

GUIDELINES FOR COMPARISON OF THE EQF AND THIRD COUNTRY QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

This report has been prepared by the European Training Foundation

Author(s): Arjen Deij (ETF) and Sona Kalantaryan (ETF)

Editor(s)/Peer reviewers: EQF Advisory Group members engaged in the Project Group on the Third Country Dimension of the EQF.

Manuscript completed in October 2025.

© European Training Foundation, 2025



Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not owned by the European Training Foundation, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

When citing this report, please use the following wording:

European Training Foundation (2025), *Guidelines for comparison of the EQF and third country qualifications frameworks*, Turin

PREFACE

These guidelines are the result of the work of the Project Group on the Third Country Dimension of the EQF, established by the EQF Advisory Group to develop procedures for the comparisons set out in the EQF Recommendation.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all members of the Project Group for their dedication and expertise. This collaborative effort brought together representatives from the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) as lead service, with contributions from DGs HOME, EAC, INTPA, MENA, and ENEST), the European Training Foundation (ETF), Cedefop, and the Council of Europe.

The guidelines build on lessons learned from the first comparison exercises with Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong (2014–2015), which laid the foundation for later pilots with Ukraine, Cape Verde, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These pilots provided critical learning opportunities and helped refine the draft guidelines, first proposed in February 2021. We are especially grateful to the national and regional stakeholders from Ukraine, Cape Verde, and SADC for their openness and commitment, which enabled meaningful dialogue and peer learning.

Special thanks also go to the participants of the Peer Learning Activity held in Turin on 29–30 October 2024. Their reflections and discussions enriched the understanding of the comparison process, and their feedback will guide future activities to ensure their relevance and impact.

The European Commission's DG EMPL, represented by Koen Nomden and Tiina Polo, coordinated the work. The ETF, represented by Arjen Deij and Sona Kalantaryan, provided technical and conceptual support and drafted the guidelines in close cooperation with Project Group members.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
---------	---

CONTENTS	4
----------	---

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
-------------------	---

1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 EQF Recommendation of 2017	9
1.2 Project group and pilot comparisons	9
1.3 Understanding “comparison”	10

2. OBJECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS	12
2.1 Objectives of the comparisons	12
2.2 Labour migration and recognition of qualifications and skills	13
2.3 International agreements	14
2.4 Bilateral comparisons of EU member states with third country NQFs	15

3. BEFORE THE COMPARISON	16
3.1 Identifying the interest for comparison	16
3.2 Assessing the operational stage of the framework	16
3.3 Regional or national qualifications framework	16
3.4 Procedures, criteria and topics	18

4. THE COMPARISON PROCESS	23
4.1 Phase 1: Identification of topics to be covered during comparison, process and the timetable for comparison	23
4.2 Phase 2: Documentation	38
4.3 Phase 3: Comparison	38
4.4 Phase 4: Results of Comparison and Publication	38
4.5 Who is involved in the comparison and the follow up?	43

ANNEX I: USEFUL LINKS	45
-----------------------	----

ANNEX II. REFERENCING VERSUS COMPARISON	47
---	----

ANNEX III: GLOSSARY	49
---------------------	----

ANNEX IV: SELF-ASSESSMENT SHEETS	54
----------------------------------	----

ANNEX V: REPOSITORY - LIBRARY STRUCTURE	61
---	----

ANNEX VI: STATISTICS SOURCES	63
------------------------------	----

ANNEX VII: EXAMPLES OF EU AGREEMENTS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES	65
---	----

ANNEX VIII: TABLES FOR THE COMPARISON OF LEVELS	67
---	----

ABBREVIATIONS	69
---------------	----

REFERENCES	73
------------	----

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The guidelines provide a structured and practical roadmap for comparing national and regional qualifications frameworks (QFs) from outside the European Union with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Developed in response to the 2017 EQF Recommendation—which calls for the creation of criteria and procedures to enable the comparison of third country QFs with the EQF—the document is designed to support policymakers and technical experts in conducting robust, transparent, and mutually beneficial comparison exercises. The guidelines are the result of collaborative work by the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission, the European Training Foundation (ETF), Cedefop, and the Council of Europe, and are informed by extensive pilot experiences with various countries and regions, as well as feedback received through a dedicated Peer Learning Activity.

The introduction sets out the policy context and rationale for comparison, highlighting that the core aim of the guidelines is not to harmonise or align third country frameworks with the EQF, but to foster mutual understanding, transparency, and trust. Ultimately, the guidelines seek to support the mobility of learners and workers, address skills shortages, and facilitate international cooperation.

The comparison process follows a structured five-phase approach, typically taking around 12 months. The guidelines provide clear objectives, actions, and outputs for each phase. The process begins with **Phase 0 – Initiation**, where mutual interest is established and the operational readiness of the third country QF is assessed. This phase ensures that comparisons are only undertaken where there is clear added value and mutual benefit. To verify a QF's readiness for comparison, the document includes a **self-assessment tool**.

Phase 1 – Identification involves setting up a joint technical working group, agreeing on the scope and timetable, and defining the core topics and supporting questions for the comparison. This collaborative approach ensures that both policy and technical dimensions are addressed from the outset.

Phase 2 – Documentation is dedicated to the systematic collection of evidence and documentation by both parties. The guidelines provide detailed instructions and templates for this phase, ensuring consistency and rigour across different comparison exercises. A distinctive feature of the guidelines is the set of eleven core topics that structure the comparison, each accompanied by supporting questions and examples, making the guidelines highly practical for technical experts. The topics are:

1. Objectives of qualifications frameworks
2. Scope of the frameworks
3. Governance structures
4. Levels and level descriptors
5. Learning outcome approach(es)
6. Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning / Recognition of Prior Learning
7. Recognition processes
8. Quality assurance
9. Referencing / alignment processes
10. Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information
11. Transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process

Phase 3 – Comparison is the analytical heart of the process, where joint dialogue and peer learning take place. Here, the working group examines the evidence, identifies commonalities and differences, and explores the implications for recognition and cooperation.

Phase 4 – Results and Publication is where the findings are synthesised in a joint report with a suggested detailed structure. This report includes a comparative analysis of the frameworks, conclusions on their comparability, and recommendations for follow-up actions. The guidelines emphasise the importance of dissemination and ongoing dialogue, recommending that results be communicated to a wide range of stakeholders and integrated into broader policy dialogues and cooperation frameworks.

The inclusion of **Annexes**—such as [self-assessment templates](#), a [glossary](#), supporting [statistical data](#), and [examples of EU agreements](#)—further enhances the usability of the document.

The implications of these guidelines are significant. Comparisons should only proceed where there is clear mutual benefit and where the frameworks involved are sufficiently operational to allow for meaningful analysis. While comparison supports recognition, it does not guarantee it; recognition remains the responsibility of national authorities. The guidelines also emphasise the importance of sustainability, recommending ongoing dialogue, periodic reviews, and updates to maintain the relevance of comparison outcomes. Capacity building is another key benefit, as the process can help strengthen the institutions and systems involved, fostering long-term partnerships between the EU and third countries.

In conclusion, the guidelines provide a robust and flexible framework for international cooperation in qualifications recognition. By promoting transparency, trust, and mutual understanding, the guidelines support the mobility of learners and workers, the integration of labour markets, and the development of education and training systems worldwide. The approach is adaptable and grounded in dialogue, ensuring that each comparison is meaningful, impactful, and aligned with broader policy objectives. The guidelines thus represent a significant step forward in the EU's efforts to build bridges between education and labour markets across the globe, supporting both individual aspirations and collective economic and social development.

1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines describe the process and principles of comparing third countries' national or regional qualifications frameworks with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The document can be useful not only to the experts participating in comparisons of the EQF and third country qualifications framework, but also for the experts wanting to do bilateral comparisons between national qualifications frameworks.

Comparing EQF with national and regional qualifications frameworks of third countries aims for a better understanding of other national and regional qualifications frameworks in Europe, and vice versa. Comparison of qualifications frameworks does not itself imply recognition, but it enhances transparency and supports the recognition of qualifications. One of the key benefits of the comparison will be to make the recognition of qualifications easier for:

- People who move to an EU country to learn or work
- Education and training institutions, employers and other stakeholders who receive workers or learners from other countries.

The purpose of comparing qualifications frameworks is not to persuade other qualification frameworks to comply with the EQF, but to thoughtfully evaluate whether various aspects of the qualifications frameworks are comparable.

International skill shortages and the need for qualified labour is growing¹. In matching labour demands with the profiles of job seekers the emphasis is often more on skills than on qualifications. To address skills shortages, both skills and qualifications are relevant. Skill demands are evolving rapidly, and qualifications may be too slow to adapt. However, screening candidates on skills alone is risky in particular when statements on skills have not been verified. Qualifications can be seen as reliable proxies for skills if they are expressed in learning outcomes and properly quality assured. The people who obtained qualifications have been assessed and certificated on the basis of relevant standards.

The European Union (EU) is developing different instruments to promote international labour mobility and mutually supported skills development. This has raised the interest in the possibility to use the EQF and the comparison process between non-European QFs and the EQF as a way to address skills shortages and reduce mismatches. Aspects of the legal mandate provided by the EQF Recommendation of 2017², relevant EU agreements and policies with third countries are at the basis of comparison such as, for instance in the Talent Partnership framework, which are mutually beneficial partnerships between the EU and third countries that boost skills development and labour mobilities between the EU and partner countries – addressing EU's labour market needs³.

In addition to the 19 RQF initiatives beyond Europe, we estimate that there are approximately 110 national qualifications frameworks initiatives outside the EQF, offering a large potential of qualification frameworks that could be compared and linked in the future to the EQF. To start a comparison process it is important to establish the mutual benefits based on policy objectives and the operational level of implementation of the qualifications frameworks. A key function of qualifications frameworks is to bring qualifications from different sub-sectors together and create links between them, in order to promote easier access, progression, mobility and career development.

¹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Employment and social developments in Europe 2023, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, Available online <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/089698>

² Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017/C 189/03).

³ More details on Talent Partnerships are available online at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-resettlement-and-integration/talent-partnerships_en

1.1 EQF Recommendation of 2017

The start for the comparison exercise is the EQF Recommendation, which recommends:

The Commission, in cooperation with Member States and stakeholders within the EQF Advisory Group to *'explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison of third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF'*.

The Recommendation did not define what *comparison* is, but it provided contextual elements that can be used to build a common understanding of comparison.

The text of the EQF Recommendation provided at least four contextual factors that contribute to the understanding of *comparison*:

- a. Comparison can support cooperation on transparency of qualifications with countries outside the EQF which can foster migrant integration into EU labour markets
- b. Comparison can facilitate a better understanding and fair recognition of qualifications awarded outside the EU, facilitating migration flows to and from the European Union⁴.

These can be supplemented and operationalised by relevant arguments of the EQF Recommendation 2017 related to EQF *referencing*, which should equally apply to comparison such as:

- a. It can support existing recognition practices thanks to strengthened trust, understanding and comparability of qualifications⁵.
- b. It can increase trust in the quality and level of qualifications that are part of NQFs or systems referenced to EQF which is essential to support the mobility of learners and workers⁶.

The EQF AG is supporting the implementation of the EQF Recommendation and the Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). It includes representatives from the 41 countries that are implementing the EQF, the European Commission (EC) and stakeholders from the world of education and training, employment and civil society. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) support the work of the AG.

1.2 Project group and pilot comparisons

Project Groups on the Third Country Dimension of the EQF established by the EQF AG was tasked to develop procedures for comparisons mentioned in the EQF Recommendation. The Project Group consists of representatives from the EQF AG, services of the European Commission (DG EMPL as

⁴ See Recommendation text: *'While the Union acquires on legal migration and asylum provides for equal treatment with nationals in terms of recognition of qualifications and even for facilitation measures as far as beneficiaries of international protection are concerned in accordance with Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council (2), high rates of over-qualification and under-employment persist among third-country nationals with tertiary education. Cooperation between the Union and third countries over the transparency of qualifications can foster migrant integration into Union labour markets. Given the growing migration flows to and from the Union, a better understanding and a fair recognition of qualifications awarded outside the Union is needed.'* Available online at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01))

⁵ See Recommendation text: *'The EQF and the national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to it can support existing recognition practices thanks to the strengthened trust, understanding and comparability of qualifications they bring. That can make the process of recognition for learning and working purposes easier. Overarching qualifications frameworks such as the EQF could serve as information tools for recognition practices as mentioned in the recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications, as adopted under the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region.'*

⁶ See Recommendation text: *'Trust in the quality and level of qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF (hereafter 'qualifications with an EQF level') is essential in order to support mobility of learners and workers within and across sectoral and geographical borders.'*

lead service, other services include DGs HOME, EAC, INTPA, MENA, ENEST), the European Training Foundation, Cedefop and the Council of Europe.

While the first experiences of comparison exercises with Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong conducted in 2014-2015 provided insights into the technical process and the possible outcomes of comparison, the three recent pilots with the national qualifications framework of Ukraine, the national qualifications framework of Cape Verde and the regional qualifications framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have provided the first formal experiences with comparison in line with the EQF Recommendation.

These draft guidelines have been developed on the basis of the “*Proposal for procedures, criteria and topics*” that were developed by the Project Group on the Third Country Dimension of the EQF and discussed by EQF AG on 23 February 2021. The proposal has been tested in the three pilots with the national qualifications framework of Ukraine, the national qualifications framework of Cape Verde and the regional qualifications framework of the Southern African Development Community. The experiences with these three pilots have been reviewed and discussed at the Peer Learning Activity on Comparison of the EQF and third country qualifications frameworks - what have we learned from pilots - how can we take it forward organised in Turin from 29-30 October 2024.

From the pilots we know that Ukraine emphasised the potential for comparisons to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, both for Ukrainians seeking employment abroad and for future immigrants to Ukraine, particularly in anticipation of post-war reconstruction. Politically, the formal comparison process had a positive impact, resonating at higher levels of governance. For the SADCQF, the comparisons are expected to build mutual trust between regional qualifications frameworks and to provide insights for ongoing NQF reforms. For SADCQF, the comparison has also highlighted the role of qualifications registers and platforms like Europass. In Cape Verde, the process has enhanced the visibility of its qualifications framework and system.

1.3 Understanding “comparison”

Comparison is understood as a process that should enable trust in the quality and level of qualifications of operational third country qualifications frameworks to support recognition and the international mobility of learners and workers⁷. The objectives of comparison are not fundamentally different from the objectives of EQF referencing: both seek to enhance the transparency and comparability of qualifications. However, there are important differences in relation to the policy context, governance and outcomes between the two. While comparisons are expected to bridge the differences between the qualification framework, it can also lead to the discovery of even more substantial differences than initially expected. Putting appropriate mechanisms such as cooperation in the field of quality assurance (e.g. agreeing on common standards and guidelines on how quality assurance is to be carried out) can help in attenuating and addressing such risks.

Referencing in the context of the EQF recommendation for lifelong learning, means that countries relate (the levels of) their national qualifications frameworks or systems to (the levels of) the EQF in accordance with the 10 referencing criteria and procedures of Annex III of the EQF recommendation. Referencing takes place in a European context of creating a zone of trust between the countries that are part of the EQF. Referencing takes place on the basis of a referencing report that addresses the 10 referencing criteria, which function as a reference point. It is supported by a peer review process that takes place within the EQF Advisory Group. In short, in a referencing process a single NQF is

⁷ These guidelines are designed to facilitate the comparison of operational NQFs to EQF. However, many countries - including those from which a significant number of migrants residing in EU Member States originate - do not yet have an operational NQF supported by established institutions and information systems. This raises the question of how meaningful comparisons can be made in such contexts. While this issue is of critical importance, addressing it lies beyond the scope of this document. Taking into account the diversity of education and labour market systems it would require a separate reflection with engaging of wide range of experts and comprehensive feasibility analysis.

related to the EQF, which is the common reference points for all NQFs in Europe. Referencing is part of a larger set of joint activities to implement the EQF.

Comparison of qualifications frameworks means looking for similarities and understanding the diversity between two qualifications frameworks in order to draw conclusions on the level of correspondence of the two frameworks. Third country QFs are more diverse in terms of objectives, levels, level descriptors and implementation arrangements. They have been developed outside the scope of the EQF implementation, although they can be inspired by the EQF. Comparison is grounded in the principles of dialogue and mutual learning, which are essential for building trust among all the parties involved⁸. In a comparison exercise two frameworks are compared on their own merits, without the intention to converge and align the principles behind them (NQFs or RQFs that have been compared to the EQF will not become part of the EQF). EQF comparisons often address similar dimensions as addressed by the EQF referencing criteria, such as the principle of learning outcomes, validation of non-formal and informal learning and quality assurance. Qualifications of qualifications frameworks that are compared to the EQF will not mention the EQF level. As comparison is done in dialogue it will result in one common report being developed and agreed.

[Annex II](#) provides a table with an overview of EQF referencing and comparison between third country RQFs and NQFs with the EQF.

⁸ The comparison can be also conducted with a view to the potential future referencing of third-country qualifications to the EQF.

2. OBJECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

Comparison should have an added value for increased transparency, recognition, comparability and trust in qualifications in a world connected more than ever before.

Comparison takes place within the framework of the EU external relations policies. It is proposed as an additional instrument for international (bi- or multilateral) cooperation in a policy dialogue with third countries. It can support migration and asylum policies by increasing transparency, recognition, comparability and trust in qualifications; mobility of learners and workers (including virtual mobility)⁹; trade (especially trade in services); human and social development policies; economic, political and development cooperation. Comparison will connect qualifications frameworks around the globe and will contribute to the international transparency of qualifications.

Comparison can serve as tool for addressing labour shortages in the EU. Over the last decades the EU Member States have been facing increasing labour and skills shortages which are driven by demographic shifts, the demand for new skills linked to technological developments and the twin transitions, the drive to develop further our own industrial sectors, defence and security needs, and challenges related to working conditions in some sectors and locations¹⁰. To address these shortages the Commission has proposed a set of measures such as the EU Talent Pool¹¹, and Multipurpose Legal Gateway Offices, as well as launched Talent Partnerships.

2.1 Objectives of the comparisons

Comparison is a process of enabling trust in the quality and level of qualifications of third country qualifications frameworks in order to support cooperation, recognition and the international mobility of learners and workers.

The aim is not to ensure that qualifications frameworks all over the world comply to the criteria, common European values and arrangements of the EQF. Comparison is done on the basis of the merits of each qualifications framework without the intention of convergence. It is about mutual understanding and coming to a joint agreement about the extent to which qualifications frameworks are comparable, by diving into several common topics. The whole process is evidence based and takes place against a background of mutual understanding and dialogue.

Qualifications Frameworks are all about making the relationships between qualifications clear, based on learning outcomes, qualification levels and supporting mechanisms, connecting qualifications in order to support access, progression, mobility, recognition and lifelong learning. Qualifications frameworks aim to improve the currency of qualifications, allowing people to do more with qualifications.

Comparison remains an exercise in comparing qualification systems and levels rather than individual qualifications. While it can give a reliable indication on how the levels of qualifications and the processes of using learning outcomes, validation of non-formal and informal learning, recognition, quality assurance and stakeholder involvement and communication of qualifications are addressed and how comparable they are between the EQF and the third country qualifications framework, it does not indicate how individual qualifications are comparable. It is a tool for transparency that can support recognition but does not provide recognition of qualifications. It is important that participants in the exercise, stakeholders and beneficiaries are made aware of these limitations and that these are

⁹ Regarding online learners and platform workers

¹⁰ Press release Commission sets out actions to tackle labour and skills shortages. 20 March 2024, Available online at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1507

¹¹ Regulation establishing an EU Talent Pool. COM (2023) 716 final. Available online at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/regulation-establishing-eu-talent-pool_en

clearly documented in comparison reports. Recognition remains a national responsibility of member states and often of individual recognition bodies.

Comparison should only take place if it can provide added value and mutual benefits for both Qualifications Frameworks. Identifying mutual interest based on relevant EU and International agreements is the foundation and the first step in initiating the comparison dialogue. The mutual benefits relate to the cooperation between the EU and the third country or countries, regional economic communities and international organisations. Comparison is clearly on mutual benefits that have been explicitly identified and recognised by both parties, supported by formal EU or international agreements.

2.2 Labour migration and recognition of qualifications and skills

Conducting comparisons in the context of labour migration management is crucial, as it aids in the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills. This process enhances the management of labour migration, resulting in a quadruple win that benefits both the origin and destination countries, as well as the individual migrants and employers.

First, policies targeting recognition of qualifications from third countries help the destination countries to address the labour shortages and improve integration outcome of already residing third country nationals (TCN). Second, countries of origin benefit from higher remittances due to better pay when working abroad in occupations matching one's skills/qualifications, skills gain/skill circulation upon return. Moreover, the validity of qualifications beyond the country of origin might motivate more individuals to enrol on training programmes, while the increased pool of individuals with skills and qualification corresponding to international standards would attract Foreign Direct Investments to the country, thereby contributing to the country's development beyond remittances. Qualification recognition also allows for better matching between employers' needs and the candidate. Finally, qualification recognition helps individual migrants through improved labour market prospects abroad and upon return.

Currently, of 27.5 million TCNs living in the EU, 29% have a medium level of education (ISCED 3 – 4), and another 28.5% have tertiary education (ISCED 5 - 8). While there is no EU-wide statistics on these degrees obtained in origin or destination countries, evidence based on a European Union Labour Force Survey indicates that those holding foreign degrees are penalised in the destination countries labour market. In particular, 'non-EU born, tertiary educated migrants have the highest rates of non-employment and of over-education of the three groups considered. Both non-employment and over-education and over-qualification are higher for those holding a degree from a country other than the country of current residence. Within this group, people from both North Africa and the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa have the weakest labour market performance'¹².

A recent report by the EC examines the overqualification of workers born outside the EU and the factors contributing to it¹³. The findings reveal that migrants are more prone to overqualification compared to native workers. Education from the host country significantly lowers the likelihood of overqualification, but the recognition of qualifications remains a major obstacle for migrants' full integration into the EU labour market.

Over the last decades the skills dimension has gained importance in EU legal migration policies. The first elements were introduced through Mobility Partnerships with various partner countries including '*Facilitating recognition of qualifications and matching of skills and available jobs/vacancies*' among the key elements.

¹² Belmonte, M., Grubanov-Boskovic, S. and Mazza, J. Foreign Degrees, Region of Birth and Under-utilisation of Tertiary Education in the EU, EUR 30041 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-14662-9, doi:10.2760/876918, JRC119361 Available online at <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC119361>

¹³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Employment and social developments in Europe – Quarterly review. January 2025, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, Available online at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/2463745>

The skills dimension of migration gained further importance in the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which has been seeking to embed migration in international partnerships¹⁴. In particular, in the 2022 Communication on Attracting skills and Talent to the EU and the 2023 Commission's Skills and Talent Mobility Package, the Commission presented a series of new initiatives to make the EU more attractive to talent from outside the EU, and to facilitate mobility within¹⁵. **Talent Partnerships** provide a comprehensive policy framework, as well as funding for skills development and mutually beneficial international mobility to the EU, based on better matching of labour market needs and skills between the EU and partner countries. Once adopted and operational, the **EU Talent Pool** will facilitate the recruitment of jobseekers from non-EU countries in occupations where there exists a shortage of labour throughout the EU. It will be the first EU-wide platform facilitating the matching of EU employers with jobseekers residing abroad. In addition, the platform will provide information on relevant rules for the recruitment procedures in the Member States, including recognition processes. Skills dimension of migration is also central in the Union of Skills Communication that includes a pillar on attracting, developing and retaining talent for the future of Europe¹⁶.

It is important to acknowledge that national qualifications frameworks are designed primarily to organise and structure education and training systems. Although learning outcomes and employability are closely interconnected, the effect the comparison might have on labour migration management can be considered secondary through, for instance, facilitating transitions into employment or better skills to occupation match.

2.3 International agreements

A number of EU International Agreements explicitly mention cooperation with the EQF, such as:

- The far-reaching Association Agreements signed in 2014 with three countries of the Eastern Partnership: Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, mentioned above.
- Talent Partnerships (launched thus far in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Bangladesh and Pakistan).
- Statut Avancé of Morocco (2008)¹⁷.

In addition the Commission acknowledges that *'facilitating the recognition of qualifications and validation of skills gained in non-EU countries is a key enabler for employers seeking skilled workers, and for third country nationals seeking access to the EU jobs' market, as well as their integration into host societies' recommended to 'a set of measures to simplify and speed up the recognition of skills and qualifications of third country nationals'*¹⁸. The aim is to develop the capacity of national recognition authorities to simplify and expedite procedures by improving comparability of third country qualifications and of how to assess jobseekers' skills. This will allow for recognition decisions to be taken quickly and with confidence to fill vacancies in EU shortage occupations, in particular in priority regulated professions.

Measures facilitating qualifications recognition advances not only with countries of origin of migrants heading towards the EU. In October 2024, the EU and Canada adopted a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) on the professional qualifications of architects¹⁹. This is the first bilateral MRA for

¹⁴ Pact on Migration and Asylum. Available online at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

¹⁵ Commission proposes new measures on skills and talent to help address critical labour shortages. Available online at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5740

¹⁶ Union of Skills, COM (2025) 90 final. Available online at [Union of skills - European Commission](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5740)

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Statut avance page 12 'Renforcer le processus de certification dans le domaine de l'enseignement, en vue d'assurer la qualité et la transparence de la certification. Ceci contribuera à la modernisation du système d'éducation et de formation et à l'évolution des qualifications acquises. A terme, cela permettra d'envisager un rapprochement avec le Cadre européen des Certifications.'

¹⁸ Commission proposes new measures on skills and talent to help address critical labour shortages. Available online at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5740

¹⁹ EU adopts first ever Mutual Recognition Agreement for professional qualifications. Available online at https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-adopts-first-ever-mutual-recognition-agreement-professional-qualifications-2024-10-10_en

professional qualifications to be concluded by the EU in the framework of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

And finally, the Commission in the Union of Skills Communication²⁰ states that it will explore whether to propose common rules for simpler procedures for handling the recognition and validation of qualifications and skills of third country nationals in the context of a Skills Portability initiative.

The [Annex VII](#) to this paper provides an overview of examples of EU agreements with third countries.

Apart from agreements with the EU, international agreements such as Global Compacts for Migration for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration²¹ and the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European Region, the Global Convention on the Recognition of qualifications concerning higher education and the Bologna process should also be considered. Examples of such agreements are provided in Annex VII.

Apart from the Global Convention on Recognition, the Addis Convention for Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States and the Buenos Aires Convention for Latin America explicitly mention qualifications frameworks as a tool in the recognition process. Older conventions such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention ratified by 57 countries, mainly in Europe, and the Tokyo Recognition Convention for the Asia-Pacific Region do not explicitly mention qualifications frameworks but for the LRC a subsidiary text²² has been drafted mentioning qualifications frameworks, while in the Asia-Pacific network of recognition centres the use of qualifications frameworks is being discussed.

2.4 Bilateral comparisons of EU member states with third country NQFs

Apart from the comparisons at the level of the EQF, some member states have also undertaken bilateral comparisons, such as Ireland and Austria. It shows that comparison of qualifications frameworks is a tool that can support bilateral cooperation and mobility. It also shows a high degree of diversity in the approaches and limited transparency, as these exercises had not been discussed before in the EQF Advisory Group. It will be important to agree common principles for these bilateral exercises, as they may have ramifications beyond a single country, within the European Union.

²⁰ Union of Skills, COM (2025) 90 final. Available online at https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/union-skills_en

²¹ In particular, the objective 18 'Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences' in its point (b) calls to 'Promote transparency of certifications and compatibility of national qualifications frameworks by agreeing on standard criteria, indicators and assessment parameters, and by creating and strengthening national skills profiling tools, registries or institutions in order to facilitate effective and efficient mutual recognition procedures at all skills levels'.

²² The Committee of The Convention on The Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region Available online at https://www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/LRC_Subsiary_Text_Use_of_QFs_ENGLISH.pdf

3. BEFORE THE COMPARISON

3.1 Identifying the interest for comparison

Given the current resources and limitations that the Commission, the EQF Advisory Group and the ETF have to deal with comparisons the initiative for comparison will come predominantly from Commission Services with a responsibility for cooperation with third countries and in particular in the context of legal migration.

However, in theory the request of comparison can come from different parties.

- Third Country NQFs and RQFs can request comparison, but will need to demonstrate mutual interest in the context of EU international agreements.
- Commission services in charge of a relevant policy dialogue with third countries can recommend comparison with specific NQFs or RQFs.
- The EQF Advisory Group may also identify NQFs and RQFs for comparison where it sees a clear mutual interest of different member states.

EU and international agreements set a frame for comparison, and cover a wide range of bilateral and multilateral agreements. Some of these refer directly to qualifications, or even qualifications frameworks, others only implicitly.

3.2 Assessing the operational stage of the framework

Although many qualifications frameworks initiatives are not fully operational and therefore cannot be easily compared with the EQF in all technical aspects, the policy objectives for comparison are often very clear. One of the conclusions from the experience with the pilots is that more attention should be paid to policy objectives, at the beginning of, during and after the comparison. The case of Ukraine, with millions of refugees fleeing to the EU clearly illustrated the relevance and timeliness of the comparison exercise. These guidelines aim to strike a better balance between the technical and political aspects of comparison, and also address how to deal with countries that are politically important but do not have fully operational frameworks yet.

3.3 Regional or national qualifications framework

The experience with the pilots showed that it is important to distinguish better between comparisons of regional frameworks with the EQF and national frameworks with the EQF. Regional frameworks bring together the national frameworks of different countries in world regions, through commonly agreed criteria and mechanisms with the aim to link and converge qualification systems. Regional frameworks play an important role in recognition procedures given their cross-border nature. By comparing the EQF with other regional qualification systems across the globe, more links can be created between the EU and third countries, although not to the same depth as in the case of comparison with national qualifications frameworks. This should be better reflected in comparisons with regional frameworks.

The ETF study Regional Qualifications Frameworks²³ in 2020 identified and compared 15 RQF initiatives in the world, in addition to the EQF and Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Desk research to prepare these guidelines shows that most of these initiatives have made further progress since then. In Africa, the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) has become operational and referencing to the ACQF has started. In Latin

²³ Regional Qualifications Framework initiatives around the Globe 2020 - a comparative study, ETF 2021, Available online at https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-04/rqf_initiatives_around_the_globe_2020_en_april_2021.pdf

America the Regional Qualifications Framework of the Pacific Alliance has recently published a basic structure, processes and roadmap for implementation, while in Asia the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework has been reinforced by establishing a common space for higher education, and the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAARC RQF in the 2020 ETF study) is also becoming a reality.

Moreover, new initiatives have been launched in addition to the 15 initiatives described in the 2020 study. These include a Regional Qualifications Framework for TVET in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, a regional sectoral framework, the Qualifications Framework for Skills in the Sugar Agroindustry (MCAA, in Spanish) in Latin America, a proposal for a Latin American Regional Qualifications Framework as a meta framework for the whole region and a call for establishing a regional qualifications framework for Central Asia by stakeholders in that region, bringing the total to 21 regional qualifications framework initiatives worldwide.

On the other hand, a comparison between the EQF and a NQF can go deeper as it can look into the use of levels, learning outcomes and quality assurance arrangements for specific sets of qualifications for each subsector of the education and training system. For comparing RQFs it is very important to understand the interplay between the RQF and the related NQFs. Not all RQF related NQFs are equally advanced and similar in design. It is therefore important to consider the different stages of development of NQFs and their linkages to the RQF into account. Most importantly, which NQFs have been referenced or aligned to the RQF. A comparison between EQF and a RQF can only be used as an indication of the levels, when countries have aligned or referenced to the RQF.

Considerations when comparing RQF/NQF

There are some differences when dealing with NQFs or RQFs that are important. In NQFs there is a stronger connection to a national context and education and training system, with links to types of qualifications, pathways and stakeholders. Specific institutional settings, national legislation and mechanisms play an important role in NQFs. They may be linked with national education and labour market reforms. In a true sense NQFs are frameworks of qualifications in which registers of qualifications often play a key role in bringing together different types of qualifications and in managing and quality assuring qualifications.

While looking at NQFs, it is important to consider how different sub-sectors of the national qualifications and education and training system are linked. What does the NQF mean for higher education, where there are often higher education institutions that have their own qualifications and autonomy?; what does it mean for vocational education and training, where there is by nature a stronger link with the labour market?; what does it mean for general education and for adult learning? Is the NQF primarily a tool supporting lifelong learning and education and training policies, or does it also play a role in the labour market?

Because RQFs have to accommodate and link different NQFs they are more open, inclusive constructs. Nevertheless, RQFs also are part of a regional context that is shared between the countries that are part of the regional framework. The ETF study on Transnational Qualifications Frameworks from 2011 highlighted the following features of RQFs:

1. they have less regulatory and more communicative purposes;
2. they include a wide range of sectors of education and training, if not all;
3. they have a range of national and regional policies, accords, conventions and protocols supporting them, but are not underpinned by enforceable legislation; and
4. they have limited, often voluntary, institutional arrangements for governance and management’.

For NQFs, it is easier to go into detail on how learning outcomes are used in standards, learning and assessment in the context of a NQF and consider different types of qualifications from different sub-sectors of the education and training system. RQFs use learning outcomes differently but can support the development of NQFs and promote mutual learning between the NQFs that are part of the RQF.

NQFs can sometimes be used to demonstrate how the RQF works, but it is not the aim of comparing two RQFs to investigate the specificities of all the related NQFs. Not all NQFs will be at the same development stage, and it is therefore important to be clear that the comparison of an EQF with other RQFs can only provide an indication of comparison to those NQFs that are clearly referenced or aligned to the RQF.

The ultimate purpose of comparison is the same for RQFs and NQFs: to increase transparency, mobility and improve possibilities for comparing learning outcomes. Comparison can clearly have an added value to make qualifications easier to compare by their levels and supporting systems and to connect qualification systems. The process of the actual comparison work and the stakeholders and partners will be different, whether we deal with RQFs or NQFs. In order to engage interest from other QFs, we should treat each QF equally, whether it is a national or regional framework.

3.4 Procedures, criteria and topics

Overview

Comparison could be seen as a process with distinct stages and different possible outcomes. Improving trust in qualifications (in addition, to frameworks) should be at the heart of the exercise.

We propose that comparison will be conducted following four steps in cooperation with an RQF or a third country's NQF and is preceded by Phase 0 in which the Member States represented through the EQF-AG and Commission services, and supported by the ETF, decide to start the comparison process with a partner. After the four steps, agreement should be reached on follow up. The steps are as follows:

Phase 0 – Initiation: Clarification of the mutual interest, within the common policy and legal framework for cooperation and dialogue and of readiness for comparison. A green light to initiate comparison process given by the EQF AG.

Phase 1 – Identification: Dialogue to define and agree the formulations of the core topics and supporting questions and the steps in the procedure for comparison.

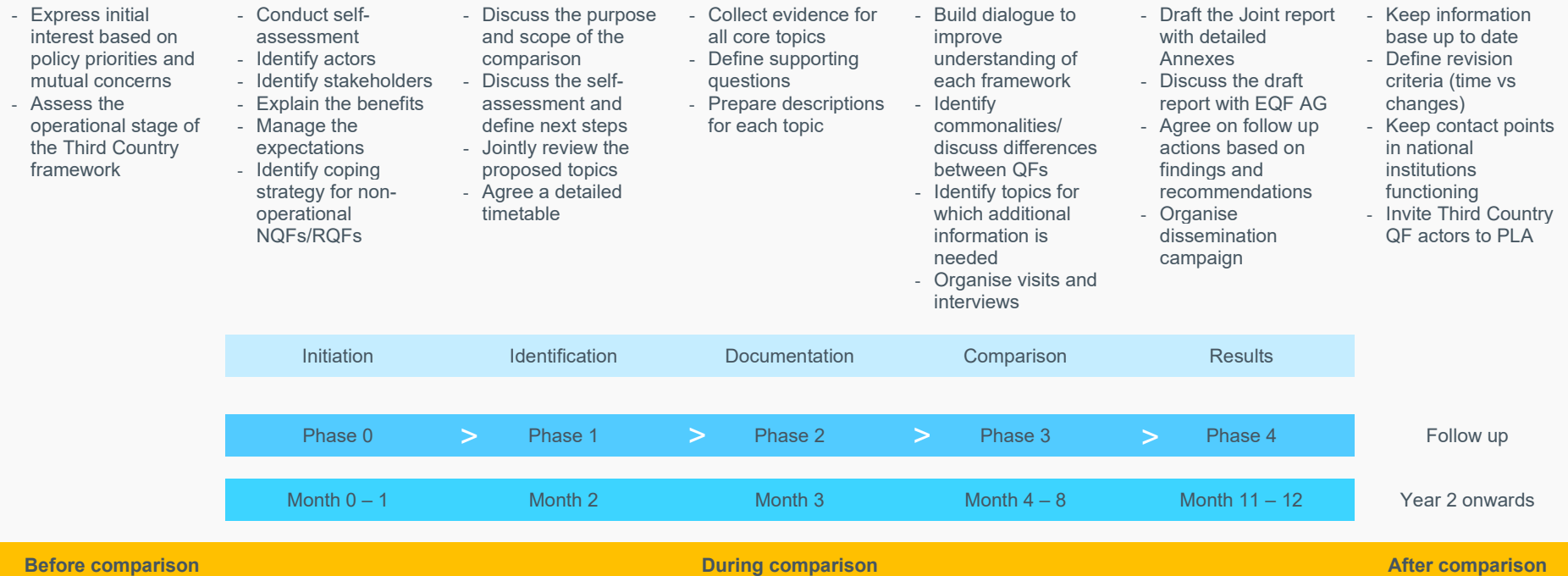
Phase 2 – Documentation: Each party collects evidence in cooperation with stakeholders for all core topics and supporting questions and prepares descriptions for each topic.

Phase 3 – Comparison: Dialogue to build a better understanding of each framework.

Phase 4 – Results of Comparison: Report drafting and publication

This document describes the procedures and criteria for each step and proposes the core topics and supporting questions for comparison.

Overview of the comparison



3.4.1 Phase 0: Identification of mutual interest based on policy objectives and decision to initiate the comparison process

Many qualifications frameworks could potentially express an interest to compare themselves with the EQF. Given the current limitations for running several comparisons in parallel, any comparison would only be possible on invitation from the European partners, the European Commission and the Member States in the EQF Advisory Group.

The decision to start a comparison process with a RQF or a third country NQF is a decision made by the Commission, after consultation with Member States and stakeholders within the EQF Advisory Group. This decision is based on the criteria as elaborated in the section on international agreements. There should be an expected mutual benefit of comparison for both parties. The ongoing dialogues with EU partners countries requires speed up comparison procedures going from currently conducted one per year to a few per years.

Member States have indicated that they have confidence in the process of comparison that has been used in the pilots so far, but do not see any scope for making the process leaner²⁴. The time for one comparison takes approximately one year. In order to conduct multiple comparisons simultaneously, it is necessary to find additional resources while ensuring coherence and coordination. This would not only speed up the overall process of EQF comparisons with third country qualification frameworks, but would also create space for economy of scale, for example, through running capacity building and familiarisation exercises for several countries at a time, and optimising human resources needed for coordination of activities. Moreover, parallel comparisons would create peer learning opportunities for the national experts working for different comparisons.

As agreed before the pilots the third country NQF or RQF needs to be operational to allow an effective comparison. If the regional or third country national qualifications framework is not operational, there is a risk of comparison of a framework that only exists in legal texts and policy intents, without any tangible impact on transparency and comparability of qualifications and added value for individuals. Cedefop, EQF and the EC developed a paper on different development stages of qualifications frameworks²⁵ that was presented to the EQF AG in November 2020, to monitor progress in implementation and to identify operational frameworks. On the basis of that paper, criteria were selected to determine the readiness of the qualifications frameworks. The paper on Qualifications Frameworks and their development stages states that the operational stage is reached upon completion of the activation stage. For a third country NQF this means it has fulfilled the majority of the following criteria:

- Implementation structures are in place (stable and agreed governance structures, day-to-day administrative capacities in place, predictable financing);
- Main working methods and instruments being put in place (databases, communication strategies, quality assurance arrangements, by-laws and administrative regulations);
- End-users are being made aware of the existence and the services of the NQF;
- The NQF is a reference point for the use of learning outcomes and for the continuous revision and renewal of qualifications;
- Criteria and procedures for allocation of qualifications to levels (and/or levels to qualifications) are in place and allocation of qualifications continue;
- The NQF is gradually playing a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications at national and international levels;
- The NQF is gradually supporting reform and renewal of education, training and qualifications systems at national level.

²⁴ This was one of the outcomes of the PLA in Turin of October 2024

²⁵ Qualifications frameworks and their development stages, Cedefop & ETF, 2020. Presented during the 54th EQF AG Meeting

For RQFs fulfilment of most of the following criteria would be expected:

- Main working methods, procedures and tool are being put in place (meetings, communication strategies, quality assurance criteria, arrangements and tools);
- Member countries are supported to relate their NQF to the RQF, by comparing NQF levels and RQF levels and other criteria;
- Inclusion, referencing, alignment, articulation or harmonisation procedures and criteria to link a national qualification system or framework, and/or specific qualifications to the RQF established and agreed among member countries; and implemented with adequate number of member countries/bodies;
- Formalisation of the linkages between the national qualification system, NQF and/or qualifications with the RQF; including use of the RQF levels in qualifications
- While operational level of the qualifications framework is one of the key criterions when considering added value of the comparison, there are also other criteria that can be considered:
- Existence of a policy dialogue on migration and mobility (including Talent Partnerships and its annual Round tables) requiring facilitation of qualifications recognition as a precondition for mobilities of learners and workers to happen and for moving from pilots to system level approach
- The size, age structure, education level of migrant population (stock) from a particular country or region
- The size, age structure, education level, entry channel (education, employment, family reunification, humanitarian) of new entries (flow) from a particular country or region
- Existence of an advanced/innovative NQF or RQF from comparison with which EQF would benefit

In cases where there are doubts about whether NQFs are in place and fully operational, a pre-comparison process should be carried out, based on the self-assessment described below.

3.4.2 Self-assessment

Third Country NQFs and RQFs that are considered for comparison based on mutual interest will be invited to conduct a self-assessment to analyse the policy objectives, possible outcomes and the readiness of the QF for comparison with the EQF. This will be based on the questionnaire proposed in Annex IV. The questionnaire tries to balance policy criteria and technical aspects, reflecting on the specific context of each case, as QFs are developed in different contexts, relevant developments around the different topics and identifying evidence of progress that could be used in the comparison. The self-assessment should be answered by a third country QF team, with representatives from key stakeholders. The self-assessment should be self-critical and include an elaboration of benefits and risks of comparison for both frameworks. Risks could be linked to substantial differences in terms of expectations or in terms of scope and objectives of the QFs that could make further comparison meaningless.

After the self-assessment is completed, it will be analysed by selected representatives (on a voluntary basis) of EU Member States in the EQF AG and the ETF. On the basis of the analysis, a decision will be taken to either start the comparison as planned or delay the comparison until certain identified issues have been addressed. In some cases, the conclusion can also be that comparison is not considered to be appropriate and alternative forms of cooperation may be considered.

Guidance for implementation

- Use an online self-assessment tool at the initial stage
- Carefully identify the actors in the comparison process
- Analyse and validate the self-assessment by EU MS representatives and ETF
- Bring new participants up to speed on comparison
- Manage different stakeholder expectations – focus on delivering results
- Pay more attention to the policy context – how to link with migration and other priorities
- Show the relevance of comparing qualifications frameworks and the link to skills
- How to deal with countries whose qualifications frameworks are not yet fully operational
- Decide on prioritising comparison, integrate in planned schedules, or postponing comparison with targeted advice or propose alternative forms of cooperation

4. THE COMPARISON PROCESS

4.1 Phase 1: Identification of topics to be covered during comparison, process and the timetable for comparison

The purpose of this phase is to identify, clarify and define clear topics and supporting questions for comparison.

At the start of the identification phase a **joint technical working group** will be established with relevant representatives from both frameworks to be compared.

While it is important to engage a diverse and representative team from the third country or region, we should distinguish between the **core team** that will participate in all meetings and lead the work and **the wider team**, in which there are representatives from all relevant education and training sectors, recognition centres, specialised agencies (e.g. for VET, NQF, QA), representatives of sectoral bodies and professional associations, trade unions, learners' representative bodies, the institute of statistics, employment services and other bodies involved in international learner and labour mobility. Moreover, the core team may draw as well on individual experts for specific issues.

The **core team** will normally include a **coordinator** from a coordinating body charged with issues of qualifications at the national or regional level (e.g. the qualifications agency, a dedicated department in the ministry of education, or the educational or labour secretariate of a regional economic community) who is a senior person with a very good understanding of the qualifications framework, who knows the different stakeholders and who can act as technical coordinator and go between. The coordinator is accompanied by a few key representatives from stakeholder organisations with an active role in implementing the QF representing different interests (e.g. from higher education, from vocational education, from general education, from a QA Agency) which attend all meetings together with the coordinator. This group should maintain continuity throughout the process, with additional experts, institutions or interest groups brought in as needed for specific discussions. The discussions on QA, for example, should include quality assurance bodies and/or competent authorities, the discussions of recognition, recognition agencies etc.

Balancing technical expertise and policy-level support is deemed critical, to provide both the required **technical expertise and political backing**. This becomes more important when discussing how the QF is used to support wider policies. The team size can be adjusted according to the scope of issues, for example, when discussions take place on governance and stakeholder involvement, it is recommended to ensure that everybody concerned is involved.

While the comparison exercise is an exercise in peer learning that may attract the interest of many stakeholders, the priority is to **ensure the necessary expertise is at the table** to allow for a meaningful and informed discussion.

Similarly, the **EQF/EU team** should reflect this balance between policy support and technical expertise (and between EQF AG and NCP representatives), and where relevant recognition bodies, quality assurance bodies, and possibly also public employment services or migration services, or specific Erasmus+ Offices of Member States. On the Commission side, apart from DG EMPL as lead DG for the EQF, an EU Delegation representative and other EU services responsible for the external relations with the Third Country / Region should be included (e.g. DG ENEST, DG MENA, DG INTPA, DG HOME, DG EAC, DG TRADE). In the pilots the EU teams were often outnumbered by participants from the third countries; the European Commission, a number of member state representatives and ETF were represented, but it is important to widen participation, if possible, at least for specific topics.

The **ETF** will continue to support the comparisons, organise the meetings, provide translation and interpretation, draft briefings, prepare drafts of reports and minutes, and commission background research where necessary.

Phase 1 consists of four steps:

- **Discuss the purpose and scope of the process** of dialogue and building mutual trust. These discussions will include presentations on the EQF and the comparison process and the preparation of the self-assessment report of the qualifications framework of third country/region, as well as a short training session for experts who will be involved in the comparison exercise.
- The third country/region QF team will present the self-assessment that has been analysed by the EQF/EU team. **After discussing the self-assessment**, the Commission will propose prioritising the comparison, continuing as planned, postponing the exercise, or identifying an alternative form of cooperation.
- Jointly **reviewing the proposed topics** below and the supporting questions that will be used for comparison and tailor them to the context of the exercise if needed. Based on the self-assessment and on the experience of the pilot comparisons, it is possible to define what further information is needed from both frameworks to show what to expect in light of the different topics.
- **Agree a detailed timetable** for the comparison process. This plan should be as detailed as possible to take account of possible conflicting dates and to allow for sufficient times between meetings to prepare properly for in-depth discussions, based on short presentations, summarising briefing documents and key points to be clarified. It should be decided whether the comparison meetings will be online only, or whether short study visits could be built in to see developments on the ground. The meetings might be combined with peer learning or mutual learning sessions to go deeper into aspects of the comparison and looking at operational functions of both QFs.

As comparison is seen as a dialogue and a process where both frameworks are treated in an equal way, the exact topics for comparison and supporting questions will have to be identified in cooperation. This depends on the features of the QFs which are compared and the context in which they are compared. To ensure transparency and continuity it is desirable to keep the topics as much as possible the same across comparison exercises with different countries and regions. The section below shows the topics that will be proposed from the EQF side. Topics and questions can be adapted, specified, or added in cooperation with the partner framework based on their specific interest.

4.1.1 Core topics and supporting questions for EQF comparison

A general list of topics is provided with supporting questions that are proposed for the dialogue, that can be refined between the teams of representatives. All topics can be addressed for both a comparison with a RQF as well as a comparison with a NQF, though the exact questions addressed, and evidence used might differ.

For each topic identified supporting questions have been suggested in order to collect the views of both teams on the comparability of both QFs.

Core topics for comparison

- Topic 1: Objectives of qualifications frameworks
- Topic 2: Scope of the frameworks
- Topic 3: Governance structures
- Topic 4: Levels and level descriptors
- Topic 5: Learning outcome approach(es)
- Topic 6: Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning/ Recognition of Prior Learning
- Topic 7: Recognition processes
- Topic 8: Quality assurance
- Topic 9: Referencing/ alignment processes
- Topic 10: Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information
- Topic 11: Transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process

The chapter below presents each topic with examples of supporting questions and evidence used in the comparison pilots with Ukraine, Cape Verde and the Southern African Development Community.

Topic 1: Objectives of qualifications frameworks

This topic aims to establish whether the objectives of the qualifications frameworks (the EQF + the TC NQF or RQF) support the intended / expected outcomes of comparison.

Supporting questions:

- What are the objectives of each QF?
- Is it clear how the QFs support these objectives? This may differ between NQFs and RQFs.
- Have these objectives evolved since the qualifications framework was developed?
- Are the objectives of both QFs coherent and do they support the intended outcomes of comparison?
- Are their common core values behind these objectives?
- If not, does this create any difficulties for comparison?

Examples of objectives:

- improving the transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications
- improving education and qualification systems
- the use of learning outcomes and quality assurance based on learning outcomes
- improving lifelong learning opportunities including the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning, and improved access, recognition, credit transfer and progression of learning
- cooperation between public and private entities and private-public partnerships on qualifications
- supporting new partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and civil society
- supporting cross border economic cooperation (investments and platform work)
- application of QF in the labour market to support better use of human resources
- reducing the number of people in the informal sector

Possible evidence from the EQF:

It is expected that each QF provides evidence for the topic. As the EQF will be repeatedly compared with other QFs an indicative list of possible evidence is provided here:

EQF related sources:

- The EQF Recommendation
- EQF evaluation(s)
- EU Skills policies

The EQF has four broad objectives:

- Transparency – as there are many different qualification systems in Europe, transparency will make qualification systems and qualifications easier to understand and to compare.
- Comparability – learning outcomes and levels make qualifications easier to understand and links to quality assurance arrangements improve mutual trust, which facilitates their portability and recognition across borders.
- Modernising Education and Training Systems – learning outcomes describe what learners know, understand and are able to do at the end of a learning process. Qualifications frameworks based

on learning outcomes facilitate access, progression, inclusion, lifelong learning and mobility. The EQF links formal, non-formal and informal learning through validated learning outcomes.

- Increasing the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners.

Evidence from research and the pilots

NQFs

Global Inventory of NQFs and RQFs

Based on an analysis of 93 reports of NQFs, in the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (2023) 10 main objectives emerged for NQFs, all of which relate in some way to improvement. In order of the percentage of reports in which the objectives are mentioned, these are to:

1. Improve transparency, comparability, and recognition of qualifications (93)
2. Support lifelong learning, access to qualifications, and permeability of education and training systems (87.2%)
3. Support recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning (73.3%)
4. Support reforms and raise the quality of education and training (68.6%)
5. Strengthen links between education and the labour market (59.3%)
6. Improve quality assurance systems (51.2%)
7. Ensure closer integration of education and training systems (48.8%)
8. Use the NQF as an instrument for international alignment (32.6%)
9. Support socio-economic development (19.8%)
10. Strengthen cooperation among different stakeholders (17.4%).

Ukraine

1. Harmonising legislation on the use of qualifications in education as well as social and labour relations.
2. Promoting national and international recognition of qualifications obtained in Ukraine.
3. Establishing effective interaction between the education system and the labour market.

Cape Verde

Using learning outcomes is one of the main objectives of the NQF of Cape Verde, in particular to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning, thus providing the population, especially those in vulnerable situations, with opportunities to access continuous learning and to enter the labour market.

RQFs

The 2020 ETF study on RQF initiatives showed that the objectives of RQFs mainly fall into the following three areas, which are partly interlinked:

- mobility (of workers and learners);
- quality/quality assurance;
- harmonisation towards comparability and transparency.

SADC QF

1. Providing a mechanism for comparability and recognition of qualifications in SADC.
2. Facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications in all SADC member states.
3. Harmonising qualifications wherever possible.
4. Promoting the transfer of credits within and between member states and even beyond.
5. Creating SADC regional standards where appropriate.

NB: Objectives may change in the course of time, when the contexts change. In the Ukrainian Qualifications Framework, one of the main drivers is to bring education and the needs of the labour market and society much closer together. However, the second objective to gain international recognition has become particularly important after Ukraine was invaded by Russia in 2022 and millions of people fled abroad.

Topic 2: Scope of the frameworks

Supporting questions:

- What is the scope of each of the QFs?
- Are the QFs going beyond formal education?
- Are they promoting lifelong learning effectively (supporting access and progression)?
- Is there any reference to partial qualifications, micro credentials?
- What is the comparability of the scope of the two frameworks?
- To what extent does this influence the comparison process and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?

Examples to take into account when discussing the scope:

- Qualifications Frameworks include General education, VET, HE, adult learning qualifications.
- Formal, non-formal, informal learning are recognised.
- In respect to RQFs: Is there a focus on alignment / referencing of NQFs to the RQF and common criteria? Or are national and / or other regional qualifications directly included in the RQF.
- Which qualifications are registered / included in the NQF?
- Registers/databases of qualifications supporting/based on RQF/NQF.

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- EQF reference to Lifelong Learning.
- The scope of European NQFs referenced to the EQF (which qualifications are currently included in the European NQFs and linked to the EQF) – largely based on the European Inventory of NQFs of Cedefop²⁶.
- Validation, ECTS, Europass.

Evidence from Pilots

NQFs

Ukraine

Like the EQF, the NQF in Ukraine is a tool for lifelong learning and has eight levels. It includes educational qualifications issued by the formal education system and professional qualifications to recognise labour market skills and occupations, predominantly through assessment by Qualification Centres. It has arrangements for recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Part qualifications and micro-credentials are being explored within the NQF. The scope of both QFs seems to be coherent and comprehensive. Both QFs have a lifelong learning approach that goes beyond formal education systems

Cape Verde

Both the NQF of Cape Verde and the EQF are comprehensive and inclusive: they embrace qualifications from all sub-systems of education and training, of all levels and types. Both consider learning in different contexts: formal, non-formal and informal. The two registers of qualifications of Cape Verde (CNQ for technical education and professional training, levels 2 to 5) and the ARES register (higher education qualifications, levels 5 to 8) include national quality-assured qualifications.

RQFs

SADC QF

The scope of the SADC QF and EQF is identical: both are comprehensive and inclusive of all forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and levels of qualifications. Both frameworks support dialogue

²⁶ European inventory of NQFs. Available online at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-of-nqfs>

and actions to widen the scope to new types and forms of qualifications, notably micro-credentials and qualifications from industry, the private sector and domains beyond formal education and training. As meta-frameworks they do not register actual qualifications, as qualifications are national and are registered at national level, through NQFs. But through the process of referencing / alignment national qualifications levels are compared to the regional levels and their compatibility is demonstrated. All levels and sub-systems of education and training (General Education, Technical Vocational education and Training, and Higher Education) are part of NQFs within the RQF, and acknowledge all forms of learning (formal, non-formal, informal).

Topic 3: Governance structures

Supporting questions:

- What are the responsibilities and legal competences of all bodies involved in both QFs?
- What is the institutional framework of both QFs (e.g. laws/regulations, policies)?
- How inclusive is the QF, what is the involvement of different stakeholders (labour market, education/training, recognition) and how is relevance and co-ownership of QF ensured?
- To what extent are the effectiveness and inclusiveness of governance structures comparable and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- EQF recommendation.
- Roles of EQF AG and of the National Contact Points.
- Materials produced in the context of the EQF AG.

Evidence from Research and Comparison Pilots

Research

The ETF study “International mapping of national qualifications agencies (NQA): identity, tasks and scope for cooperation” (2023) shows that the landscape of NQAs is very diverse across countries. While they share certain similarities - with a certain degree of autonomy and a common body of core functions - NQAs form a very heterogeneous group that is not easy to group or classify. Furthermore, very few NQAs could be identified that have a comprehensive scope by covering all or almost all educational subsectors - including general education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education. Despite their differences, there is an exceptionally high level of interest in international collaboration and exchange among NQAs and other organisations with similar tasks.

NQFs

Cape Verde

The main government bodies responsible for the education and vocational training system are:

- ME: [Ministry of Education](#)
- MFFE: [Ministry of Finance and Business Development](#)
- DGE: [Directorate General for Employment](#)
- DGES: [Directorate General for Higher Education](#)
- UC-SNQ: [National Qualifications System Coordination Unit](#)
- ARES: [Higher Education Regulatory Agency](#)

The Ministry of Education is responsible for national policies and oversees NQF qualifications in coordination with the UC-SNQ and in cooperation with the General Directorate of Employment. The DGE and the UC-SNQ are supervised by the Ministry of Finance and Business Development. The coordination of the NQF is ensured by the UC-SNQ. Social partners contribute to the coordination of the

national qualifications system. Different sector councils support the development of professional profiles and training courses. For higher education, ARES is independent in the performance of its functions.

Ukraine

The [National Qualifications Agency \(NQA\)](#) is tripartite collegial body to strengthen coordination of qualifications. It was co-founded by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Social Policy in cooperation with social partners at the national level. The agency is the main body supporting the Ukrainian NQF implementation and the development of the professional qualifications system.

RQFs

SADC QF

The SADC Council of Ministers, the ministers responsible for Education and Training, the TCCA, the TCCA Executive Committee and an Implementation Unit are the main governing structures for the implementation of the SADC QF. The Implementation Unit has not been put in place yet, therefore its role has been assured by an arrangement of shared responsibility of SADC member states and the SADC Secretariat for the six implementation programmes of the SADC QF:

Alignment of NQFs to SADC QF – South Africa

Quality assurance – Botswana

Verification – Kingdom of Eswatini

Articulation, RPL and credit accumulation and transfer – Namibia

Advocacy and communication – Zambia

Governance – TCCA and SADC Secretariat.

Topic 4: Levels and level descriptors

Supporting questions:

- How many levels does each QF have?
- How are the levels of each QF defined in terms of level descriptors?
- To what extent are the level descriptors formulated in a way that the levels of the two QFs can be compared?
- How (and to what extent) do the levels of the QFs compared relate to each other and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?
- How are levels used (e.g. in setting standards, in levelling modules, in referencing, aligning related qualifications framework, in cross-border comparison of qualifications)?
- How are levels allocated to qualifications? How are levels considered when bringing qualifications into the qualifications register?

Methodology for comparison:

- Linguistic/textual comparison of level descriptors, addressing both the overall level descriptors as well as the separate elements this consists of.
- The comparison will in particular have to address the extent to which 'bands' or 'corridors' of complexity have been defined.
- Concepts of 'best-fit'.
- Looking above and looking below (why are the levels of both frameworks not the same).
- Contextual information (typical examples of qualifications for each of the levels of the two frameworks).

Possible evidence from the EQF:

EQF related sources:

- EQF Recommendation.

- NB: Member states should ensure that all newly issued qualification documents and/or registers of qualifications contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.
- Cedefop's analysis and overview of NQF level descriptors in European countries
- Qualifications for different levels from different countries that are referenced to EQF (coming from the Commission and Cedefop comparison tools + qualifications registers/databases).

Evidence from the pilots

Use of the levels

NQFs

Ukraine

In Ukraine, the use of levels is well-established in higher education where diploma supplements also exist, but this is not yet the case for VET or professional qualifications. Individual qualifications are often indirectly based on levels through the description of outcomes in the State Educational Standards that cover a group of qualifications linked to the Ukrainian NQF descriptors.

Cape Verde

In Cape Verde all qualifications in the National Catalogue of Qualifications contain the respective NQF level, whereas higher education has its own register of the QA Agency for higher education ARES, and are classified by Bachelors, integrated Masters, Masters and Doctorate Degrees.

RQFs

SADC QF

- The two frameworks use identical domains of learning for the definition of the level descriptors: knowledge, skills and autonomy and responsibility (responsibility and autonomy).
- The level descriptors are formulated as learning outcomes for each level.
- The level structure differs: SADC QF has 10 levels, mirroring the structure of the NQFs in the region (and in many other African NQFs). The EQF has eight levels, as do the large majority of NQFs in the EQF context.

SADCQF	EQF
Level 10	Level 8
Level 9	Level 7
Level 8	Level 6
Level 7	
Level 6	Level 5
Level 5	Level 4
Level 4	Level 3
Level 3	Level 2
Level 2	Level 1
Level 1	

One application of the SADC QF levels is for the use of credit accumulation and transfer across countries and institutions. SADC-CATS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated SADCQF level and workload. On average, 120 SADC QF credits

are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated level and workload of a full-time study year or its equivalent. SADC-CATS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.

Topic 5: Learning outcome approach(es)

Supporting questions:

- To what extent are the QFs and their qualifications based on the principle of learning outcomes?
- How are learning outcomes defined in both QFs? Are learning outcomes used at the level of units or modules, or are they only addressing the qualification as a whole?
- To what extent and how do the learning outcomes inform qualification types, standards, assessment and VNFIL and learning programmes?
- To what extent is the use of learning outcomes comparable and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?

Examples:

- Comparing examples of learning outcomes.
- Descriptions of how learning outcomes are used to inform assessment, learning programmes and VNFIL arrangements where applicable.

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- Information on the EQF and the learning outcomes approach used.
- EQF evaluations.
- NQF inventory.
- Cedefop studies on learning outcomes.

Examples from the pilots

NQFs

Ukraine

Learning outcomes and competences (the terms are sometimes used interchangeably) are a central part of education and training reforms in Ukraine. Learning outcomes have been introduced gradually since the early 2000s, but the real push came after they were legislated in 2014 and 2017. The development of qualifications of different types in line with the NQF level descriptors was a key priority for the Ukrainian NQF Implementation Plan 2016-2020. It is now mandatory to use learning outcomes for each new qualification.

Cape Verde

The application of the learning outcomes approach in the design and description of qualifications is one of the main objectives of the NQF, which is necessary to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning, thus providing citizens in vulnerable situations with opportunities to access continuous learning and entering the labour market.

RQFs

SADC QF

Both frameworks are based on learning outcomes and promote the use of learning outcomes at national level, for transparency and comparability, and for referencing / alignment. In both regions, the NQFs are based on and apply learning outcomes concepts and approach to define level descriptors, design and register qualifications, implement learning outcomes-based programmes and assess knowledge, skills and competences. The EQF Recommendation gives greater emphasis to learning outcomes than does

the SADCQF document, and extensively describes their role seen as driver of change, and key for transparency, quality, and systemic coherence.

Topic 6: Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning/ Recognition of Prior Learning

Supporting questions:

- For NQFs: Is it possible to obtain qualifications in the NQF through VNFIL/RPL?

Can individuals obtain a full qualification in the NQF through VNFIL/RPL? Are there separate standards and certificates for VNFIL?

- For RQFs: Is VNFIL/RPL addressed in the RQF and considered in the referencing/alignment process of linked NQFs to the RQF?
- To what extent is the approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning or recognition of prior learning comparable and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- EQF Recommendation (VNFIL as a principle + referencing criterion 3).
- Commission Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning of 2012.
- European Inventory on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning.
- European Guidelines on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning.

Experience from the pilots

NQFs

Ukraine

VNFIL has a very clear place in the Ukrainian NQF. The State Employment Service has recognised the cook occupation through VNFIL since 2016. A growing number of Qualification Centres accredited by the National Qualifications Agency have been dealing with VNFIL since 2020 and award professional qualifications based on occupational standards. In formal VET, there is some experience with entrance control, which can be used to shorten programmes by recognising parts of a programme. In HE a regulation has been adopted but has not yet been implemented.

Cape Verde

The system of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies (RVCC) is one of the components of the National Qualifications System (SNQ) in Cape Verde. It is currently in the initial phase of implementation and applies only to the professional qualifications inserted in the CNQ (all levels - 2 to 5) mainly focused on three professional families (Hospitality Restaurants and Tourism; Installation and Maintenance; Administration and Management).

RQFs

SADC QF

SADC adopted in 2016 Guidelines for RPL which propose a six-stage process, starting with (1) information and guidance, followed by (2) administrative registration, (3) eligibility, (4) assessment, (5) appeal and (6) certification. These guidelines are used by member states in implementing their RPL policies. Six SADC countries have functioning RPL systems. In conclusion, both EQF and SADC QFs have adopted their specific regional policy framework on validation of non-formal and informal learning / recognition of prior learning, which the respective countries use in developing and implementing policies and measures at national level.

Topic 7: Recognition processes

Supporting questions:

- How is recognition of foreign qualifications organised for each country/regional economic community?
- Is the QF a reference for recognition of foreign qualifications? In what sense?
- How are the QFs used in recognition practices and what does this mean for comparability of the two frameworks?
- How could recognition be supported by this comparison exercise?

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- Participation in ENIC-NARIC.
- ENIC-NARIC website.
- Subsidiary text to Lisbon Convention.

Examples from the Pilots

NQFs

Ukraine

The qualifications framework and learning outcomes play a role in the assessment of the level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes of a qualification in line with the EAR Manual of the ENIC NARIC network. The NQF and overarching qualifications frameworks can be used to compare qualifications. This can shorten the recognition process especially if there is a link to the EQF. NQFs as transparency instruments confirm the level, learning outcomes and often the type of qualification.

Cape Verde

Management and supervision of processes of professional and academic recognition of qualifications are directly linked with the institutions in charge of coordination and implementation of the NQF, notably the UC-SNQ (professional recognition) and ARES (higher education / academic recognition). CNEP, the Commission tasked with professional recognition, is part of the organisational structure of the UC-SNQ. ARES closely cooperates with the ENIC-NARIC Networks, for references, data, and verification of authenticity of qualifications from relevant countries.

RQFs

SADC QF

SADC adopted the “Guidelines for Recognition of Qualifications” (2020). Chapter 5 discusses qualifications frameworks as tools that enable the (provide an opportunity for) mutual recognition of qualifications, learning outcomes, and used of credits.

Additional examples

Africa

The Addis Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in African States confirms that parties agree to make use of national and regional qualifications frameworks, where they exist, in the recognition processes (art IV.8.3)

Topic 8: Quality assurance

Description of the role of quality assurance in the frameworks and the mechanisms and principles used.

Supporting questions:

- What are the main principles of the quality assurance mechanisms of both QFs?
- In the case of NQFs how are qualifications in the QF quality assured?

- To what extent is the focus on institutional capacities (e.g. accrediting training providers, assessment centres, awarding organisations), to what extent on processes such as setting standards, valid and reliable assessment processes and on certification, to what extent on personnel (assessors, internal and external verifiers) and to what extent on learners?
- How are intended and achieved learning outcomes used in quality assurance?
- In the case of RQFs, what are the arrangements for QA at the RQF level and how are these arrangements related to the QA of qualifications in NQFs that are part of the RQF? Are there common principles? Is there a mechanism to ensure consistency? Are there minimal requirements for standards, assessment and certification processes?
- To what extent are the quality assurance mechanisms comparable and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- Quality assurance principles of the EQF (Annex IV).
- EQF Referencing criteria 5 and 6.
- EQAVET framework for VET (as included in the new VET Recommendation)
- European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education and the link to national frameworks
- EQF related sources:
- EQF referencing reports
- EQF Evaluations

Experience from the Pilots

NQFs

Ukraine

Qualifications that belong to the Ukrainian NQF are developed based on further to educational or occupational standards. Educational standards specify requirements for mandatory competences and learning outcomes. Educational programmes are developed based on the respective educational standards. The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes; Assessment of learning outcomes is an integrated part of quality assurance arrangements. In Ukraine, learning outcomes are mainly assessed for full qualifications. Assessment of learning outcomes is addressed in higher education standards and related programmes. Occupational standards are used for assessing professional qualifications, which can also focus on a set of competences.

Cape Verde

The emphasis in VET is on harmonized development and validation of qualifications (professional profiles and training plan and modules) and their inclusion in the register. The accreditation of training providers, the quality of assessment of the achieved learning outcomes and certification, the quality of RVCC (VNFIL), while in higher education the emphasis is on internal (self-evaluation) of higher education institutions and external evaluation, and the accreditation and registration of new higher education institutions and programmes leading to degrees and diplomas.

RQFs

SADC QF

In SADC QF quality assurance is central to the referencing / alignment process, as a requirement. In the SADC QF: *“The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the NQF/NQS and is consistent with quality assurance guidelines of the SADCQF”*.

Topic 9: Referencing/ alignment processes

RQFs in general have processes to reference or align NQFs to them. Referencing and aligning processes vary. The terms are used here beyond the EQF context to describe the processes of establishing the correspondence of an NQF to an RQF. This criterion is applicable for RQFs but also for NQFs that are part of RQFs.

Supporting questions:

- What steps are taken during the referencing/ alignment process to each of the RQFs?
- What criteria are used during the referencing/ alignment process?
- How is transparency and quality assured during the referencing/ alignment process?
- How are results of the referencing/ alignment process communicated?
- To what extent are the referencing/alignment processes comparable and what does this mean for the final conclusions on the comparability of the two frameworks?

Evidence from the EQF:

- [EQF recommendation 2017 Annex III](#) Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
- [EQF Referencing Reports | Europass.](#)
- EQF AG meeting papers and minutes.

Evidence from SADC QF:

The package of alignment support tools includes:

- SADC QF policy objectives, quality assurance guidelines and level descriptors (SADC QF Booklet, 2017).
- Terms of reference for the National Alignment Committees
- Ten alignment criteria and procedures. This document provides useful guidance for the understanding and use the 10 criteria and procedures, in form of orientation questions and explanatory notes.
- Training workshops on alignment concepts and procedures with a group of Member States.
- Other guidelines and handbooks, such as on RPL, CATS and Recognition, equally pertinent for alignment. The SADC 'Qualifications Recognition Manual' (12/2020) was compiled by a task team of country representatives (Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, South Africa, and Zambia) with consultant's support. The 'Guidelines for SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer' were presented to TCCA in October 2020, reviewed for validation in April 2021 and approved by the Ministers in June 2021.
- South-Africa, the Seychelles and Mauritius have aligned their Qualifications Frameworks to the SADC QF.

Topic 10: Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information

Supporting questions:

- What is known about the benefits of the qualifications frameworks? Are there any results of studies on the audience reached with information on the QF.
- Who are the target groups identified that need information about the QFs? How are they being addressed?
- Who are the main actors responsible for disseminating information on the QFs?
- How and in what forms are both QFs communicated to the relevant stakeholders, end users and wider audience?

- Where can different stakeholders find information on the QFs and how easily accessible is this information for different stakeholders (e.g. education and training providers, learners, employers, etc.).
- How well are both QFs known by different stakeholders?
- How or to what extent does or could the visibility of both QFs influence the intended outcomes of comparison?

Examples:

- The means used to communicate the QF, for example websites, leaflets, videos, conferences, workshops, etc.

Possible evidence from the EQF:

- The Europass Platform as official EU Platform on the EQF.
- Cedefop website (National Inventory of NQF).

Evidence from the pilots

NQFs

Cape Verde

In Cape Verde the communication and advocacy of the NQF, and the main related policies and instruments (CNQ and RVCC) is channelled through the websites of the UC-SNQ, and of the Directorate General of Employment. Social media of the Employment Centres disseminate information on professional qualifications. Professional qualifications display the NQF level and the CNQ that is accessible online offers the most tangible example of implementation of the NQF's principles and use of the NQF descriptors.

Ukraine

The National Qualifications Agency is primarily responsible for communicating about the NQF. The NQA website includes sections with information about the national qualification system, resources, links to useful sources, related legislation, key documents and publications.

RQFs

SADC QF

Currently the SADC website does not contain a specific public page for SADCQF activities and news. However, the ACQF contributes to partially fill this gap, through a range of actions and events started in 2021, notably the review of the first 5-year implementation of SADQF, resulting in a report and updated inventory of NQFs in the region, presented and approved by the Joint ESTI Ministerial meetings (2022 and 2023). The review of SADC QF in 2021-2022 revealed that communication and dissemination of information on the SADC QF has much room for improvement. The survey and interviews conducted by ACQF for this review, gathered pertinent recommendations on the need to strengthen efforts to inform and update the national authorities and stakeholders on the SADC QF and its benefits, processes, and actions.

Topic 11: Transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process

Supporting questions:

- How will the transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process be assured by both QFs?

Examples:

- Role of the EQF AG.
- Role of NQF / RQF lead organ.
- Validation process.

Each of the draft comparison reports was presented and discussed in the EQF Advisory Group. Comments were addressed in the final drafts. Further dissemination and consultation events took place separately.

Evidence from the pilots

NQFs

Ukraine

Ukrainian participants in the comparison exercise came from the Ministry of Education and Science (responsible for Higher Education, adult learning, vocational education and training and general education), the Ministry of Economy, the National Qualifications Agency, the ENIC NARIC Recognition Centre, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, universities, regional methodological centres for VET, social partners (employers' organisations and trade unions) companies and NGOs. The dialogue took place in English and Ukrainian to ensure all relevant stakeholders were included and had full access to the process. In-depth expert discussions were organised in order to explore topics in greater detail. Relevant stakeholders were asked to join the discussions so that their perspective regarding certain issues could be heard.

Discussions focused on issues that needed to be clarified, and plenary discussions focused on agreeing to what extent the frameworks were comparable by key topic. All participants acted as critical friends. In June 2022, a presentation by Ukrainian and EU participants was made in the EQF AG on the progress achieved. In October, the draft report was presented to the EQF AG and shared for comments. Every effort was made to ensure that the comparison process was as transparent for and accessible to all those involved.

Cape Verde

The involved national institutions and EQF experts actively engaged in dialogue on all topics of comparison, seeking mutual understanding on similarities and distinctive features between the two frameworks. The openness of the exchanges contributed to a higher-level mutual trust, as a key aspiration of the comparison.

The comparison showed the importance of context for understanding the two frameworks and the interplay of qualifications from different subsystems in the case of Cape Verde.

RQFs

SADC QF

The comparison process took place based on shared goals and expectations, and participation of the relevant institutions from the large majority of SADC member states.

The involved national institutions and EQF experts actively engaged in dialogue on all topics of comparison, seeking mutual understanding on similarities and distinctive features between the two frameworks. The openness of the exchanges through the comparison meetings contributed to enhance mutual trust. The comparison showed the importance of context and historical background in understanding the two frameworks. SADC QF contextualised and adapted some of the principles and application tools inspired from the EQF experience. The comparison report is based on an extensive and updated inventory and analysis of national policies, legal acts, and methodological frameworks, and provided concrete examples and application cases in all topics. The report is comprehensive, detailed, and updated. It can be used as a trusted information source on related national qualifications frameworks, and is disseminated to different networks interested in recognition, referencing, and mobility.

Third country NQFs and RQFs are developed and implemented in different contexts and there is a lot of diversity in terms of features, purposes, and implementation mechanisms. Different NQFs and RQFs can be compared with EQF, even if they are not fully comprehensive, cover all levels of the EQF or have features that go beyond the EQF. The same set of core topics is proposed for both RQFs and NQFs. They have been tested in the pilots. For each exercise they are refined jointly in order to reflect the respective contexts and scope of the QFs.

4.2 Phase 2: Documentation

Based on the agreed topics and questions the teams from both sides that are involved in the comparison exercise collect the documentation and evidence needed for all topics and prepare descriptions for each topic that will be used as input for Phase 3.

This work starts with the Third Country QF team conducting the self-assessment and documenting the progress and gaps for each topic. During the Self-Assessment the stakeholders of the Third Country Qualifications Frameworks upload useful background documents for the comparison to the online comparison repository or library. These include general background materials such as legislation, policy papers, relevant links to websites, methodological tools and guidelines, any report or evaluation or article on the qualifications framework, any online repositories and links to key institutions that are involved in the implementation of the NQF (for each item there will be short explanation in English). In addition, for each topic of the comparison a short text will be provided with links to online sources or supported by uploaded documents.

A separate section of the repository is about available statistics, which can help gain an understanding of the scope of the qualifications frameworks as well as the possible links to employment, migration, education, lifelong learning, economic and social inclusion policies. Currently, Eurostat provides detailed statistics on the stocks and flows of TCNs by country of origin (birth and citizenship), age group, reason of entry (employment, education, family reunification, other including asylum seekers, EU Blue card holders) but does not publish statistics on education level of migrants by single country of origin. This means that a collection of relevant statistics would require close cooperation with the national statistical institute of EU Member States.

4.3 Phase 3: Comparison

The documents, evidence and descriptions collected during Phase 2 are the inputs for this phase. The working group with the representatives from both frameworks comes together online to work on the actual comparison. This process is not just about the technical comparison of the two frameworks, but also a form of dialogue to build a better understanding of each framework.

Based on the experience from the pilots, we aim to provide timely access to background information and supporting materials well before the meetings, so that the meetings themselves will only have targeted presentations and questions for discussion. During these, both parties jointly identify commonalities and discuss differences between the qualifications frameworks. They also define the benefits, risks and possible synergies of connecting both frameworks in order to achieve mutual trust in the quality and level of qualifications to support mobility of learners and workers within and across sectoral and geographical borders.

As preparation for each meeting the different teams will read each other's descriptions and supporting documentation. This is also an opportunity to double check what information might have been lacking in the self-assessment and identify questions for clarification and for discussion. Each of the teams (representing EQF and NQF/RQF) will meet separately to define comments, questions and requests for additional information and explanation. Then before the joint meetings on topics there should be an opportunity to add information to go with the explanations and information before meetings on topics are scheduled.

4.4 Phase 4: Results of Comparison and Publication

The visibility of the process and the outcomes are very important for its success. A number of products are produced to capture the context, the process and the outcomes of the comparison.

These include a Joint Report and a Joint Action Plan to address the dissemination and other identified follow up actions from the comparison exercise.

4.4.1 Joint Report

The results of the comparison are documented in a joint report that is drafted and agreed between the representatives of both qualifications frameworks. Based on the experience with the pilots it is proposed to harmonise the structure of the reports so that they are easier to compare. Moreover, the policy dimensions in the report should be enhanced to obtain a better balance with the technical aspects of comparison and the concluding section about the comparability of both frameworks should include clear recommendations for follow up and a draft leaflet on the findings for wide dissemination.

The report provides the background and policy context as well as a technical comparison of both frameworks, followed by a concluding section on the comparability of both frameworks and recommendations and possible next steps.

The recommended structure of the report is the following:

1. Forewords

The Forewords are made by senior representatives from the EU and the Third Country or the Regional Economic Community Body. Each foreword is a political endorsement of the conclusions of the comparison process underlining from the perspective of each partner why this process is important and how it can be used.

2. Table of Contents

3. List of Acronyms

4. Executive Summary

The executive summary is 4-5 pages maximum to present the process and main findings. It should be usable as a self-standing document.

5. Introduction

The introduction explains how comparison works, describing the policy context and technical aspects:

- For the political context it is recommended to provide a very short introduction into both qualifications frameworks and their policy expectations in the respective regional economic community / third country and in the EU, and to discuss the relevant background for cooperation with the EU (economic, labour, educational and or trade cooperation, labour and learner mobility) and the expected mutual benefits from linking the qualifications frameworks.
- For the technical aspects there should be a short description of the methodology used to conduct the comparison, and the documents / evidence collected. This also explains why and how topics were chosen and supporting questions agreed and might emphasise possible key issues that emerged from the self-assessment at the start of the comparison process.

6. Comparison

This is the longest part of the report. The Comparison provides an evidence-based detailed description on how the two frameworks compare on the different topics for comparison:

- a. Topic 1: Comparing objectives.
- b. Topic 2: Comparing the scope of the Qualification Frameworks.
- c. Etc.

For the comparison of levels, a comparative table is provided of the levels and in case of a comparison with a Third Country NQF also the related qualification types at the corresponding level

7. Conclusions and Recommendations for Follow Up

The conclusions bring together the findings of the comparison exercise and explain how comparable the two frameworks are. It is important to bring the conclusions on all the topics together and make concluding statements about the comparability of both Qualifications Frameworks and in particular the levels supported by other arrangements. The conclusions should also include lessons learned and feedback to the comparison process.

Qualifications Frameworks are not static tools but evolve and develop during their implementation. The aim of comparison is not to conform the Third Country Frameworks to the criteria and characteristics of the EQF. Comparison is not aimed at converging qualifications frameworks. Both qualifications frameworks have been discussed on their own merits. While there may have been inspiration from the European Qualifications Framework, the Third Country Qualifications Frameworks were not designed to be linked to the EQF and neither is the EQF designed to be linked to frameworks that have been developed in different contexts. This means that there are probably some aspects in the comparison that are more difficult to match due to the context or implementation arrangements. It is important to focus in the follow up on those aspects that can enhance the impact of the comparison in practical terms and improve the functionality of the qualifications frameworks.

This may include policy recommendations for the Third Country or Regional Economic Community authorities, EU DGs in charge, EU Delegation (e.g. by integrating the qualifications framework and the link to the EQF in the policy dialogue, or making it a key instrument in the application of policy instruments, (e.g. in the Talent Partnerships). The recommendations can inform planning of possible future activities, such as projects and programmes. It may also include technical recommendation for specific bodies in third country bodies (e.g. in charge of qualifications, quality assurance, mobility and recognition), or for the EQF Advisory Group, NCP networks or other networks. Technical recommendations should address technical aspects of the qualifications frameworks that can improve the transparency, mutual trust and comparability between both frameworks.

In the first pilots a Joint Action Plan for Follow-Up was proposed. However, it takes time to shape these issues as they will require consultation and mobilisation of resources and actors to ensure the commitments for the follow up and it is therefore easier to address this through agreed recommendations in the report and deal with the follow up separately after the report. Moreover, the term Joint Action Plan suggests a joint follow up. While this can be the case for certain actions, including the communication and dissemination of the report, follow up actions can also be dealt with by one side or through different channels involving different actors. It is important to identify which existing channels for cooperation can be used to support the follow up.

Below is an overview of the Recommendations from the Pilots, as examples.

Generic recommendations are also a basis for a Joint Action Plan

- Value the process and results of comparison, use the outcomes
- Continue the policy dialogue and identify appropriate existing channels if these exist
- Communicate and raise awareness on the results of comparison
- Ensure close cooperation with networks for the recognition of qualifications (ENIC-NARICs) to facilitate dissemination and uptake of comparison results

Take further steps and monitoring measures to ensure comparison can

- a. facilitate recognition;
- b. provide better access to labour markets (including regulated professions);
- c. support further development of qualification systems;
- d. lead to systematic collection of feedback on the use of comparison outcomes.

- Identify how the cooperation can be continued and explore opening up opportunities of participation of countries and regional bodies that have completed comparison in the EQF and Europass cooperation, e.g. in specific PLA's of mutual interest, or use of Europass instruments.
- Advise how technical and financial Commission and Member State support can be obtained to implement recommendations after comparison.

Specific recommendations for the Ukrainian Qualifications Framework

- Ensure every VET qualification and professional qualification and qualification of general education has a clear NQF level.
- Introduce certificate supplements for VET qualifications.
- Operationalise the NQF registers as a single register for the NQF and populate it with educational and professional qualifications, ensuring interoperability with European Learning Model and QDR.
- Widen the implementation of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in formal education (higher education, VET and general education) and increase the number of Qualification Centres to support access to VNFIL for professional qualifications.
- Strengthen the use of learning outcomes for quality assuring all qualifications and programmes in Ukraine.
- Improve information for end users on Ukrainian qualifications, including better online information tools to support lifelong guidance.
- Facilitate access to Europass digital credentials.
- Facilitate full participation of Ukraine in the EQF and the activities to support VNFIL, establishment of a national contact point and nominating and training members of the EQF AG and the EQF VNFIL Network.

Specific recommendations for the Qualifications Framework of Cape Verde

- Deepen and broaden the implementation of the NQF and its systemic components, mobilising all relevant institutions and providing training to trainers and teachers and other stakeholders, dissemination and capacity building of institutions.
- Increase exchange and mutual learning between different subsectors.
- In Higher Education strengthen the use of learning outcomes.
- Consider opening up the levels 6, 7 and 8 of the NQF to professional, market, technical qualifications and assess the internal coherence aspects of the NQF and the quality of such qualifications in the event of a reform of higher-level qualifications.
- Consider the options for establishing a unified digital register for qualifications at the levels of the NQF, comprehensive and with interactive functions for users, in order to 'reach all the villages'.
- Analyse the options for linking information and data systems of the NQF (all levels of qualifications) with labour market information systems, employment and analyses on the labour market integration of young people after graduation / certifications (for academic and/or professional qualifications).

Specific recommendations for the Qualifications Framework of the Southern African Development Community

- Create a collaborative platform for systematic cooperation between the two frameworks. Implement the SADC QF guidelines and manuals on RPL, CAT, Recognition, etc .
- Strengthen SADC QF implementation and the underlying conditions and linkages at national, regional and continental levels.
- Streamline and re-activate the SADC QF alignment to all SADC Member States to ensure that all SADC Member States start active preparations and complete alignment.
- Use SADC QF levels in qualifications that are issued by SADC Member States after alignment.

- Cooperate on new developments including the digitalisation of qualifications management, micro-credentials and common profiles.
- Capacity-building and peer learning.
- Strengthen cooperation with ACQF and EQF.
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the SADC QF and common tools.
- Improve governance, organisation and resources for the implementation of SADC QF.

8. Glossary

A glossary is proposed to support the comparison process and to enhance mutual understanding. The glossary explains the main terms used from the perspectives of the different frameworks. The glossary can be based on Annex III of these guidelines.

9. References

A list of the most important references for information on both qualifications frameworks and related policy initiatives.

10. Annexes

Other annexes can be added as seen appropriate by the Joint Technical Working Group. One of the annexes recommended is a jointly drafted leaflet on the comparison between the two frameworks that can be used for wide dissemination.

The drafting of the Joint Report is a process that accompanies the whole exercise, with briefings and conclusions on specific aspects being transformed into draft texts. Once the Joint Technical Working Group has agreed a final draft it is being submitted for comments and endorsement by main NQF / RQF bodies, including the EQF AG. The draft joint report should be discussed in the EQF AG and it is proposed to be published on the websites of the EQF /Europass portal and the NQF/RQF.

Both sides will also undertake other activities to disseminate the findings of the exercise and ensure that all those who need to be informed are provided with the information.

It is proposed that the follow up is integrated in the existing EU-country/ regional economic community dialogue. This requires involvement of the related Commission services DG EMPL, DG ENES, DG MENA, DG INTPA, DG HOME, DG GROW, DG TRADE, DG EAC, EU-delegations.

The follow up in Phase 4 is more than just a report, the report will be the starting point for wider communication and future dialogue.

Looking back to the previous exercise with Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand, we know that these QFs and the EQF have evolved further, introducing new elements and changing existing elements. Moreover, in order to ensure continued comparability and an effect on mutual recognition of qualifications for study purposes, or better access to labour markets, further steps and monitoring of the compared frameworks may be needed. Both QFs agree on how to keep each other informed about important new developments. ETF will keep Third Countries informed on major developments in the EQF. A contact point for the comparison is nominated by the Third Country / Regional Economic Community Body that will report annually to ETF on the use of the comparison and on possible changes in policies, institutional settings and technical aspects that may affect the accuracy of the findings of the comparison. ETF will inform the EQF AG and the Commission and will propose necessary steps to keep the comparison results up to date.

Apart from the Europass website, different Commission services dealing with the policy dialogue with third countries, will share information on comparisons. The Bi-annual Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Framework country/regional chapters may be used to report back on the progress of comparison.

Experience shows that a detailed technical report may not be the best tool for communicating comparison to a wider audience, as it is not particularly user friendly. More recently Ireland/Hong Kong and Ireland/New Zealand cooperation has resulted in leaflets^{27 28} that are easy to understand. It is proposed that the most appropriate tools for communication will be discussed during the comparison. This would also help to identify the stakeholders, users, practitioners and beneficiaries that should be informed about the comparison. It has been suggested to develop briefings on the comparison process for different groups of stakeholders explaining the basis, the purpose and the possible outcomes of comparison.

The online tool similar to the Europass Qualifications Frameworks Comparison Tool is proposed on the Europass website. The tool will show the relationship between EQF and the third country QFs, but does not directly link the third country frameworks to individual Member State NQFs.

Diploma or certificate supplements or certificates mentioning EQF levels after comparison, are not proposed as this is an option only available for EQF countries. However, other countries might have comparable documents that serve a similar purpose.

Guidance for implementation

- Communicate and disseminate the results by tailoring the information to different target groups through different channels and use different formats
- Establish an EQF working group on post-referencing and comparability communication
- Continue the dialogue after comparison (periodical reviews, updates, schedule webinars and reports, align data systems, synchronise Cedefop, Europass and other platforms, explore interoperable databases
- Use Comparison as a step towards long lasting partnerships between qualifications frameworks

4.5 Who is involved in the comparison and the follow up?

Different Commission services will be involved in the process, such as DG EAC, DG HOME, DG INT PA, DG ENEST, DG MENA etc, with DG EMPL leading the process.

It is proposed that EQF AG members are not only actively involved in the comparison process itself, but will be actively involved and consulted in the follow up.

The exercise requires appropriate resources. ETF has been asked to provide content and methodological guidance and expert support to the process, including the design of the pilots, coordination of the dialogue, analysing and drafting documents and drafting the comparison reports, supporting monitoring and evaluation.

Given the fact that more countries are developing and starting to implement NQFs, for example in Africa, there is a need for sustained support from DG INTPA to these processes, and ETF can play a role in facilitation and capacity development.

²⁷ Comparing Qualifications in Ireland and Hong Kong, Making Connections for You. Available online at https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/36563-IRELAND-HONG%20KONG%20Booklet_FINAL.pdf

²⁸ Comparing Qualifications in Ireland and New Zealand: A Guide. Making Connections for You Available online at <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2021-11/comparing-qualifications-in-ireland-and-new-zealand.pdf>

Guidance for implementation

- Pay attention to the objectives and concrete expected outcomes
- Ensure external financial resources if needed for comparisons
- Pay attention to the connectivity, understanding of participants, information channels, follow up plan
- Plan enough time between meetings, earlier briefings, shorter presentations, more interactive meetings
- Pay attention to recognition and recognition bodies and networks
- Distinguish clearly between Comparisons with RQFs and Comparisons with NQFs
- Promote online collaboration
- Develop an online glossary in the relevant languages for the comparison exercise
- Develop an online repository of a specific set of data with links to sources
- Balance technical and political dimensions better in the Comparison reports

ANNEX I: USEFUL LINKS

Legal Framework

- Council Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017/C 189/03), 22 May 2017, available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2017_189_R_0003

EQF

- Europass pages on EQF, available at <https://europass.europa.eu/en/europass-digital-tools/european-qualifications-framework>
- Compare qualifications across Europe, available at <https://europass.europa.eu/en/compare-qualifications>
- EQF Advisory Group, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2107>

EU Policies

- Skills and Mobility Package, available at https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/introduction-skills-and-talent-mobility-package-2023-12-19_en
- Union of Skills, available at https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/union-skills_en
- EU International Agreements database, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/treaties-agreements/>

Past comparisons

- Comparison report Ukraine, available at https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/comparison-report-european-qualifications-framework-and-ukrainian-national-qualifications-framework-2023-02-15_en
- Comparison report Cape Verde, available at https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/comparison-report-european-qualifications-framework-and-national-qualifications-framework-cabo-verde_en
- Comparison report Southern African Development Community, available at <https://acqf.africa/news/comparison-between-european-qualifications-framework-and-the-national-national-qualifications-framework-of-the-republic-of-cabo-verde>

Tools

- Cedefop/ National qualifications frameworks (NQF) online tool, available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/nqfs-online-tool>

Relevant institutional pages

- Europass / The European Qualifications Framework, available at <https://europass.europa.eu/en/europass-digital-tools/european-qualifications-framework>
- Cedefop/ National qualifications frameworks (NQFs), available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/national-qualifications-framework-nqf>
- ETF/ Qualifications and qualification systems, available at <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/qualifications-and-qualification-systems>
- UNESCO, Cedefop, ETF/ Global inventory of national and regional qualifications frameworks, available at <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/global-inventory-national-and-regional-qualifications> National and regional case studies | ETF

- Regional Qualifications Initiatives around the Globe, 2021, available at https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-04/rqf_initiatives_around_the_globe_2020_en_april_2021.pdf
- African Continental Qualifications Framework, available at <https://acqf.africa/>
- Analytical inventory of experiences in the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks in Latin America, available at <https://www.oitcinterfor.org/en/node/8104>
- Guidelines for Comparison, (this document)
- Online Repository/Library of Sources of Information, links in the ANNEX of this document (to be developed during comparison process)
- Qualifications frameworks and their development stages, Cedefop and ETF, 2020, presented in the 54th EQF AG Meeting (internal document)

ANNEX II. REFERENCING VERSUS COMPARISON

Referencing	Comparison
Context	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European integration, freedom of movement, single market and changing skill needs Subsidiarity and diversity of education and qualification systems, no harmonization, diversity of systems Towards European Education Area European Union plus EFTA and Accession Countries Most NQFs developed in parallel with EQF Voluntary European principles and instruments Common interests in quality, mobility, lifelong learning, inclusion, access and progression European values, self-fulfilment and citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing global international economic, social, environmental, technical, political and developmental cooperation, Increased connectivity, migration and mobility EQF is becoming an instrument for the EU's external relations policies NQFs and RQFs worldwide are diverse and developed in different contexts Comparison is based on mutual benefits, supported by binding agreements Comparison should have clear added value Readiness: focus on comparison of operational frameworks⁵⁴¹
Goal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a zone of trust between countries that are part of the EQF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable trust in the quality and level of qualifications of operational third country qualifications frameworks in order to support recognition and the international mobility of learners and workers
Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countries prepare each their own referencing report Relate NQF to the EQF in accordance with referencing criteria Same 10 referencing criteria for all to confirm conformity with EQF Single NQF is related to the EQF as common reference point Supported by a peer review process in EQF Advisory Group Part of EQF implementation, not the only step 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison takes place in a dialogue based on a set of mutually agreed topics 11 common topics and supporting questions have been defined to explore whether QFs are comparable Topics, supporting questions can be refined in dialogue in order to reflect contexts and diversity Result in one common report developed and agreed together
Criteria / Topics	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Clear responsibilities of all relevant national bodies involved in referencing Clear demonstrable link between the NQF levels and EQF levels NQFs based on learning outcomes and arrangements VNFIL, possibly credit systems Transparent procedures for inclusion of qualifications in NQF. QA systems for E&T refer to NQF and consistent with EQF QA principles National QA bodies confirm referencing report consistent with existing QA arrangements. Referencing process involves international experts confirmed by their statement Competent authorities certify referencing of NQF with the EQF and publish comprehensive referencing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Comparing objectives of qualifications frameworks Comparing scope of the frameworks Comparing levels and level descriptors Comparing learning outcome approach(es) Comparing approaches to VNFIL and RPL Comparing approaches to QA Comparing Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information Comparing Recognition processes Comparing Governance structures Comparing referencing/ alignment processes Ensuring transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process

Referencing	Comparison
<p>report with evidence for each criterion, on own as well as on NCP website.</p> <p>9. Single report can address both EQF referencing and self-certification to QF EHEA using both sets of criteria.</p> <p>10. National reports published on EQF portal with relevant information within 6 months</p> <p>11. Qualifications that are part of NQF will have reference to EQF level</p>	
After referencing/ comparison	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Qualifications can mention EQF levels 2. Tools for transparency and recognition open to EQF countries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://europa.eu/europass/en/compare-qualifications • http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/Chapter7/Recommendation.aspx • https://europa.eu/europass/en/qualifications-dataset-register-interoperability 3. EQF countries update referencing reports 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Qualifications of QFs compared to the EQF will not mention the EQF level. 2. Comparison will contribute to transparency of qualifications at global level and contribute to the international transparency of qualifications. 3. Create faire conditions for third country and EU nationals, supporting recognition, mobility, migration and virtual cooperation between the EU and third countries.

ANNEX III: GLOSSARY

Not all terms listed in this glossary are included in the main document. It is developed to foster a shared understanding of key concepts. Participants of the working group proposed adding the terms 'referencing' and 'comparison'.

Term	Source
<i>Academic recognition</i> the act of, or system for, acknowledging that elsewhere qualified applicants may pursue their learning, or has obtained an academic title. Academic recognition is normally done by the higher education institutions when a person wishes to continue or to begin studying or to use an academic title after studies undertaken abroad. It might include prior learning and professional experience and periods of study as well as full degrees.	Based on Unesco, CoE and ENIC-NARIC
<i>Assessment standards</i> or qualifications standards may specify the object of assessment, performance criteria, assessment methods, and the composition of the jury entitled to award the qualification.	The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards, Cedefop 2009
<i>Awarding organisation</i> : an organisation that designs, develops, delivers and awards the recognition of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual following an assessment and quality assurance process that is valued by employers, learners or stakeholders.	Federation of Awarding Bodies, UK
<i>Comparison</i> of qualifications frameworks means looking for similarities and understanding the diversity between two qualifications frameworks in order to draw conclusions on the level of correspondence of the two frameworks	EQF
<i>Competence</i> means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development;	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Competent bodies</i> are responsible for issuing qualifications determining that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.	Based on EQF definition
<i>Credential</i> is a documented statement containing claims about a person issued by an educational organisation following a learning experience.	EUROPASS
<i>Credit</i> means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Credit systems</i> means a transparency tool for facilitating the recognition of credit(s). These systems can comprise, inter alia, equivalences, exemptions, units/modules that can be accumulated and transferred, the autonomy of providers who can individualise pathways, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning;	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Credit transfer</i> means the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit in one context to have it valued and recognised in another context	EQF Recommendation 2017

Term	Source
<i>Digital Credentials</i> describe a learning achievement. They can describe activities, assessments, and professional entitlements as well as qualifications. Digital Credentials support instant verification; recipients can automatically verify information.	EUROPASS
<i>Double certification</i> is a modality of education and training that confers both school certification and professional qualification to the individual who has the skills to carry out one or more professional activities and has, for this purpose, a technical, professional, school and trade training, proven through a diploma.	Cape Verde Comparison Report
<i>Education standards</i> may define the expected outcomes of the learning process, leading to the award of a qualification, the study programme in terms of content, learning objectives and timetable, as well as teaching methods and learning settings, such as in-company or school-based learning.	The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards, Cedefop 2009
<i>ESCO</i> (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) is the European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences and Occupations. ESCO works as a dictionary, describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations and skills relevant for the EU labour market and education and training. Those concepts and the relationships between them can be understood by electronic systems, which allows different online platforms to use ESCO for services like matching jobseekers to jobs on the basis of their skills, suggesting training to people who want to reskill or upskill, etc.	ESCO portal
<i>Formal recognition of learning outcomes</i> means the process of granting official status by a competent authority to acquired learning outcomes for purposes of further studies or employment, through the award of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles) the validation of non-formal and informal learning the grant of equivalence, credit or waivers	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Integration</i> in the EU context means, a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States.	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>International qualification</i> means a qualification awarded by a legally established international body (association, organisation, sector or company) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body that is used in more than one country and that includes learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body.	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Key competences</i> Common competences needed to allow citizens to fulfil their full potential. The EU identifies eight key competences essential to citizens for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion. They include (1) literacy competence, (2) multilingual competence, (3) mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, (4) digital competence, (5) personal, social and learning to learn competence, (6) citizenship competence, (7) entrepreneurship competence and (8) cultural awareness and expression competence.	European Union
<i>Knowledge</i> means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;	EQF Recommendation 2017

Term	Source
<i>Labour market integration</i> means the extent to which migrants will achieve the same range of labour market participation as nationals of receiving countries by using their skills and realising their economic potential.	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>Learning outcomes</i> means statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy.	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Legal pathway</i> in the EU context means, every legal mechanism and policies that enable legal migration from a third country to an EU Member State, for both international and humanitarian protection needs and labour market needs.	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>Micro-credential</i> means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.	Council Recommendation of on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, 2022
<i>Labour market integration</i> means the extent to which migrants will achieve the same range of labour market participation as nationals of receiving countries by using their skills and realising their economic potential.	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>National qualifications agencies</i> are typically stand-alone body (established outside a ministry) with a certain degree of autonomy dedicated to assuming a central role in supporting, coordinating, managing, administering and reforming qualifications systems. They have a key role in coordinating the stakeholders of the qualifications system, are often linked to qualifications frameworks and may be linked to the entire qualifications system or several sectors thereof (e.g. vocational education and training, higher education, adult learning)'.	International Mapping of National Qualifications Agencies, ETF, 2024
<i>National qualifications framework</i> means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>National qualifications system</i> means all aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. That includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework.	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Occupational standards</i> may specify 'the main jobs that people do', describing the professional tasks and activities as well as the competences typical of an occupation.	The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards, Cedefop 2009

Term	Source
<i>Professional Recognition</i> is the recognition of a foreign qualification for the purpose of employment in a certain profession. The recognition of qualifications for professional (employment) purposes depends largely on whether the profession in question is regulated or is not regulated in the host country.	ENIC-NARIC
<i>Qualification</i> means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Qualifications Dataset Register</i> (QDR) is a central platform that manages the exchange of qualification and learning opportunities data.	ESCO Portal
<i>Recognition</i> is a formal acknowledgment by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities.	UNESCO/Council of Europe
<i>Referencing</i> in the context of the EQF recommendation for lifelong learning, means that countries relate (the levels of) their national qualifications frameworks or systems to (the levels of) the EQF in accordance with the 10 referencing criteria and procedures of Annex II of the EQF recommendation.	EQF
<i>Regional Qualifications Framework</i> : A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country.	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, A Practical Guide and All you Need to Know.
<i>Regional qualifications frameworks</i> usually 1. have less regulatory and more communicative purposes; 2. include a wide range of sectors of education and training, 3. if not all; have a range of national and regional policies, accords, conventions and protocols supporting them, but are not underpinned by enforceable legislation; and 4. have limited, often voluntary, institutional arrangements for governance and management	Transnational Qualifications Frameworks, ETF 2011
<i>Register of Qualifications</i> : Official Public Online Record of the qualifications that are part of the Qualifications Framework.	Summary of different definitions
<i>Regulated profession</i> : As a general rule, a profession is regulated if you have to hold a specific degree to access the profession, sit special exams such as state exams and/or register with a professional body before you can practise it.	Your Europe
<i>Responsibility and autonomy</i> means the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility.	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Sector skills councils</i> organisations formed to monitor and forecast the labour market and technical technological developments in different sectors, specifying the nature of the skills that an industry sector needs, including requirements for training quality and standards.	Based on Cedefop and ILO
<i>Skills</i> first approach emphasises a person's skills and competencies, rather than qualifications, degrees, job histories and titles. It focuses directly on skills, rather than how they've been acquired. It can help employers find non-traditional talent. It requires that the skills are audited or assessed.	World Economic Forum

Term	Source
<i>Skills</i> means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	EQF Recommendation 2017
<i>Talent partnerships</i> mean a comprehensive EU policy framework as well as funding support for cooperation with third countries for skills development and better matching labour and skills needs in the EU aimed at enhancing legal migration and mobility with key partners.	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>Third country</i> means a country that is not a member of the European Union as well as a country or territory whose citizens do not enjoy the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>Transversal skills</i> or competences are learned and proven abilities which are commonly seen as necessary or valuable for effective action in virtually any kind of work, learning or life activity.	Cedefop
<i>Third-country national</i> means any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).	EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary
<i>Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning or Recognition of Prior Learning</i> allows individuals to identify, document, assess and certify their skills. Such a process may result in receiving a partial or complete qualification.	EUROPASS
<i>Validation of non-formal and informal learning</i> means the process of confirmation by a competent authority that an individual has acquired learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases: identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual, documentation to make visible the individual's experiences, a formal assessment of those experiences and certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.	EQF Recommendation 2017

ANNEX IV: SELF-ASSESSMENT SHEETS

Self-assessment questionnaire

The aim of the online questionnaire is to support the colleagues from Third Countries to systematically review the policy contexts, progress and topics of their qualifications framework in view of assessing the benefits, and risks of carrying out the comparison to the EQF. The self-assessment questionnaire is designed to collect evidence and document the background and the development of the QF and insert links or upload documents that provide evidence of the developments. For each link and uploaded document, a short description is provided indicating where the precise information can be found.

The questionnaire starts with a general background and description of the NQF within the context of national/regional labour market and education and training policies followed by an in-depth analysis of each of the topics for comparison.

Each section is concluded with a short synopsis and critical reflection that can be used for a report on the self-assessment.

Section I background and the development of the QF

Policy context of the Qualifications Framework

Q1 What are of the objectives of the Qualifications Framework (See Topic 1: Objectives of qualifications frameworks)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the objectives of the QF? Is it clear how the QFs support these objectives? This may differ between NQFs and RQFs. Have these objectives evolved since the qualifications framework developed? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments
---	--------------------------------

Q2 What policies drive the development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework

Option	Description	Y/N	Comments	Evidence Links/ Attachments
L.1	Improve employability			
L.2	Integrate disadvantaged groups			
L.3	Labour mobility and migration			
L.4	Reintegration of returnees			
L.5	Support career progression within and across sectors and occupations			
L.6	Support matching of qualifications with skill shortages and skill gaps on the national and international labour market			
L.7	Tackle informal employment			
E.1	Education and training reforms			
E.2	Enhance trust in qualifications			
E.3	Improve the understanding of qualifications and skills to support policy making			

E.4	Support the internationalisation of education and training			
E.5	Raise the quality of education and training			
E.6	Support international student mobility			
E.7	Support lifelong learning, access to qualifications, progression and permeability of training systems			
E.8	Support personalisation of lifelong learning			
E.9	Support recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning			
E.10	Support the flexibilisation of education and training through unitisation, credit systems, micro-credentials and making new combinations			
C.1	Strengthen cooperation between different stakeholders			
C.2	Adaptability to changing needs through, upskilling and reskilling			
C.3	Create new learning and employment opportunities			
C.4	Establish synergies between employment and education policies			
C.5	Improve cross ministerial cooperation			
C.6	Improve the relevance of education and training by strengthening the links between education and training and the labour market			
C.7	Create new public private partnerships and cooperation with civil society			
I.1	Support regional economic cooperation between countries (investments, mobility and platform work)			
I.2	Improve transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications nationally and internationally			
I.3	Use QF as an instrument for international alignment			
O.1	Other relevant policies			

Q3	Which strategic documents refer to the QF?	
Option	Title(s)/year	Evidence Links/ Attachments
	Short synopsis	
Q4	Which legislation and regulatory documents refer to the QF?	
Option	Title(s)/year	Evidence Links/ Attachments
	Short synopsis on how the QF is integrated in the legal act(s):	
Q5	Is there a QF implementation strategy or roadmap in place?	
Option	Y/N	Evidence Links/ Attachments
	If Yes what is/are the title(s) of the document(s)	
Q6	Have there been any reviews/evaluations/ impact assessments done on the QF?	
Option	Y/N	Evidence Links/ Attachments
	If Yes what is/are the title(s) of the document(s)	
Description of environmental factors		
Q7	<p>Describe briefly the labour market information in your country/ economic world region in relation to the qualifications- framework:</p> <p>The questions below are meant to help you to describe the labour market situation and the role of qualifications and the qualifications framework to support labour market policies. You are not expected to answer each question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is the role of qualifications on the labour market? ■ What is the composition of the workforce by qualification level? How has this evolved during the last 10 years? ■ Are there serious problems of mismatch, expressed in skill shortages, youth unemployment, informality, aging workforce, overqualification or underqualification? ■ How are skills, occupations and qualifications monitored on the labour market and how is labour market information used to develop or renew qualifications? ■ What is the situation regarding migration? ■ What are the most common migration flows? ■ Do you have any information on the level of qualifications of migrants? Do you have any information on remittances? ■ Do you undertake any policies to reintegrate returning migrants? ■ Is there any policy to improve career progression and career change among workers and job seekers? What kind of policies are in place to support upskilling and reskilling? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments

Q8	<p>Describe briefly the education and training reforms or lifelong learning policies or cooperation programmes in your country/ economic world region in relation to the qualifications framework:</p> <p>The questions below are meant to help you to describe the education and training reforms and possible regional initiatives and the role of qualifications and the qualifications framework to support these. You are not expected to answer each question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the role of qualifications in supporting lifelong learning? What is the attainment level of young adults? How has this evolved during the last 10 years? Are there serious problems of dropouts, NEETS, rigidities in progression pathways, limitations to access higher education, poor image of vocational training? What is the internal efficiency of different pathways (people starting a programme vs. people successfully completing a programme for the main qualification types) and what is the external efficiency for VET and HE graduates (how many manage to find suitable employment after 9 months or 36 months)? How well are existing qualifications perceived by employers, how much have companies been involved in defining occupational standards, qualifications and programmes and in training learners in their companies? How is the quality of education and training provision ensured? Is there specific reference to intended and/or achieved learning outcomes 	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q9	<p>Describe briefly how education and training reforms or lifelong learning policies and labour policies are linked and how stakeholders from labour market and education cooperate in relation to the qualifications framework</p> <p>The questions below are meant to help you to describe how education and training reforms or lifelong learning policies and labour policies are linked and how stakeholders from labour market and education cooperate in relation to the qualification system. You are not expected to answer each question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is coordination between the different stakeholders in the NQF ensured and which organisation represent the main stakeholders? Have sector skills councils or similar bodies been established? What is their role and modality of collaboration? Are there specialised entities on foreign qualifications recognition? If so, under which ministry do they operate? <p>Do potential and returnee migrants (as well immigrants) have guidance or referral on qualifications recognition possibilities in origin and destination countries? If so, how is the information on this disseminated (special awareness raising campaigns, information sessions, advising at PES)?</p>	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q10	<p>Describe briefly how the qualifications framework is used for international cooperation?</p> <p>The questions below are meant to help you to describe how the qualifications framework is used for international cooperation. You are not expected to answer each question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your QF part of a regional QF or other meta frameworks? Have any links been established with other QFs? Are there any mutual recognition arrangements in place with a link to the QF? Is there any mobility scheme for learners and staff of training providers that uses aspects of the QF? Are there any schemes for international labour mobility that make reference to the QF? Are there any international agreements to support international mobility? Is your country/ region active in Erasmus +? Do you have a Talent Partnership with the EU? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments

Short description of QF and its developmental process

Q11	<p>Describe briefly the key features of your QF in terms of scope and levels (See Topic 2: Scope of the frameworks and Topic 4: Levels and level descriptors)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope refers which kind of qualifications are part of the QF (formal qualifications from general education, vocational education and training, higher education, other types of qualifications issued for adult learning, micro-credentials etc) and whether the framework includes mechanisms for addressing non-formal and informal learning and access and progression mechanisms (including credit accumulation and transfer). <p>Levels describes the different qualification levels, how they are defined in terms of domains and how they are used and whether they have been inspired by existing level descriptors from elsewhere.</p>	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q12	<p>Provide a short chronological overview of the main milestones in developing the QF</p> <p>You may refer to the Stages of development of QF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual stage Design stage Adoption stage Activation stage Operational stage Review stage Re-design stage, etc. <p>And provide the dates and a short concrete description for each milestone</p>	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q13	<p>Provide a short overview of the governance, coordination mechanisms, and implementation arrangements of the QF (See Topic 3: Governance structures)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the responsibilities and legal competences of all bodies involved in both QFs? How are the QFs set in laws/recommendations? How inclusive is the QF? Is involvement of different stakeholders guaranteed to ensure the relevance and co-ownership of the QF? How is coordination between stakeholders ensured? <p>If available please provide an organigram</p>	Evidence Links/ Attachments

Section II assessment of the features of the QF

Processes linked to the Qualifications Framework Implementation

Q14	<p>Provide a short description about the use of learning outcomes (See Topic 5: Learning outcome approach(es))</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the QF and qualifications based on the principle of learning outcomes? How are learning outcomes defined in the QF? What methodologies exist to define them? For qualifications, are learning outcomes used at the level of units or modules, or are they only addressing the qualification as a whole? To what extent and how do the learning outcomes inform qualification types, standards, assessment and VNFIL and learning programmes and quality assurance processes? How are learning outcomes assessed? Please provide examples for different types of qualifications and different sub-sectors of the QF (e.g. in general education, in vocational education and training, in higher education, for adult learning etc.) 	Evidence Links/ Attachments
------------	--	--------------------------------

Q15	<p>Describe briefly the system of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning/ Recognition of Prior Learning and its links to the QF (See Topic 6: Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning/ Recognition of Prior Learning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For NQFs: Is it possible to obtain qualifications in the NQF through VNFIL/RPL? ■ Can individuals obtain a full qualification in the NQF through VNFIL? Are there separate standards and certificates for VNFIL? ■ For RQFs: Is VNFIL/RPL addressed in the RQF and considered in the referencing/alignment process of linked NQFs to the RQF? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q16	<p>Describe briefly the processes for academic and professional recognition and the possible link to the QF (See Topic 7: Recognition processes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How is recognition of foreign qualifications organised within the Third country/regional economic community? ■ Is the QF a reference for recognition of foreign qualifications? In what sense? ■ How are the QFs used in recognition practices? ■ How could recognition benefit from a possible comparison with the EQF? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q17	<p>Describe briefly the processes for quality assurance of qualifications and the possible link to the QF (See Topic 8: Quality assurance)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What are the main principles of the quality assurance mechanisms of the QF? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of NQFs: how are qualifications in the QF quality assured? • To what extent is the focus on institutional capacities (e.g. accrediting training providers, assessment centres, awarding organisations) • To what extent on processes such as setting standards, valid and reliable assessment processes and on certification, to what extent on personnel (assessors, internal and external verifiers) and ■ To what extent on learners? ■ How are intended and achieved learning outcomes used in quality assurance? ■ In the case of RQFs, what are the arrangements for QA at the RQF level and how are these arrangements related to the QA of qualifications in NQFs that are part of the RQF? ■ Are there common principles? Is there a mechanism to ensure consistency? Are there minimal requirements for standards, assessment and certification processes? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments
Q18	<p>Describe briefly the processes for referencing or alignment of the QF with other QFs (See Topic 9: Referencing/ alignment processes)</p> <p>RQFs in general have processes to reference or align NQFs. Referencing and aligning processes vary, the terms describe the processes of establishing correspondence of an NQF to an RQF or between two NQFs or RQFs. This criterion is applicable for RQFs but also for NQFs that are part of RQFs or linked to another NQF.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Has the QF been aligned /referenced to another QF? ■ If not, is it being planned? ■ Which RQF and NQFs are involved in the referencing/ alignment process? ■ What steps are taken during the referencing/ alignment process? ■ What criteria are used during the referencing/ alignment process? ■ How is transparency and quality assured during the referencing/ alignment process? ■ How are results of the referencing/ alignment process communicated? 	Evidence Links/ Attachments

Q19	<p>Describe briefly how the QF is communicated to target groups and the wider public and the benefits are demonstrated (See Topic 10: Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is known about the benefits of the qualifications frameworks? Are there any results of studies on the audience reached with information on the QF. Who are the target groups identified that need information about the QFs? How are they being addressed? Who are the main actors responsible for disseminating information on the QFs? How and in what forms are both QFs communicated to the relevant stakeholders, end users and wider audience? Where can different stakeholders find information on the QFs and how easily accessible is this information for different stakeholders (e.g. education and training providers, learners, employers, etc.) How well are both QFs known by different stakeholders? How or to what extent does or could the visibility of both QFs influence the intended outcomes of comparison? Is there a register or database of qualifications linked to the QF? Is the register allowing for searches, and for linking information on qualifications to other data (programmes and providers, career opportunities, etc.) 	
Section III benefits and risks of comparison		
Q20	Describe briefly what the main expected benefits of the comparison exercise are and how you would use the results	
Q21	Reflect on the possible risks of comparison and undesirable effects it may have and how these risks could be mitigated	

ANNEX V: REPOSITORY - LIBRARY STRUCTURE

This repository or library is an online tool to be used by participants in the Comparison exercise in order to provide a searchable body of source documents and background documents that can be referenced and used in the Comparison exercise. For each comparison, a repository or library is established. It is the main body for providing links or direct evidence of external and independently verifiable sources that underpins the statements in the self-assessment and the comparison report and other documents drafted to support the comparison.

The repository/library consists of a descriptive part in HTML format which is tagged, to make it searchable, related links to online sources which are integrated in the descriptive part, and related documents that can be uploaded if they are not available online or are no longer active.

Do not upload documents that are available online, but try to use links where possible.

A. General background documents	
A1	Relevant legislation, all legislation that makes reference to the Qualifications Framework
A2	Relevant policy initiatives, in which the Qualifications Framework is an instrument
A3	National or International Projects to support the development and implementation of the QF
A4	Reports, studies, evaluations, reviews published on the qualifications' frameworks or important aspects of it (e.g. register, use of learning outcomes, governance)
A5	Past benchmarking, comparison, alignment, referencing exercise with other frameworks
A6	Links to NQF/RQF Inventory fiches ETF or Unesco (as part of the GINRQF) or other organisations such as ACQF mapping reports and ILO Cinterfor dashboard
A7	Website(s) on QF
A8	Websites from related institutions with reference to the QF
A9	Register(s) of Qualifications
A10	Articles on the QF
A11	Social Media pages on the QF
A12	Other relevant information
B. References for the topics	
B1	Topic 1: Objectives of qualifications frameworks Abstracts to documents describing the wider and specific objectives of the QF
B2	Topic 2: Scope of the frameworks Abstracts to documents describing the scope of the QF, and possible references to QF on websites or other sources of information for different subsectors of the QF (general education, VET, HE, adult learning, voluntary sector, career guidance services, employment services, sectoral or professional organisations etc)
B3	Topic 3: Levels and level descriptors Links to the level descriptors, links to any relevant documents referring to the use of level descriptors

B4	<p>Topic 4: Learning outcome approach(es)</p> <p>Any relevant sources describing the use of learning outcomes for standard setting, learning, assessment and quality assurance processes, including guidance materials</p> <p>Any study that has been conducted to analyse the use of learning outcomes</p>
B5	<p>Topic 5: Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning/ Recognition of Prior Learning</p> <p>Any references to policy documents and decisions on the introduction of VNFIL</p> <p>Links to guidelines (on use of VNFL for different purposes)</p> <p>Links to VNFIL opportunities and providers</p> <p>Reports, evaluations, articles</p>
B6	<p>Topic 6: Quality assurance</p> <p>Any references to policies and regulations on the use of the QF in quality assurance</p> <p>Any reference of QA in developing and approval of qualifications on assessment of learning outcomes and on certification</p> <p>Links to appropriate QA bodies</p>
B7	<p>Topic 7 Communication, visibility, transparency, access to information</p> <p>Any reference to the official QF pages and other web pages, social media accounts etc, that regularly report on the QF</p> <p>Any reports, articles or studies that can demonstrate the visibility of the QF</p>
B8	<p>Topic 8 Recognition processes</p> <p>Any references to the QF in recognition processes</p>
B9	<p>Topic 9: Governance structures</p> <p>Links and references to the strategic and technical coordination bodies and to main actors, showing their role in the implementation of the QF</p>
B10	<p>Topic 10: Referencing/ alignment processes</p> <p>Links to referencing or alignment procedures and existing referencing or alignment reports</p>
B11	<p>Topic 11: Transparency and quality assurance of the comparison process</p> <p>(only at the end of the process)</p>

ANNEX VI: STATISTICS SOURCES

The list of indicators listed is tentative and not mandatory and is expected to be tailored to the specific comparison context. Moreover, it is not exhaustive. Along with indicators the table provide corresponding sources which should be consulted (e.g. Eurostat, UNESCO) or contacted ahead of comparison (e.g. National Statistical Institutes).

Indicator	Potential source
Number of TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU	Eurostat
Number of TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU by Member States	Eurostat
Number of TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU by age and sex	Eurostat
Number of first residence permits issued to TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU	Eurostat
Number of first residence permits issued to TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU by Member States	Eurostat
Number of first residence permits issued to TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU by age and sex	Eurostat
Number of first residence permits issued to TCNs from country/region under comparison residing in the EU by reason for entry (education, employment, family reunification, humanitarian, EU Blue Card)	Eurostat
Number of TCNs from country/region under comparison residing by level of education and age	National Statistical Institute of EU Member State(s)
Number of TCNs from country/region under comparison residing by field of studies and age	National Statistical Institute of EU Member State(s)
Number of TCNs from country/region under comparison residing by level of education and occupation (matrix of mismatch)	National Statistical Institute of EU Member State(s)
Working age population in country/region under comparison by age and gender	National Statistical Institute of compared country/region
Working age population in country/region under comparison by labour market status	National Statistical Institute of compared country/region
Working age population in country/region under comparison by level of education	National Statistical Institute of compared country/region
Working age population in country/region under comparison by field of studies	National Statistical Institute of compared country/region UIS Statistics - UNESCO
Number of graduates/enrolled by level of education and field of study	National Statistical Institute of compared country/region UIS Statistics - UNESCO
Number of mobilities within Erasmus Plus by destination, level of education, field of study,	Erasmus+

Number of recognition, equivalence or comparison applications for qualification from country/region of comparison by destination	ENIC/NARIC Ministry of education Ministry of Justice Other recognition bodies such as chambers of industry and crafts, professional associations etc.
Number of comparison applications for qualification from country/region of comparison by level of education	ENIC/NARIC Ministry of education Ministry of Justice Other recognition bodies such as chambers of industry and crafts, professional associations etc.
Number of comparison applications for qualification from country/region of comparison by field of study	ENIC/NARIC Ministry of education Ministry of Justice Other recognition bodies such as chambers of industry and crafts, professional associations etc.
Number of comparison/ recognition applications for qualification from country/region of comparison in origin	ENIC/NARIC Ministry of education Ministry of Justice Other recognition bodies such as chambers of industry and crafts, professional associations etc.

Note: The table above provides a tentative list of statistical indicators with corresponding potential sources. It should be adapted to the context of a specific comparison.

ANNEX VII: EXAMPLES OF EU AGREEMENTS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

The EU has made numerous agreements with individual third countries and groups of third countries. Apart from agreements with the EU as signatory, international multilateral agreements with members states that cover issues of labour mobility, skills and qualifications should also be considered.

In practice, the EU has concluded numerous international agreements with individual countries, groups of countries and international organisations. The legal basis for the European Union's international agreements is Article 216, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU):

Article 216

1. The Union may initiate an **agreement with one or more third countries or international organisations** provided by the Treaties or where the conclusion of an agreement is necessary in order to achieve, within the framework of the Union's policies, one of the objectives referred to in the Treaties, or is provided for in a legally binding Union act or is likely to affect common rules or alter their scope.
2. Agreements concluded by the Union are binding upon the institutions of the Union and on its Member States.

Article 216 TFEU therefore authorises the conclusion of three types of international agreements:

- between the EU and one third country
- between the EU and multiple third countries (such as regional organisations, blocks)
- between the EU and an international organisation

A landmark international agreement is the multilateral Cotonou Agreement (entry into force in 2003) between the EU and the ACP Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Some examples of agreements and frameworks in the various categories, with the date of entry into force:

- Between the EU and one third country:
 - EU- Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt Talent Partnerships, implementation started in 2023
 - EU- Pakistan Talent Partnership, launched in 2023
 - EU- Bangladesh Talent Partnership, launched in 2023
 - EU- Cape Verde Mobility Partnership, signed in 2008
 - EU- Moldova Mobility Partnership, signed in 2008
 - EU- Armenia Mobility Partnership, signed in 2011
 - EU- Morocco Mobility Partnership, signed in 2013
 - EU- Azerbaijan Mobility Partnership, signed in 2013
 - EU- Tunisia Mobility Partnership, signed in 2014
 - EU- Belarus Mobility Partnership, signed in 2014
 - EU-Jordan Mobility Partnership, signed in 2014
 - EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (2011)
 - EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (2017)

- EU-Georgia Association Agreement (with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), signed in 2014)
- EU-Moldova Association Agreement (with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), signed in 2014)
- EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), signed in 2014)
- EU-Egypt Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, 17 March 2024
- EU Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic and global partnership between the European Union and Tunisia, July 16, 2023
- EU-India Strategic Partnership, 2020
- EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement, 2001
- Between the EU and multiple third countries:
 - EU-Colombia-Peru-Ecuador Trade Agreement (2013 for Peru and Colombia; 2017 for Ecuador)
 - EU-Central America Association Agreement (2013 for Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama; Costa Rica and El Salvador; Guatemala)
 - EU Africa Joint Vision for 2030, adopted in 2022
 - Global Gateway in Asia and the Pacific
 - Global Gateway in Latin America and the Caribbean
 - EU-West Africa Economic Partnership Agreement, 2014
 - EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), 2017
 - Between the EU and international organisations:
 - EU-Southern African Development Community (SADC) (2016). This is an economic partnership agreement.
 - EU-CARIFORUM (2008)

Among the examples of relevant multilateral agreements are the Lisbon Convention on recognition of qualifications in the field of higher education, the Global Convention on Recognition and the Bologna process.

ANNEX VIII: TABLES FOR THE COMPARISON OF LEVELS

Ukraine

Levels		Formal Education Qualifications				
EQF	NQF	General secondary education	Vocational education and training	Pre-higher professional education	Higher education	Professional Qualifications
8	8				Doctor of Philosophy Doctor of the Arts	
7	7				Master	
6	6				Bachelor	
5	5		Diploma of skilled worker Certificate of skilled worker	Professional Junior Bachelor (formerly Junior Specialist)	Junior Bachelor	
4	4	Professional Qualifications	Diploma of skilled worker Certificate of skilled worker			
3	3		Diploma of skilled worker Certificate of skilled worker			
2	2		Certificate of skilled worker			
1	1					

Cape Verde

Levels		Qualifications in the Cape Verde NQF
EQF	NQF	Diploma of Compulsory Basic Education
1	1	Diploma of Basic Education of adults with double certification route corresponding to the professional qualification of Level 2 Level 2 Professional Qualification Certificate
2	2	Secondary Education Certificate (10th grade) Level 3 Professional Qualification Certificate
3	3	Secondary Education Diploma (12th year general route) Diploma of secondary education (12th year of the technical route corresponding to the professional qualification of Level 4) with double certification Level 4 professional qualification certificate with double certification Level 4 professional qualification certificate
4	4	Diploma of Higher Professional Studies (DESP) with training of professional qualifications of Level 5 (CESP - Courses of Higher Professional Studies) Level 5 Professional Qualification Certificate
5	5	Bachelor's Degree (University Education)
6	6	Master's Degree (University Education)
7	7	Doctor's Degree (University Education)
8	8	Diploma of Compulsory Basic Education

Sources: Portaria Conjunta No 10/2020; EQF Recommendation 2017.

Southern African Development Community

EQF	SADC QF
Level 8	Level 10
Level 7	Level 9
Level 6	Level 8
	Level 7
Level 5	Level 6
Level 4	Level 5
Level 3	Level 4
Level 2	Level 3
Level 1	Level 2
	Level 1

ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AG	Advisory Group (as in EQF AG)
ARES	Higher Education Regulatory Agency
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CETA	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CNQ	National Catalogue of Qualifications
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
DESP	Diploma of Higher Professional Studies
DG	Directorate-General
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG ENEST	Directorate-General for Enlargement and Neighbourhood East and South
DG GROW	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG MENA	Directorate-General for Middle East and North Africa
DG TRADE	Directorate-General for Trade
DGE	Directorate General for Employment

DGES	Directorate General for Higher Education
EAR Manual	European Area of Recognition Manual
EC	European Commission
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENIC-NARIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region / National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
Erasmus+	EU programme for education, training, youth, and sport
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EU Blue Card	EU work permit for highly skilled non-EU citizens
EUA	European University Association
GINRQF	Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ME	Ministry of Education
MFFE	Ministry of Finance and Business Development
MRA	Mutual Recognition Agreement
NCP	National Contact Point

NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NQA	National Qualifications Agency
NQS	National Qualifications System
NZF	National Qualifications Framework
PLA	Peer Learning Activity
QA	Quality Assurance
QDR	Qualifications Dataset Register
QF	Qualifications Framework
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
RVCC	Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competencies
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAARC RQF	South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADC-CATS	SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
SNQ	National Qualifications System
TCN	Third Country National
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US-SNQ	National Qualifications System Coordination Unit
--------	--

VET	Vocational Education and Training
-----	-----------------------------------

VNFIL	Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning
-------	--

REFERENCES

Belmonte, M., Grubanov-Boskovic, S. and Mazza, J. (2020) *Foreign Degrees, Region of Birth and Under-utilisation of Tertiary Education in the EU*, EUR 30041 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, ISBN 978-92-76-14662-9, doi:10.2760/876918, JRC119361 Available online at <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC119361>

EC (2023) European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Employment and social developments in Europe 2023*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, Available online at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/089698>

EC (2025) Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Employment and social developments in Europe – Quarterly review*. January 2025, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, Available online at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/2463745>

EC and Australia (2016) *Comparative analysis of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning – Joint technical report*, European Commission and Australian Government. Publications Office. doi: 10.2767/899976. Available online at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/899976>

EC and Hong Kong (2016) Comparability study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) – Joint technical report, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Education Bureau and European Commission, Publications Office. doi: 10.2767/77528. Available online at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/77528>

EC and New Zealand (2016). A comparative analysis of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). New Zealand Qualifications Authority and European Commission. doi: 10.2767/211812. Available online at <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/International/Recognition-arrangements/EC-NZQA-Comparability-EC-NZQA-Joint-Report-FINAL-R2-online-version.pdf>

ICF GHK (2013) *Evaluation of the Implementation of the European Qualifications Framework Recommendation – Final report*. Available online at <https://www.nok.si/sites/www.nok.si/files/dokumenti/evaluation-eqf.pdf>