, growth actually slowed from 2.2% in 2022 to 1% in 2023².

The [National Employment Strategy 2021-2027](#) sets the “improvement of the quality of education and training outcomes for all” as its priority.

VET enrolment as a share of the country's upper secondary cohort has been rising in recent years, from 60% in 2020/21, to 64% in 2022/23 and 67.3% in the 2023/2024³.

Transition to higher levels of education and training has been facilitated in the past decade through several policies, such as making secondary education compulsory for all, streamlining progression routes in VET programmes from three to four years, giving access to higher education, and stimulating participation in higher education.

¹ Cited in [Key policy developments in education, training and employment - North Macedonia 2024 | ETF](#)

² As above.

³ As above.

Higher education institutions have been reforming their curricula and qualifications in implementation of the Bologna principles.

Education reform

The NQF is a key reform instrument in the country's principal economic, social, employment and education strategies. A new Education Strategy is being prepared, to be implemented for the period 2026-2030. The new [Adult Education Strategy](#) of North Macedonia 2025-2030 was adopted in 2025.

The existing [Education Strategy](#) defines a vision of an inclusive and integrated education system focused on the learner, based on modern programmes equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and competences for participation in society and the labour market. It addresses all education sectors, including VET and adult education. It seeks to improve: the education system infrastructure, including buildings and facilities; equipment and teaching; supporting technologies; capacities of human resources including managers, teaching, and support staff; the autonomy of education institutions; and legislation, management and funding.

The main policy priorities established for VET are to harmonise it with labour market needs, improve the learning environment and quality of VET, increase enrolment in the sector, and improve capacities of human resources. The two key policy initiatives launched recently in VET are the successful roll-out of classes with a substantial component of work-based learning, and the establishment of regional VET centres which will combine functions related to excellence in teaching and learning, increased collaboration with local industry, as well as inclusion of vulnerable groups, training for adults and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

There are new policy objectives in the area of micro-credentials, international qualifications, and qualifications for persons with disabilities.

2.2 NQF legal basis

The NQF in North Macedonia for Lifelong Learning was formally adopted in 2013 via the Law on the NQF, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No 137/2013), which came into effect in 2015 and which was amended by a new law in 2016 (Official Gazette No 30/2016).

A new law on the NQF was adopted in 2025, via the Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 3/25. The Law introduces new elements in the area of quality assurance and the Register of Qualifications. It defines the principles and goals of the framework, its structure, levels, sublevels and level descriptors, mandatory elements of qualification standards, volume, and types of qualifications, as well as its governance, quality assurance aspects and the roles of stakeholders in the qualification system.

3. NQF OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS

The framework aims to improve education and training through implementation of the learning outcomes approach; to aid access to learning in every context and make learning outcomes explicit for every citizen; to raise the overall level of qualifications of the population; and to strengthen the links between qualifications and employment prospects.

Specific functions are to:

- define learning outcomes at different levels.
- establish a system for validation of different qualifications within the overall qualifications system.
- encourage and promote lifelong learning.
- demonstrate clear links between different parts of the education and training system.

- indicate transfer and progression (horizontally and vertically) across and within all types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal).
- enable international comparability of qualifications, including via membership of the EQF and through participation in the EQF Advisory Group.
- promote the importance of key and professional competences.
- ensure mobility of participants in education and training and inclusion in the labour market at national and international levels.
- create a unified system for quality assurance of qualifications.
- provide a platform for contribution by stakeholders to development of the national qualification system.
- ensure alignment of qualifications with national economic, social and cultural needs.

4. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

4.1 NQF structure and level descriptors

The NQF in North Macedonia is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework. It consists of eight levels, of which levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each to reflect the specificities of the national education and training system and meet the requirements of employers⁴.

Level descriptors are defined in terms of expected learning outcomes and follow the EQF domains: knowledge and understanding, skills and competence (responsibility and autonomy)⁵. They were developed for each level taking into account the EQF level descriptors, the Dublin descriptors for levels 6 to 8, the characteristics of national education and training levels, and strategic national priorities. Different dimensions of the Dublin descriptors have been integrated into the three domains of the NQF.

Levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each, so that the framework contains Levels 5A and 5B, 6A and 6B and 7A and 7B. The specifications for learning outcomes are the same in the A and B sublevels. Instead, the function of the extra levels is to cater for different types of qualifications (see below).

4.2 NQF scope and coverage

The NQF includes qualifications of two types defined by the 2025 NQF Law⁶:

1. educational qualifications from all formal education sectors - general education, VET, and higher education.
2. vocational qualifications.

General education qualifications are allocated to NQF levels 1 and 4, educational VET qualifications can be placed at NQF Levels 2-5B, while higher education qualifications are allocated to NQF Levels 5A-8. Vocational qualifications can be allocated at NQF Levels up to 5B.

⁴ Ministry of Education and Science (2016). EQF referencing report of the Macedonian qualifications framework and self-certification to the QF-EHEA., p. 63

⁵ Law on the National Qualifications Framework. Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 3/2025

⁶ Law on the National Qualifications Framework. Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 3/2025. Article 11

Educational VET qualifications (in 1, above) are based on qualification standards while vocational qualifications (2, above) are based on occupational standards.

Vocational qualifications are acquired through parts of publicly adopted programmes, modules, or courses, or by completing special education programmes, or through validation of non-formal and informal learning after assessment law and include professional competencies from one or more occupational standards.

The new NQF Law of 2025 provided for the inclusion of micro credentials in the MQF. Partial qualifications were already eligible for levelling. While at the time of the publication (2025) there are no examples of either type placed in the framework's levels, five micro credentials have been developed.

Macedonian Qualifications Framework

NQF levels	Educational qualifications	Vocational qualifications	EQF
8	Doctorate diploma		8
7	A Second cycle of studies, specialist master studies (60 to 120 ECTS)		7
	B Second cycle of studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Specialist Master Studies (60-120 ECTS) ■ First and Second Cycle Integrated Studies (300 ECTS) 		
6	A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ First cycle university diploma (240 ECTS) ■ First cycle vocational diploma (240 ECTS) 		6
	B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ First cycle university diploma (180 ECTS) ■ First cycle vocational diploma (180 ECTS) 		
5	A Short cycle higher education (vocational) diploma		5
	B Post-secondary diploma for specialist education; Craftsman diploma	Non-formal qualifications	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Upper secondary general education diploma ■ Upper secondary technical diploma ■ Upper secondary arts diploma 	Non-formal qualifications	4
3	Vocational diploma (three years)	Non-formal qualifications	3
2	Vocational certificate (two years)	Non-formal qualifications	2
1	Certificate of primary education	Qualifications for literacy and numeracy skills	1

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education and Science, 2016.

4.3 Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards

All new and reformed qualifications are based on learning outcomes. The 2025 law on the NQF stipulates inclusion of “measurable indicators of learning outcomes relating to the acquired knowledge

and understanding, skills and competence” as one of the mandatory elements of qualifications standards.

Newer VET programmes, introduced in conformity with recent strategies and legislation, are based on the qualification standards linked with relevant occupational standards. Programmes are modular. In adult education, verified non-formal training programmes are designed in the language of learning outcomes and based on occupational standards.

Since 2010, higher education institutions have designed their programmes in the language of learning outcomes. In accordance with the Law on Higher Education, higher education programmes should contain learning outcomes aligned with the descriptors of the upper levels of the MQF.

The national stakeholders are currently working on development of a methodology for a review of qualifications which, according to the Law on NQF, is to be carried out every five years.

4.4 Quality assurance arrangements

NQF legal acts establish the competent bodies and procedures for the development and quality assurance of qualifications. The institutions responsible for the development of qualifications at levels 1 to 5B are:

- the Centre for the development of vocational education.
- the Centre for Adult Education (AEC).
- the Bureau for Development of Education.

A request for entering a qualification into the Register can be submitted by a legal entity or an individual. The approval and allocation of qualifications in the NQF are the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF following the opinion of the respective Sectoral Council.

Educational and training programmes are verified both in formal VET as well as Adult Education.

Qualifications at levels 5A to 8 are developed and awarded by accredited higher education institutions. All higher education institutions are obliged to undergo both institutional and programme accreditation by the Agency for Quality of Higher Education. The EU Twinning Project reviewed the formulation of benchmarks for higher education programmes and the degree of their alignment with the Bologna requirements and [the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#).

5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The development, adoption, approval, and classification of qualifications are the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the Bureau for Development of Education, the Centre for the development of vocational education, the Centre for Adult Education, and the Sectoral Qualifications Commissions.

The Ministry of Education and Science has overall responsibility for developing the NQF and for EQF referencing; it is the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP). It has a coordinating role, shared with the Ministry of Economy and Labour, in leading the NQF’s development and implementation. In quality assurance, it verifies programmes for formal VET and runs accreditation and verification of VET and adult education providers.

The National Board for the NQF, created in October 2015, ensures the involvement of stakeholders in framework governance. Its role is to evaluate education, employment and regional development policies, to help forge links between education and the labour market, to propose development of qualifications and decide on their allocation in the NQF in North Macedonia, to set up and supervise the sectoral qualifications councils; it also has a monitoring and methodological role.

The Board has two representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, and one from each of the following: the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the Centre for the development of vocational education, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, higher education, the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Union of Chambers of the Republic of Macedonia, the Chamber of Craftsmen of the Republic of Macedonia and the Chamber of Commerce of Northwestern Macedonia, the Organization of Employers of Macedonia (OEM), and the Independent Union for Education, Science and Culture (SONK).

Day-to-day running of the NQF is supported by the permanent NQF Unit in the Ministry of Education and Science with three staff members. The operational budget of the NQF Unit, of approximately 5 million MKD, includes budget lines for the works of Sectoral Commissions and the National Board, awareness-raising, and management of the register. A separate budget for the development of standards is included in the operations of the Centre for the development of vocational education.

5.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Economy and Labour proposes the development of qualifications, adopts occupational standards and is responsible for setting up a system for collecting information on labour market needs and changes in required competences.

Sectoral Qualifications Commissions are provided for in the NQF law, one for each of the 16 qualification sectors⁷, all of which have now been set up. However, the mandates of several of the Commissions have either expired or are due to expire soon, and the processing of new appointments is necessary. The members represent the Ministry of Education and Science, the ministry responsible for the sector, the employers' association for that sector, the relevant trades unions in the sector, universities, the Centre for the development of vocational education, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, and the relevant body for regulated professions.

Sectoral Qualifications Commissions are mandated to analyse labour market trends, propose and promote qualifications in a particular sector or subsector, evaluate current qualifications and propose priorities in developing new ones, give opinions on the compliance of examination programmes (assessment standards) with occupational and qualification standards, and establish commissions for assessment and validation of non-formal learning.

The Centre for the development of vocational education is responsible for the VET content: development of occupational standards, VET qualifications, programmes and curricula, and monitoring of their implementation. The Bureau for Development of Education is responsible for the development of programmes and curricula for primary and general secondary education, including the general subjects taught in VET programmes.

⁷ Article 14 of the Law on the national qualifications framework stipulates that qualifications are grouped according to sectors which are defined in 16 groups as follows: (1) Geology, mining and metallurgy, (2) Civil engineering and geodesy, (3) Graphic industry, (4) Economics, law and trade, (5) Electrical engineering, (6) Healthcare and social protection, (7) Agriculture, fishing and veterinary medicine, (8) Personal services, (9) Mechanical engineering, (10) Traffic, transport and storage, (11) Textile, leather and similar products, (12) Food service industry and tourism, (13) Chemistry and technology, (14) Forestry and wood processing, (15) Sport and recreation, (16) Arts. The sectoral qualification councils define further sub-sectors, areas and sub-areas. For higher education qualifications, the international Frascati classification is used in scientific disciplines, fields and areas. Law on the National Qualifications Framework, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 3/2025, Article 14.

The Centre for Adult Education proposes the development of vocational qualifications, verifies adult education programmes, and monitors their delivery, develops programmes and curricula for primary and secondary education of adults.

6. RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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

Development of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in North Macedonia is tied to development of the NQF and its principles are largely inspired by the EU's 2012 Recommendation. The Education Strategy 2018-2025 and the new Adult Education Strategy of North Macedonia 2025-2030 adopted in 2025 include measures on validation.

The requisite regulatory framework exists - the three, respective, laws on the NQF, VET and Adult Education variously provide for awards of qualifications via VNFIL, establish the assessment and other arrangements, and regulate the functioning of the departments for validation in Regional VET Centres (RVETCs).

The new, 2025, Law on Adult Education provides for accredited education institutions or adult education providers to carry out validation procedures. In addition, the Regional VET Centres will have the mandate to deliver VNFIL services. It will be possible to award qualifications up to level 5B of the NQF through validation for both types of qualification: educational and vocational. However, only educational qualifications obtained through validation will allow vertical mobility within the formal education system. The vocational certificates awarded through validation will not certify the general education component of the qualifications and therefore will not allow for continuation of learning at a higher level within the formal education system.

The Ministry of Education and Science oversees overall VNFIL policy and the verification of validation service providers. The Centre of Adult Education (AEC) leads on implementation, training of VNFIL practitioners and conducts monitoring of the implementation.

The law on higher education stipulates that higher education qualifications may be awarded via VNFIL as well, but necessary quality assurance regulations are yet to be adopted.

Operationally, developed methodological packages⁸ are available, while three Regional VET Centres have run pilots for six vocational qualifications.

However, validation is not yet widely implemented.

6.2 Credit systems

The volume of qualifications is expressed in credits, using three credit systems. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) is used for higher education qualifications, the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) for VET qualifications, and the North Macedonian credit system for general education (NMCSGE) for primary and general secondary education. ECTS has been applied to all three cycles of higher education since 2005.

6.3 Promoting lifelong learning

⁸ Two methodological documents were developed: the Guide note on VNFIL processes and the Handbook for assessment in the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Vocational qualifications can be awarded for successful completion of part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education, or through validation of non-formal learning. Improvement of adult education programmes, widening the training offer and further development of the VNFIL system, with a focus on disadvantaged groups are prioritised in the national policies and [strategic documents](#). The establishment of Regional VET Centres, which is among top priorities in the VET sector, will be accompanied by expansion of the training offer for adults.

However, the flexible learning pathways have not yet materialised in practice, mainly due to the bottlenecks encountered in adopting legislation. The approach to validation of vocational qualifications still has to tackle the vertical mobility issues that concerns the general education component. In addition, the current approach to describing learning outcomes in the educational standards provides information that is not granular enough to allow for validation of learning outcomes acquired beyond the formal education system. To launch validation, the development of more granular standards allowing assessment against individual units of learning outcomes is necessary.

The Concept for Adult Secondary Education in the Republic of North Macedonia was adopted by Decision No. 13 - 14147/1 of 23 November 2022 by the Minister of Education and Science.

It envisages development of an offer for second-chance courses for adults which will build on learning outcomes developed around [key competences](#) and incorporate experiential learning through validation. The Concept provides for qualifications awarded in the adult education system to be placed in the NQF, though allocation of such qualifications to the NQF's levels is dependent on implementation of the Concept, which is likely several years away.

As indicated at Section 4.2, the MQF is open to partial qualifications and micro-credentials. The new, 2025, NQF law formally established the latter as a qualification type eligible for inclusion in the MQF as official records of achieved learning outcomes for small volumes of learning. Micro-credentials are designed to develop specific skills and can be obtained through courses delivered by educational institutions or training organizations. They may function as standalone 'qualifications' or be combined into broader set of connected micro-credentials, offering flexible pathways for upskilling and lifelong learning.

7. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

7.1. Stage of implementation

All new and reformed qualifications are based on learning outcomes. Reformed vocational programmes are linked with qualification standards and occupational standards.

To date, more than 200 occupational standards have been developed by the Centre for the development of vocational education, in cooperation with the Sectoral Qualifications Commissions.

In recent years the Centre for the development of vocational education has developed and published qualification and occupational standards at MQF Levels 3, 4 and 5B, in various sectors, spanning textiles, transport and logistics, tourism, mechanical engineering, health, agriculture and several others:

- in 2023, 7 occupational and 10 qualification standards.
- in 2024, 3 occupational, 2 qualification and 3 professional qualification standards.
- In 2025 (at the time of writing), 1 occupational and 1 qualification standard.

Others are in the pipeline, pending completion.

The national qualifications register includes 110 VET qualifications at NQF levels 2-5.

Five micro credentials have been developed to date e.g., in waste management and digital marketing.

The establishment of a system for validation on non-formal and informal learning is prioritised in VET and adult education policies. The ETF and other EU services, through budget support, have provided significant support in building a VNFIL system.

The Macedonian NQF is at the activation stage.

7.2 Indicating RQF/NQF levels

NQF levels are currently indicated only in higher education diplomas and diploma supplements⁹. EQF levels are not yet indicated on the certificates, diplomas or in the register.

7.3 NQF dissemination

The website of the Ministry of Education and Science and of the NQF, as well as social media, are used as the main communication channels. Within the framework of a Twinning Project, the NQF Communication Strategy for the years 2023-2025 was developed, to increase the awareness of the NQF among different stakeholders. The Strategy identifies two main target groups - NQF developers and implementers, and system beneficiaries and end-users - key messages for each of the main groups of stakeholders, communication channels and tools, and delivery responsibilities. It includes an implementation plan with clear targets and indicators.

7.4 Qualifications databases and registers

The Centre for Adult Education [portal](#) includes information on adult education providers and programmes. The Employment Service Agency uses these programmes as part of its active labour market measures.

Qualifications approved by the National Board for NQF are registered in the [NQF Register](#) which is designed as a comprehensive NQF register to include all NQF qualifications. However, it currently includes only VET qualifications, 110 in total. The register is available in Macedonian only and is not yet connected to other national databases.

Qualifications are classified according to type, NQF level, and sector. For higher education qualifications, OECD classification of Fields of Research and Development is applied. Occupational standards, VET programmes, curricula and examination programmes are published on the [Centre for the development of vocational education portal](#).

The register currently includes the following data fields:

- title of qualification.
- code of qualification.
- type or sub-level of qualification.
- level or sublevel.
- sector of qualification (for higher education qualifications the science field is determined according to the Frascati classification).
- volume (number of credits and duration).
- description of qualification (measurable indicators of learning outcomes relating to the acquired knowledge and understanding, skills and competence).

⁹ A bylaw that stipulates the indication of levels on higher education qualifications was adopted in June 2018. National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 102, 1 June 2018.

- contents: entry requirements, number of mandatory and optional subjects, assessment methods and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes.
- type of public document (diploma/certificate).
- type of institution issuing the public document (primary school, secondary school, higher education institution, educational provider, adult education provider).
- mobility/progression.
- date of adoption of qualification standard.
- date of revision.

The register includes a search function.

EQF levels are not yet included in the data fields. Work to connect with the Europass platform via Qualifications Dataset Register have started. Further areas of ongoing works include defining qualifications in line with ISCED 2013 fields, defining awarding bodies and their websites, writing short descriptions of qualifications, including EQF levels of qualifications in the register, and improving user experience including digitalisation of the process of application for qualifications standards, and development of a new module for processing requests for occupational standards.

7.5 Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications

Recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out by the [country's National Academic Recognition Information Centre \(NARIC\)](#), housed in MES and called the Informative Centre at the Ministry of Education and Science.

In higher education, regulation for recognition of full qualifications needs to be revised to follow the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#) principles and the use of NQFs in recognition processes.

7.6 Career guidance and counselling

The Law on Primary Education prescribes the professional orientation of students in the 8th and 9th grades of primary schools. In 2020 the Programme for Professional Orientation (8th and 9th grade) was developed.

In secondary education, career centres have been set up in the schools, engaging trained career guidance advisors selected from school personnel and supported by a standardised web-based tool "[Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation](#)" (BIPO).

The national reform agenda includes an indicator that measures what percentage of primary and secondary schools have at least one qualified careers guidance professional.

In VET, several documents supporting career guidance have been produced for the Centre for the development of vocational education, such as the [Guide to VET qualifications](#) and the programme on career planning for [career guidance work in secondary VET](#).

In higher education, the Law on Higher Education specifies that each university should have at least one careers office.

In the employment sector, the National Employment Strategy 2021-2027 notes that in 2019 over 95% of registered unemployed people, that is circa 144,000 persons, received labour market information and counselling through the public employment services.

7.7 Awareness and use of the NQF

In December 2022, the survey, “The understanding and visibility of the NQF and NQF Digital Register” was conducted on a sample of 180 respondents. The survey targeted three groups of stakeholders: (1) national authorities and social partners; (2) learners; (3) education providers and career counsellors. The research questions covered the usability of the NQF, assessment of the NQF Board and its work and sources of information about the NQF.

The knowledge of NQF among national authorities and social partners was higher than among other groups. Among the learners, 43.8% confirmed that the NQF is a useful tool, while one third of the respondents did not have clear opinions about the NQF. Around half of respondents in this group indicated interest in receiving regular information about new qualifications and occupational standards. Among education providers and career counsellors, half agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the NQF is a useful tool. 43.8% did not have an opinion. 57.7% indicated that they wish to be informed about new qualifications and occupational standards developed.

7.8 Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

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

7.9 Impact of the NQF

The NQF is now an integral part of the qualifications system, seen as an important reform tool and embedded in several strategies. North Macedonia reached a milestone in 2016 when it referenced its NQF to the EQF, which gave the national qualifications system more international visibility.

The NQF provides the basis for acquiring qualifications and progressing through qualification levels. It is a tool supporting the quality of qualifications.

Reform of VET and adult education programmes in line with the NQF is in progress. Two and three-year VET programmes (NQF levels 2-3) have been revised or newly developed based on learning outcomes. The four-year programmes (NQF level 4) are being updated. In adult education, a total of 749 verified programmes based on learning outcomes are currently available.

The work on establishing a VNFIL system is ongoing. The Centre for Adult Education has developed a concept and roadmap for VNFIL, procedures and guidelines and has trained assessors in line with principles of the 2012 EU Council recommendation. VNFIL provisions have been included in the new Adult Education Law.

The quality assurance arrangements in higher education are undergoing a review to ensure their stronger alignment with the Bologna Process requirements.

8. REFERENCING TO THE EQF

8.1 Referencing to the EQF

North Macedonia referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016 and self-certified in the same report against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (i.e., the Bologna Process).

The report is published on the NQF website and the Europass portal.

North Macedonia is a member of the EQF Advisory Group. The Ministry of Education and Science is the designated National Coordination Point for participation in the EQF process.

National stakeholders have been discussing development of a revised referencing report. The update would be drafted based on the criteria for referencing as described in the 2017 EQF

Recommendation. It would cover the increasing level of NQF implementation¹⁰ in the country, new developments in the standards for higher education, and the amendments included in the new NQF law that concern changes in governance arrangements, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the results of the ongoing works on the qualifications register.

8.2 International cooperation

Accession to the EU is a strategic priority for North Macedonia. The Country has been a formal candidate for EU entry since 2005. Accession negotiations were launched in 2022.

North Macedonia participates in the joint monitoring process for the [Osnabrück Declaration 2020](#) and the [EU Council Recommendation on VET](#). The National Implementation Plan of North Macedonia prepared for the purpose of this monitoring includes mid-term deliverable no. 3, which is related to the NQF: Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In EU assistance in education and training in North Macedonia, priorities include widening access to quality education, training and lifelong learning; raising attainment; developing VET and promoting work-based learning to facilitate transitions to the labour market; and improving the quality and labour market relevance of higher education.

North Macedonia also participates in EU programmes such as Erasmus Plus, as a programme country.

The new Agency for Quality of Higher Education (AQA) established in 2019 is an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

In regional cooperation, North Macedonia is a member of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) of South-East Europe. RCC's aims include establishment of a Regional Economic Area which foresees such actions as promoting mobility of professionals, students, researchers, and academics.

National and international actors have provided the funding for the functioning and capacity-building of NQF structures. International donors, notably the World Bank and the EU, through its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), fund most of the NQF implementation activities, in particular development of new VET programmes. International projects have also supported the modernisation of post-secondary education¹¹; cooperation between higher education institutions and the business community¹²; and building capacity of the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) and other relevant stakeholders.

The ETF has supported the referencing of the NQF to the EQF, capacity-building for stakeholders, revision and analysis of qualifications, and levelling of a number of VET qualifications using learning outcomes. In careers guidance, ETF has supported the preparation of a rule book, occupational standards for careers guidance practitioners, and a national career management skills framework which is now available in draft and is under approval.

The EU Twinning Project “Further support to the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework” (2021- 2024), sought to strengthen quality assurance of qualifications, improve the NQF register, with the general objective of speeding up the operationalisation of the system, including through awareness-building activities.

The Technical Assistance project “Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and adult education” (2021 – 2024) included components on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and on improving the system of post-secondary education.

¹⁰ At the time of the presentation of the referencing report, in 2026, EQF referencing criteria 3 and 4 were not fulfilled in all areas: https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/202205/North_Macedonian_Referencing_Report%5B1%5D.pdf

¹¹ IPA project *Support to the modernisation of the system for post-secondary education* (2016-2017).

¹² IPA project *Cooperation between higher education institutions, private sector and relevant public bodies*. (2016-2017)

9. REFLECTIONS AND PLANS

Adoption in the first half of 2025 of a new NQF law has been a recent step forward. It aims to bolster quality assurance and systemize more thoroughly the qualifications register.

However, challenges remain in NQF implementation, especially in higher education, which lags behind VET. HE qualifications are not yet included in the NQF register.

A familiar challenge remains insufficient involvement of stakeholders representing the labour market.

The framework is open to partial qualifications and micro-credentials.

VNFIL arrangements in higher education are missing, while implementation of validation in VET needs a higher level of intensification and application across the country, given the very small numbers of applicants assessed so far.

ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Centre for Adult Education
AQA	Agency for Quality of Higher Education
BIPO	Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation
CVET	Continuous vocational education and training
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EQF NCP	European Qualifications Framework National Contact Point
EU	European Union
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MQF	Macedonian Qualifications Framework
NEET	not in employment education or training
NMCSGE	North Macedonian credit system for general education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RVETCs	Regional Vocational Education and Training Centres
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
VET	Vocational Education and Training

REFERENCES

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