



European Training Foundation

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – ALBANIA



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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 NQF snapshot

Albania's parliament adopted the country's first law on an NQF in 2010, so establishing the Albanian Qualifications Framework, the AQF. Parliament adopted a revised law in 2018, which added clauses on raising the quality and relevance of the country's qualifications, including provision to engage social partners in the identification and development of new VET qualifications.

The AQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. The 2017 VET law specifies that curricula should be modularized or unitized by learning areas so that learners can take these units separately, thus offering flexible options for different groups of learners.

While the framework is not fully operational, the responsible Ministries and national VET agency have sought to adapt and update it - most notable recent improvements are the introduction of sectoral committees, criteria to include a wider range of qualifications in the Framework and reinforcement of the AQF's level descriptors. Albania has reached the activation stage.

1.2 Policy context

Albania has been a candidate country for EU entry since 2014 and seeks integration and compatibility with EU policies, tools and systems in education and training. It is a member of the EQF Advisory Group but has not referenced yet to the EQF.

The AQF is integral to meeting the country's employment and skills needs, and so is a principal instrument to contribute to the objectives specified in the National Employment and Skills Strategies (NESS) 2014-201 and 2019-2022. A mid-term report on the first NESS in 2018 concluded Albania had made partial progress towards its original objectives of fostering decent work, providing quality VET, promoting social cohesion and strengthening labour market governance and modernising the qualifications system.

Before the start of 2020, labour market data had shown marked improvement in outcomes since 2013 (COVID will have increased unemployment levels). The employment rate for people aged 15-64 in Albania grew from 50 % in 2013 to 59.5% in 2018, one of the highest in the Western Balkans. Employment rates have improved, notably for women, from 40% in 2013 to 52.4% in 2018. However, gender inequality remains problematic, with women's employment rates being 14% lower than for men.

Despite these generally upward trends, unemployment remains high at more than 11%, recorded mid-2019. As said above, this figure is bound to surge following COVID.

¹ Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (2014). National employment and skills strategy 2014-20: higher skills and better jobs for all women and men.

1.3 NQF legal basis

LAW no. 10 247 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was adopted by parliament on 4 March 2010². A revision of this Law (23/2018) was adopted on 18 May 2018³. It describes the main characteristics of the AQF such as its structure, scope, objectives and functions, as well as arrangements for governance, institutional management, implementation, quality assurance and financing.

Law No.15/2017 “On Vocational Education and Training”⁴ defines the AQF as a national classification system of qualifications.

Three by-laws, adopted by the Council of Ministers, implement specific features of the AQF:

Decision of Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 426, June 2019 “On organization and functioning of the Sector Committees and the criteria for their selection”;

DCM No. 427, June 2019 “On approval of criteria and procedures for including the qualifications received through lifelong learning into the AQF levels for VET”;

DCM No. 428, June 2019 “On Detailed level descriptors of the AQF level”.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

2.1 Aims of NQF

The aims of the AQF are to classify and link qualifications, ensure qualifications are relevant to learners and employers, and to raise the quality of qualifications. Additionally, the AQF, as most international equivalents, acts as an identifiable entry point for foreign qualifications to the country’s education system and employment market.

Like their counterparts in the region, Albania’s education and employment actors and stakeholders view the AQF as one of a set of tools to reform and govern the labour market and qualifications system. The AQF will contribute to achieving NESS’ Strategic Objectives B, on VET provision, and D, which concerns governing the labour market and the qualifications system.

² Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2010). *Ligj No 10 247, datë 4.3.2010 përkornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve* [Law No 10 247 of 4 March 2010 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework]. <http://80.78.70.231/pls/kuv/f?p=201:Ligj:10247:04.03.2010> [in Albanian].

³ Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2018). *Ligj Nr. 23/2018 Për disa ndryshime dhe shtesa në ligjin nr. 10 247, datë 4.3.2010, “Për kornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve”* [Law No 23/2018 of 10.5.2018 on the revised Albanian qualifications framework]. <http://www.qbz.gov.al/Botime/Akteindividuale/Janar%202018/Fletore%2079/LIGJ%20nr.%2023-2018,%20date%2010.5.2018.pdf>

⁴ Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2017). *Ligj Nr. 15/2017 Për arsimin dhe formimin profesional në republikën e shqipërisë datë 16.2.2017* [Law No 15/2017 of 16.2.2017 on VET in the Republic of Albania]. http://www.akafp.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Liqji-i-ri-per-AFP_Gazeta-Zyrtare-43-2017-1-1.pdf

Strategic Objective B “On the Quality Offer of VET for Youth and Adults” includes actions to:

- diversify VET provision;
- develop post-secondary VET qualifications; and assess provision of post-secondary VET;
- in recognition of prior learning (RPL), complete the legal framework to move it towards implementation; and pilot RPL in two occupations;
- in quality assurance, implement accreditation of public and private VET providers;
- develop a first model of a teacher training qualification.

Objective D includes measures to:

- implement the AQF, including via updating and maintaining the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications;
- completing the AQF’s legal framework;
- introducing mechanisms to include non-formal qualifications in the AQF;
- revise professional qualifications based on labour market needs;
- introduce a VET credit system aligned with ECVET;
- complete regulations for sectoral committees; and pilot a Committee in a chosen sector;
- strengthen the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ) via e.g. staff training and formalisation in law of its functions.

NESS aims to raise the quality of VET, and, by extension, its attractiveness. There are signs this strategy is bearing fruit - enrolments for VET programmes at secondary level increased from 17% of all secondary programmes in 2014 to 20.6% in 2018. Most other countries in the region still have higher VET enrolment levels than Albania, as VET has traditionally been an unattractive option compared to academic education.

Vocational schools offer formal initial vocational education. Both general education (gymnasium) and four-year vocational education programmes lead to the State Matura exams. Successful completion of this stage allows access to higher education and/or post-secondary education. Vocational education offers exit points after two, three or four years, depending on the programme. On completion, graduates receive a Vocational State Matura diploma (ISCED/Albanian Qualification Framework (AQF) level 4), as well as a final certificate for the vocational education programme they will have attended (usually ISCED 3/AQF level 4).

The Vocational Training Centres offer short vocational training courses. NAVETQ has recently developed 35 curricula for such courses.

Authorities plan to merge the two separate VET provider systems, vocational schools and vocational training centre, into one system of VET multifunctional centres, to maximise efficiency and quality. The Integrated Policy Management Group, or IPMG, the forum of national and donor actors which coordinates human capital development policies, consulted on this merger proposal in 2020. A technical working group established by the Minister responsible for VET is undertaking the necessary institutional preparatory work, including identifying the required legislative changes and implications for providers.

During 2020, as in other countries, the education and training systems was hit by COVID. There was a rapid transfer to online teaching, albeit hampered by incomplete broadband coverage, as some areas could not access fast internet services. Television delivered extensive general education content,

although the passive learner experience of watching TV means that it is only partially effective in supporting learning aims.

3. LEVELS, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND QUALIFICATIONS

3.1 NQF scope and structure

Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of 8 levels, whose descriptors are written in learning outcomes organised in the three domains of knowledge, skills and competence. Originally the descriptors were simply a language translation of the (very basic and short) EQF level descriptors, but a ministerial decree of June 2019 replaced them with more detailed descriptors. These draw on the taxonomy in the EQF descriptors but expand to cover many more elements e.g. Level 4 Knowledge includes “Exercise self-management within work context guidelines”, or Level 3 Skills includes “Work independently in variable conditions etc”.

The AQF’s 8 levels correspond one to one to the EQF’s.

3.2 Types of qualifications

The AQF is open to all types of qualifications. There are three main categories of qualifications identified in the AQF handbook and 2018 Law: (i) general and higher education qualifications; (ii) professional or VET qualifications; and (iii) lifelong learning qualifications catering to adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development (Cedefop, 2020).

The term “qualifications for LLL” in the AQF Laws is used to distinguish between the formal qualifications that are automatically included in the AQF, based on existing legislation (e.g. the VET Law, HE Law) and all other qualifications.

ETF’s inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications in Albania in 2017 identified 85 qualifications that are not part of the formal education subsectors. 80 of these are vocational training courses developed for Vocational Training Centres or by private schools. 5 are courses designed for managers or higher technicians developed by private universities, at AQF level 5. Currently, there are few Level 5 qualifications in the NLVQ or AQF, which have often been pursued outside the scope of programmes or qualifications covered by legislation.

However, one Level 5 qualification in post-secondary VET has been approved by Ministry Order No.149, June 2020 and is now levelled in the AQF. This qualification is in Fashion Design and was developed by NAVETQ and implemented in the Secondary Technical and Economics School in Tirana during 2020.

In June 2019, the Council of Ministers adopted a bylaw on inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF. It stipulates criteria and procedures to place such qualifications on the AQF levels. This regulation should open the way for applications for qualifications obtained outside the formal subsystems to be levelled in the AQF and so should lead to, among other gains, inclusion of AQF Level 5 qualifications.

3.3 Use of learning outcomes and standards

All VET qualifications are defined in learning outcomes and have a clear division between knowledge, skills and broader competences. Learning outcomes for individual qualifications are of course more detailed in terms of knowledge, skills and broader competences compared to the more generic AQF level descriptors.

VET qualifications derive from occupational descriptions contained in the National List of Occupations⁵. The NLO contains 10 major occupational groups, 43 major subgroups, 133 minor groups, 480 unit groups and 5,489 job titles⁶. NAVETQ draws on the National List of Occupations, then uses the AQF descriptors as occupational standards to develop VET qualifications. Currently, the template for occupational standards is being improved and will include performance criteria, tools and equipment, etc. All future standards will be developed against this new template.

The vocational part of the National Frame Curricula is modularized. Vocational theory modules/subjects are organized in outcomes and themes with respective teaching hours. The modularized curricula are crucial in supporting a flexible delivery of qualifications, develop a flexible pathway between different qualifications and between different learning contexts.

To date, no measures have been taken towards delivering certification of partial qualifications or units of qualifications although this option is an element in the NESS 2014-2022 Action Plan.

Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes. Instead, Albania refers to students' workload for allocation of credits. A working group is working on new legislation, which will introduce outcomes in the higher education system.

3.4 Quality assurance of qualifications

The AQF Law stipulates that all qualifications in the AQF shall be quality assured. There is not yet a coherent, national system of *external* quality assurance of development, provision, assessment and certification of vocational qualifications. In VET, QA has hitherto mainly been internal.

All public VET schools in the country have now completed a self-assessment exercise. NAVETQ is now working to develop the accreditation model to be implemented in VET schools. This measure addresses both providers and the qualifications themselves.

VET providers are responsible for internal assessment and certification of vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. NAVETQ provides guidelines on both formative assessment and for summative assessment to achieve the certification. The framework curricula include recommendations on verifying if learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes in the qualification. NAVETQ also produces guidelines for VET teachers and providers, containing assessment methods and assessment tools e.g. tests, projects, check list, etc.

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE) manages quality assurance for this sector. It requires higher education institutions and their programmes to be accredited before they can issue degrees or other qualifications.

⁵ <http://listakombetareprofesioneve.al>

⁶ VET Credit System in Albania: context and potential usefulness, ETF, 2020

3.5 Credit systems

The AQF Law stipulates that the AQF should facilitate accumulation and transfer of credits. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credit system in Higher Education is operational.

But for VET there is no credit system yet. Authorities have written a concept paper looking at how a credit system in VET could be established. Aims would include improving quality assurance and supporting learner progression. Qualifications for lifelong learning are generally not expressed in credits.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Ministries, rather than a dedicated NQF authority, are responsible for the AQF. Broadly, the concerned ministries manage qualifications in the AQF which correspond to the educational subsystem the respective ministry coordinates. Therefore, the Ministry of Education covers qualifications in elementary, lower and upper secondary general education, and higher education and lifelong learning, while the Ministry of Finance and Economy leads on VET qualifications.

The AQF laws define three implementing institutions:

- the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ);
- higher education institutions in cooperation with institutions which carry out periodic labour market assessments and employment surveys of graduates;
- the ministries responsible for education and their associated agencies in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable legal framework (ETF, 2018b).

Implementation is coordinated by a dedicated AQF taskforce co-chaired by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Its tasks include development of an AQF handbook for users, revision of the AQF law, and referencing the AQF to the EQF. During 2020, its mandate was extended to end 2022.

4.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

Sector Committees can now be established, following the June 2019 bylaw adopted by the Council of Ministers. This is an important step in delivering objectives within NESS to revise existing, and develop new, professional qualifications based on labour market needs. The Committees' functions will include identifying qualifications needed, based on studies; proposing new qualifications to NAVETQ; working with NAVETQ to draft the occupational standards and vocational qualifications standards included in the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications; and broader support to the AQF's implementation.

The Committees will be organized by technical groups for each sector, to a maximum of 10 national committees, each of fewer than 10 persons to facilitate decision-making. Members will be drawn from the different ministries responsible for the AQF; ministries responsible for the respective Committee's

economic sector; employers' associations; trades unions; VET institutions; an HR specialist from the sector; and an independent expert with experience of developing and implementing the AQF.

At the time of writing, stakeholders are developing a roadmap to operationalise the Committees. A regulation on the functions of the Committees' supporting Technical Secretariat is being drafted.

Implementation has begun, stakeholders are establishing criteria to define the sectors, and to prioritise a number for first phase piloting. In early 2021, piloting in a chosen sector will start with the support of RISI Albania, a joint Swiss-Albanian project which supports employment opportunities for young Albanians. Pilots will expand to further sectors during 2021 and after.

5. RECOGNISING AND VALIDATING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

5.1 VNFIL arrangements

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the priority measures in NESS and provided for in both the VET and AQF laws. Implementation so far has been confined to pilots and has not yet been applied country wide.

NESS outlines a national system for validation. Actions to be taken include:

- selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification and the validation/recognition of prior learning;
- appointment of special bodies and establishment of procedures for the validation of qualifications, assessments of knowledge, skills and competences; certification; and validation of prior learning;
- establishment of a national system to recognise qualifications, work experience, skills obtained/received abroad;
- consolidating the legal framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
- defining roles of implementing institutions in managing RPL;
- identifying priority sectors for RPL and pilot in two occupations.

Officials are currently preparing a draft Decision of the Council of Ministers on the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

6. NQF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

6.1 Key achievements and main findings

NAVETQ has compiled the National List of Vocational Qualifications (NLVQ)⁷, which is approved by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. NLQ contains more than 100 qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3 and 4, offered through the 2+1+1, 2+2 and 4 years formal educational structure. The List is now available online in the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in the form of a public, interactive, searchable web portal/database on qualifications, curricula and training offers by VET providers.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is meanwhile creating a national register of higher education programmes. Each programme will be coded according to the field of study. The required legal framework is under development.

AQF levels are included on new certificates and diplomas and Europass supplement documents and indicated in the national catalogue for VET qualifications.

6.2 Recognition of foreign qualifications

Information about recognition of foreign qualifications in Albania on the ENIC-NARIC website is limited. The national information centre is the Technical Secretariat for the Recognition of Foreign Diplomas under the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. Currently, Albania has procedures in place for the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas at levels 5 to 8 of the AQF, issued by foreign higher education institutions. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications is under development. An instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy on the procedures for recognition of qualifications at levels 2 to 5 was adopted in 2018.

7. REFERENCING TO THE EQF

7.1 Referencing to regional frameworks

Albania participates as a full member in both the EU's EQF process as a member of the EQF Advisory Group and the Council of Europe-chaired Bologna process in higher education. The AQF is not yet referenced to the EQF or self-certified against the Qualifications Framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). However, authorities have been working on a draft report and plan to link the AQF to both frameworks in one process, resulting in one report.

7.2 International cooperation

As an EU candidate country, Albania receives financial assistance from the EU via IPA (Instrument for pre-Accession). The government has prioritized skills mismatch as the country prepares for the next round of EU support through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance 2021-2027.

⁷ <http://www.akafp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/>

EU assistance focuses on democratic development and good governance, regulatory reform and administrative capacity building and infrastructure development. EU funding for projects in Albania is provided in the form of grants, contracts and increasingly budget support.

The current education, social policy and employment portfolio is worth 30 million euros and is mainly rolled out through a Budget Support programme that is currently being adapted to the COVID context.

The next programme, titled “EU for Social Inclusion” has been under preparation during 2020, and provides 50M Euro, much of it addressing VET and employment. It replicates in many ways for Albania the EU 2020 programmes, providing support for transitioning to the knowledge economy and adopting the European social model. It will support implementation of NESS, the Strategy for Development of pre-university education 2014-2020 (PUE) and the National Strategy for Decentralisation and local Government 2015-20.

As an EU candidate country, Albania implements actions consistent with the RIGA 2015 conclusions on new medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020 (Riga is a follow-up of the Bruges process). MTD 3 is related to the NQF: Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all, through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

8. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND PLANS

The adoption of the revised, 2018, AQF law steers the AQF development process towards achieving more relevant qualifications, including through establishment of sector councils comprising social partners and other stakeholders. Pilot committees will provide feedback to inform orientations in reforming existing or designing new qualifications.

Application of learning outcomes in higher education would more closely align Albania’s higher education sector to those in other countries in the European Higher Education Area.

Recognition of prior learning, facilitated by early adoption of a Ministerial Decision, would contribute to the development of lifelong learning opportunities and improve adult participation.

Two other priorities are developing a communication strategy and referencing of the AQF to the EQF.

9. MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports is the main source of information and the EQF NCP: <http://www.arsimi.gov.al>

National catalogue of vocational qualifications (NCVQ). <http://www.akaftp.gov.al/lista-kombetare-profesionale/>

European Training Foundation NQF Inventory, [NQF inventory Albania | Open Space \(europa.eu\)](http://www.etf.europa.eu/nqf-inventory-albania)

10. ALBANIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (AQF)

The AQF differentiates between general, vocational and lifelong learning qualifications.

AQF level	Qualifications from initial education		Lifelong learning qualifications
	General/traditional qualifications	Vocational/professional qualifications	
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Doctorate ■ Graduate school study in advanced studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Executive master/second level master/postmaster ■ Long term specialisation 	Study programmes for continuous education
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Master of science ■ Master of arts/ Master of Fine Arts/programme level II study ■ Integrated study programme of the second cycle ■ 4-year study programme (pre-Bologna programmes) 	Professional master/first level master	Study programmes for continuous education
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bachelor ■ Study programme first level 		
5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Post-secondary study programme of professional type ■ Professional non-university study programme after secondary education ■ Vocational certificate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bridging courses (certificate) ■ Specialisation courses based on professional requirements
4	State <i>matura</i> diploma (Upper secondary general education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State vocational <i>matura</i> diploma issued upon completion of the vocational high school programme ■ Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the four-year study programme for middle technicians/middle managers ■ Vocational certificate i issued at the conclusion of the two-year programme for technicians/ middle managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bridging courses ■ Vocational training courses ■ Specialisation courses based on professional requirements

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the one-year programme for technicians/ middle managers ■ Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of an apprenticeship programme 	
3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vocational certificate issued at the end of a three-year programme for skilled workers ■ Vocational certificate issued at the end of a one-year programme for skilled workers ■ Vocational Certificate issued at the end of an apprenticeship programme 	
2		Vocational certificate issued at the completion of the two-year programme for semi-skilled workers	
1	Final school report after completion of the compulsory nine-year education		Minimum entry requirements to work or social life

Source: Albanian Ministry of Education and Sport: <http://www.arsimi.gov.al>

ABBREVIATIONS

AQAHE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
NAVETQ	National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
NESS	National Employment and Skills Strategy
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NCVQ	National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications
NLVQ	National List of Vocational Qualifications (NLVQ)
NLO	National List of Occupations

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Where to find out more

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