MEDA-ETE
regional project

Thematic Studies

Qualifications that count: Strengthening the recognition of qualifications in the Mediterranean region

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT (ETE) IS AN EU FUNDED INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTED BY THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION (ETF). ITS OBJECTIVE IS TO SUPPORT THE MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RELEVANT TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) POLICIES THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROMOTION OF EMPLOYMENT THROUGH A REGIONAL APPROACH.

Thematic Studies
Qualifications that count: Strengthening the recognition of qualifications in the Mediterranean region

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PREFACE

It is a pleasure to present this new thematic study on the recognition of qualifications in the Mediterranean area. Thematic studies aim to build a common understanding of the situation and to allow the identification of the main developments and issues on a topic of common interest. The analysis is thus seen as instrumental to the development of a body of knowledge that can support policy formation at both national and regional levels.

In recent years, qualifications have moved to the centre of policy debate both in Europe, through the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, and in the Mediterranean region, particularly through the EU-funded Education and Training for Employment (MEDA-ETE) project and the work undertaken by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in the field of qualifications systems.

Mediterranean countries and territories gave their support to a review of policies on the recognition of qualifications during the formulation of the MEDA-ETE project. The topic was considered to require active cooperation taking into account common interests and purposes. The region is characterised by mobility and migration, both inside and outside its borders. This common interest is combined with a growing understanding that qualifications are powerful tools for reform. This is well reflected in current developments of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in several countries and territories in the region.

Qualifications have traditionally been deeply embedded in specific social and economic contexts and institutional settings. While still very important, the specific national character of qualifications has been challenged by the internationalisation or globalisation of labour markets and by the increasing mobility of populations. This is gradually impacting on the way countries define, award and recognise qualifications.

The title of this report illustrates the strategic and complex character of qualifications: they not only define the knowledge, skills and competences or any other kind of learning outcomes held by an individual, they also take the form of a currency signalling their value both nationally and internationally.

This report does not claim to provide an exhaustive inventory. Its aim is more modest, that of giving an account of recent developments in Europe and in the Mediterranean region in the field of qualifications and the recognition of qualifications. Nevertheless, the message is clear: in order to work well, qualifications from different fields and education sub-sectors have to be linked and to communicate important signals in terms of their transparency, currency and portability at both national and international levels.

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report concerns the internal and international recognition of qualifications. It will analyse why the recognition of qualifications has become an important issue on policy agendas, what the challenges are, and how countries and territories in the Middle East and North Africa – and elsewhere – are responding. The conclusions reached will focus on national and international issues facing countries and territories in the Mediterranean region[1], reforms that are underway and further steps that can be taken.

Governments and stakeholders in the Mediterranean region have identified an urgent need to reform their qualifications systems. An important motivation for these reform programmes is to make sure that different aspects of nationally based qualifications are useful and consistent with one another, and that they are recognised and respected beyond national boundaries. The twin themes of (i) achieving internal coherence and legibility of qualifications, and (ii) gaining international recognition for national qualifications and frameworks are the subject of this report.

Since these two themes are high on the agendas of education and training policymakers, it is not surprising that they are linked to several of the key issues on which partner countries are working with the European Training Foundation (ETF) in the region[2].

Before beginning the analysis, it is useful to identify what is meant by the terms 'recognition' and 'qualification' in this report.

Qualifications are awarded to people and are therefore their property. Once a competent body decides that an individual has learnt knowledge and skills to a specified standard, qualifications are awarded – usually as certificates, diplomas or degrees. In its analysis of qualifications systems as bridges to lifelong learning the OECD (2007) provided a more elaborate definition, which is helpful[3].

The concept of recognition is more problematic because it is often thought of in several ways, often at the same time. Firstly, the skills that a person has gained should be

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1   In the context of this publication, the term 'Mediterranean' refers to the 10 Mediterranean Partners – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey – that are part of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

2   The ETF Work Programme 2008 emphasises cooperation in human resource development, support for modernising education, labour market and training systems, supporting partner country development through innovation and co-learning from EU country cooperation, and strengthening organisational learning.

3   'A qualification is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual has learnt knowledge, skills and/or wider competences to specified standards. The standard of learning is confirmed by means of an assessment process or the successful completion of a course of study. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place during a programme of study and/or workplace experience. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practise a trade.' Op. cit. pp. 21–2.

easily recognisable (that is, legible or transparent) to the users of qualifications. Users are mainly education providers, employers and of course the person who has achieved the qualification. Secondly, qualifications should be recognised as having a real value, for example for entry into the labour market or for academic or professional progression (that is, currency). Thirdly, qualifications should be used and trusted when a person changes job or decides to migrate to a different area or country (that is, portability). Thus, recognition refers to the transparency, currency and portability of qualifications[4].

Governments hope – and expect – that creating a coherent and intelligible system of general, vocational and higher education qualifications will help to solve substantive challenges. These include the following:

- opening up pathways from schooling to the labour market, thus maximising the productivity of new entrants, minimising youth unemployment and helping to reduce poverty;
- reforming the curriculum in order to make teaching and learning relevant and engaging to learners, and useful to working life and communities;
- putting in place approaches to vocational education and training (VET) in schools, training centres and workplaces that raise the skills levels of the workforce, including graduates, older workers and those in the informal sector of the economy;
- facilitating migration (both outward and inward) such that people's talents and qualifications are recognised and utilised across borders;
- helping the growing numbers of people in higher education to achieve international exchange and mobility;
- ensuring that the international community understands and respects the range of qualifications that the country uses;
- opening up systems of qualifications that were previously rather closed, so that they become more flexible frameworks in which most or all citizens become lifelong learners and, hopefully, expert learners;
- ensuring recognition for skills gained in informal learning and in informal sectors of the economy; this is an important consideration in the region.

Chapter 2 of the report sets out the main factors that are motivating or driving an increased interest in the region in improving the recognition of qualifications. Chapter 3 describes how global factors (such as inward investment and migration in internationalised labour markets) and international and European policy responses (such as the Bologna process for higher education and the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)) are influencing policies for qualifications development in the Mediterranean region. Chapter 4 turns the spotlight directly onto qualifications reform in the region. The chapter explores how (and why) governments and stakeholders in the region are seeking to make their qualifications more legible, more coherent and of better quality. While examples will be drawn from across the region, the chapter pays particular attention to the widely shared policy interest in national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), and to developments in the four countries in the region that are involved in the current ETF NQF project[5].

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4   ILO has provided a useful note on the portability of skills (ILO, 2007), and this helps to define recognition in a sensible way, for this context.

5   Several countries participated in the earlier phase of the project, and Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan are participating in the ETF's development project.

Qualifications frameworks are currently receiving a great deal of attention from governments and stakeholders across the globe, as a tool intended to improve the national and international recognition of qualifications in their national systems. Therefore, discussion of the potential strengths (and difficulties) associated with NQFs is an important part of this report. Chapter 5 takes this analysis further and Chapter 6 reaches conclusions.

The research[6] and analysis is intended for policymakers and stakeholders in the region. The report therefore tries to be free of unnecessary jargon. It is also intended to be of interest to a wider audience, including researchers and international agencies in the field.

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6   Research is drawn from a range of secondary sources, including a range of recent ETF publications. The primary evidence is drawn mainly from the four countries involved in the current phases of the ETF's project to support the development of NQFs.

2. REGIONAL CONTEXT

2.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the main factors that are motivating or driving an increased interest in the region in improving the recognition of qualifications, in terms of the conditions of legibility, value and portability set out in Chapter 1. These include a rapidly growing population with a youthful age profile and strong trends of migration across and out of the region. Furthermore, labour markets in most Mediterranean countries and territories are polarised or fragmented – on the one hand between predominantly public employment with a growing private sector, and on the other hand between the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Capital is flowing into the region for investment, but at levels that are still far short of optimal.

2.2 Demographic trends and migration in the Mediterranean region

Three factors stand out in terms of population trends in the region. Firstly, most – but not all – of the countries and territories have rapid population growth. Secondly, almost all the countries and territories have a youthful age profile in comparison with countries in the EU, North America and Australasia. Thirdly, with few exceptions, countries and territories in the region have high levels of inward and/or outward migration, including some that experience considerable movement on the part of refugees.

The salient aspects of these trends are described below. The implications in terms of the recognition of qualifications will be explored further in later chapters of the report.

2.2.1 Rapid population growth

The United Nations (UNESCWA, 2005) has reported on the rapid increase in the population of the Arab world over the past century. A population of 80 million in the mid 20th century had grown to 300 million in 2003 and is projected to increase to 400 million by 2020. Compared with other parts of the world, annual population growth rates are high and the countries that are contributing most to the population increase in the region are Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, Yemen and Morocco. Other Gulf States also have high percentage population growth rates, while Lebanon, Somalia and Tunisia have the region's lowest population growth rates. In fact, Tunisia is now experiencing a new phenomenon: the number of students starting school is decreasing, which is a result of the success of its demographic policy.

Behind this growth lies a change that may eventually lead to a reduction or reversal of the population increase that has characterised several generations. On the one hand, the death rate has reduced rapidly in the Arab world over the past two decades, largely

through inroads made into rates of infant mortality, which means that average life
expectancy has increased. At the same time the fertility rate has reduced in the region as
a whole over the past 20 years, from 6 children per woman to 4.4 children per woman.
Fertility rates in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Algeria and Syria have
all shown moderate or rapid declines in this respect. In Tunisia the fertility rate is
under 2.1, which is the minimum rate for renewal of the population. Although these trends
vary greatly by country, if they continue the Arab world is likely to face a new challenge in
the future: an ageing population. This is already the challenge facing Europe.
Furthermore, an ageing population is a feature of many rural communities in the region,
as many young and active people have migrated to urban environments in their home
country or abroad.

2.2.2   A youthful population profile

In the short and medium term, however, it is the youthful age profile of the
population that is presenting societies and governments in the region with a key
opportunity and challenge, as they seek to plan and reform their education, social and
employment systems. The region's youthful age profile is shown in Figure 1, which
illustrates the point dramatically.

Figure 1: Population profile for the Arab world in 2002
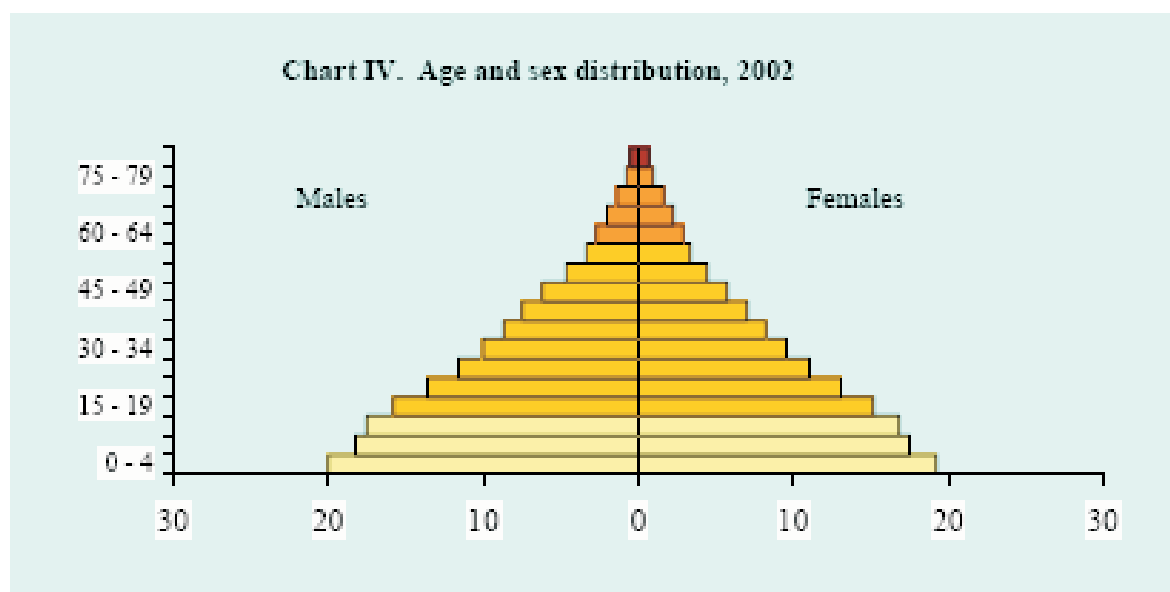
Source: United Nations, 2003.

Figure 2: Population profile for Europe (EU-27) in 2006
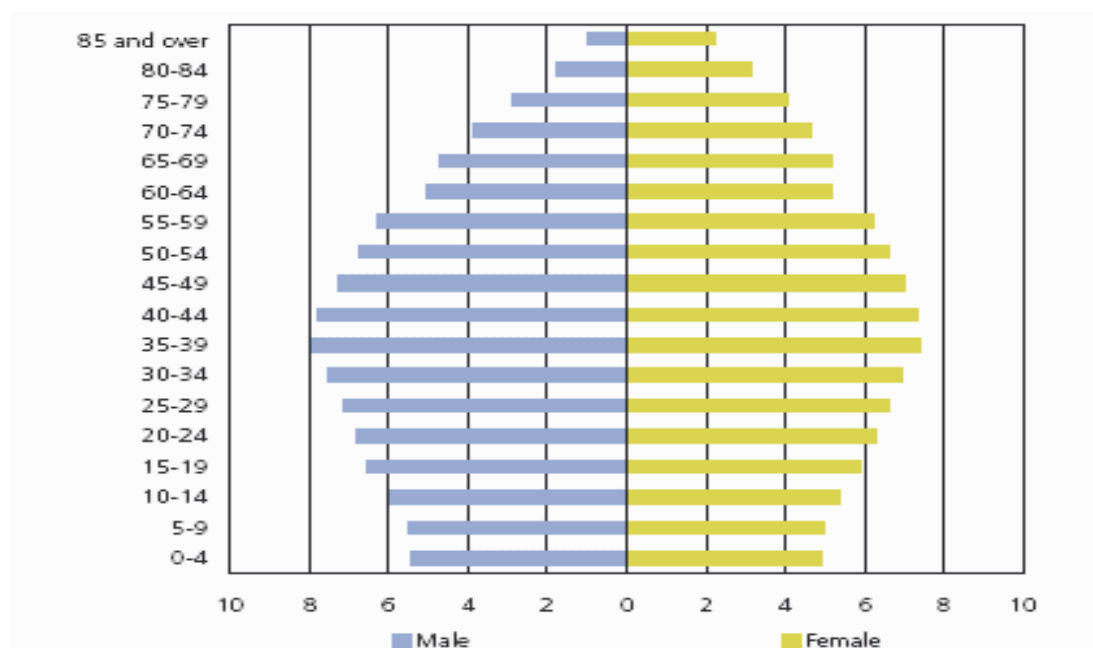
Source: Eurostat (demo_ppavg)

Figure 1 shows that young people and economically active age groups represent by far the largest share of the population in the Arab world. In contrast, the population chart for Europe (Figure 2) has a very different profile. The ratio of older to younger people is much greater, and the impacts of an ageing population on the profile can be clearly seen.

While there is debate among experts as to whether or not population growth is supportive of economic growth, it is clear that demographic and economic changes are linked. An expansion of the youthful population calls urgently for economic change, since there are more needs to be met, and economic change is certainly related to the types, quality and levels of education attained by the population. In turn, economic change is strongly influenced by the kinds of work available, and by the supply and demand for labour in the labour market, as well as by investment. The levels and kinds of knowledge and skills that workers possess are an important factor in the relationship between supply and demand in the labour market.

Thus, population increases, especially in the direction of a youthful population profile, are making demands on education systems, and governments and stakeholders are trying to meet these demands, often in challenging circumstances with severe budget limitations. Changing skills needs in the labour market and the rapid growth of knowledge media and internationalised information technologies mean that governments and stakeholders, including the individual learners, are now involved in trying to orchestrate a continuous process in which workers and citizens become lifelong learners. In other words, governments and stakeholders are trying to develop lifelong learning strategies.

2.2.3 Patterns of migration

Countries and territories in the region variously experience high levels of outward and inward migration, and this has been the case for many years. It is helpful to understand the main features of migration, within the region, into Europe and globally.

QUALIFICATIONS THAT COUNT: STRENGTHENING THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Regional and global patterns of mobility of labour have increased the urgency of achieving international recognition for national qualifications.

The OECD (2008) has recently published an international outlook on migration. Although written from the viewpoint of wealthier countries that are OECD members, several of the conclusions highlight important considerations for the Mediterranean region. Statistics are not reliable in this field, but the following observations hold.

- The flow of legal immigrants continues to grow. Notably this is family migration and migration for employment, while the extent of asylum seeking (into OECD countries) has reduced somewhat over four consecutive years.
- The international flows of students are increasing.
- Overall, immigrants form a significant proportion of OECD country workforces, contribute to meeting skills gaps and shortages, and make a significant contribution to the labour market and productivity.
- In most OECD countries immigrants earn significantly less than members of the native population, and immigrants from non-OECD countries are at a particular disadvantage.
- Many OECD countries have introduced structural changes in their migration policies, such as placing limits and developing points systems.
- There is competition in OECD countries to attract and retain highly skilled workers. There are also shortages in the labour market for low-skilled workers and this is being partly met through migration.

These global trends in migration patterns are significant for the region, as are the specific regional patterns of migration in the Middle East and North Africa. A European University Institute study (Fargues, 2007) analysed the regional context. It was found that around 40% of migrants from the Mediterranean region have the Gulf States and Libya as their destination. These oil-producing countries with labour shortages have the world's third strongest pull in terms of numbers of people migrating, after the USA and Europe. On the other hand, most of the non-oil-producing countries in the region have a labour surplus and a capital deficit and have become countries of emigration. At the same time, they receive immigrants from poorer countries.

Urging caution regarding the statistics, the study concludes that there are currently some 12 to 15 million first-generation emigrants from Arab countries, and rates are rising. The vast majority are split evenly between Europe and the oil-producing states, while around 10% have emigrated to North America and Canada. Only one in ten emigrants to Europe is a graduate, while six out of ten who go to North America are graduates. Morocco and Egypt are the main countries of emigration, although it is a common phenomenon to many countries across the region. The patterns of country of origin and country of destination across the region are complex; for example, migrants from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia predominantly go to France, reflecting language and cultural links; migrants from Egypt go to Libya and the Gulf States; and migrants from the Occupied Palestinian Territory go to Syria.

With weak domestic economies creating a push factor that combines with the continuing pull of labour shortages in Europe, oil-producing countries and North America – and the mediation of processes such as the Barcelona process (now Union for the Mediterranean), which will be covered later in this report – it seems sensible to anticipate that the migration trends described here will continue to rise for some years ahead.

This, surely, will add urgency to the question of the recognition of qualifications, which should act as a kind of skills passport for those who are migrating to work or study.

Political events and developments in the region have meant, as in a number of other regions in the world where conflict is a significant factor, that refugee movement is an important and on-going issue. Refugee movement must be considered when looking at patterns of migration in the Middle East and North Africa. Several quotations from Phillippe Fargues' report highlight the critical situation.

Box 1: Recent refugee flows in the Middle East

'The years 2005 and 2006 witnessed an upsurge of large refugee flows. The countries of departure of these refugees were […]: Iraq, Sudan, the countries of the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia) and Lebanon.'

'In Egypt 2005–06 was marked by the Sudanese refugee crisis.'

'In Lebanon, the events of 2005 and 2006 have triggered considerable waves of migration among the Lebanese and above all among foreigners working in the country.'

'Since […] 2000 Palestine has experienced a new wave of emigration from West Bank and Gaza, estimated at 100,000.'

'Of all transit migration the influx of Iraqi refugees to the Arab countries of the Mediterranean is the largest and most uncertain. […] Four million (estimate number at the beginning of 2007) Iraqis fled their region of origin […]. According to recent UNHCR estimates (February 2007), Syria hosted around 1 million Iraqi refugees, Jordan 700,000, Egypt 100,000 […] It is the most important wave of refugees ever registered in the region; it is almost three times greater than the exodus of Palestinians […] in 1948 and the fastest growing flow of refugees in the world. […] Many Iraqi refugees belonged to the middle or higher classes […].'

Source: Fargues, 2007, pp. xx–xxi.

This report will address (Chapter 3) the question of how improved national and international recognition of qualifications can improve the conditions of emigration and immigration. This is a policy area that has not been given much priority until quite recently.

It is worth raising several other aspects of migration that are now receiving greater attention[7].

- *Diasporas.* There is a renewed interest in diasporas, particularly on the part of governments in countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Jordan, all of whom have actively facilitated emigration during some periods, as part of growth and development policies. Circular migration and trans-national networks have a significant economic and social impact.

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7   Bardak (2005) provides a clear outline of the factors mentioned here, and summarises their importance.

- *Brain drain and brain gain.* While concerns continue, rightly, about the brain drain that occurs when 10% or more of the highly qualified people from a particular sector emigrate, there is also a growing interest in the 'brain gain' effect. Patterns of skilled and highly qualified emigration may act as an incentive to participate in education and training for others, thus increasing the stock of human capital. At the same time, 'brain waste' is now a recognised phenomenon, in which young returnees do not pursue further studies after a period abroad.
- *Returning migrants* bring back skills, work experience and often capital from abroad. This aspect is now often discussed under the heading of circular migration.
- *Knowledge and technology transfer.* Migration in the information age opens up opportunities for the transfer of knowledge and technology, which would have been cumbersome or impossible in earlier periods.

2.3 Characteristics of labour markets

The key characteristics of the Mediterranean labour markets have been documented in a number of studies (World Bank, 2004; Bardak et al., 2007). A review of labour market indicators reveals, as indicated in the previous section, a fast-growing working-age population as a result of demographic pressure, low participation and employment rates (in particular for females and young people), high unemployment, difficulties in labour market entry as a result of the scarcity of decent jobs, and labour market segmentation along public/private and formal/informal lines, with low mobility across sectors. A large section of the population in most countries lives and works in traditional labour markets that consist mainly of agriculture and small-scale trade and services[8]. The formal, regular labour market is comparatively small and is mainly dominated by the state, and many people are struggling to find a way through different (often insecure) forms of employment, with social protection as a rare commodity.

While the formal private sector has been weak in terms of the creation of good-quality jobs, the informal sector has absorbed most of the unskilled and low-skilled workers in the region. According to the World Bank (2004), informal employment in the region overall accounts for almost half of non-agricultural employment (30% in Algeria, 35% in Tunisia, 42% in Syria, 55% in Egypt and 63% in Morocco)[9]. Furthermore, it has been the most important source of jobs for new entrants to the labour force. In Egypt the majority of the jobs created in the private sector during the period 1988–98 were in the informal sector. Between 1995 and 2001 in Syria there was a fall in the percentage of people employed in the formal private sector from 40.0% to 34.8%, and an increase in the percentage of employees in the informal sector from 33.8% to 39.0%.

The characteristics of the highly precarious jobs in the informal sector – lack of a social safety net, low wages and long working hours – contrast with the high level of job security and the social safety net linked to jobs in the public and formal private sectors. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that jobs in the public sector may not be sufficiently demanding, while at the same time they are considered to be prestigious

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8   An exception to this trend is Tunisia, where privatisation is widespread, except in certain key industries.

9   Informality is even more common in the agricultural sector. If agriculture were to be included, the share of informal sector would be much higher.

white-collar positions. Their wages (and fringe benefits) are not based on the productivity of employees, and this sets an artificially high benchmark for job expectations in the labour market. Thus, labour markets in the region are segmented on formal/informal and public/private lines, and mobility across sectors is hindered as a result of the high transition costs for individuals. This is often a question of insiders versus outsiders, with insiders often having access to jobs through family, status or personal contacts. Given the lack of a social safety net for a considerable proportion of the population (around half on average), family solidarity seems to be the most robust social support system for guarding against all risks in these societies[10].

For many individuals the barriers to entry and progression are high – much higher than their capabilities could justify.

An examination of employment by educational level reveals that the majority of workers in the region (on average 60–70%) have only primary education or less. One of the best performers, Tunisia, has a pyramid of worker qualifications as follows: 60% low skilled, 30% medium skilled and 10% high skilled; the corresponding figures for the EU are 20%, 60% and 20%. Figure 3 illustrates this contrast.

Figure 3: Skills profile of EU and Tunisia compared
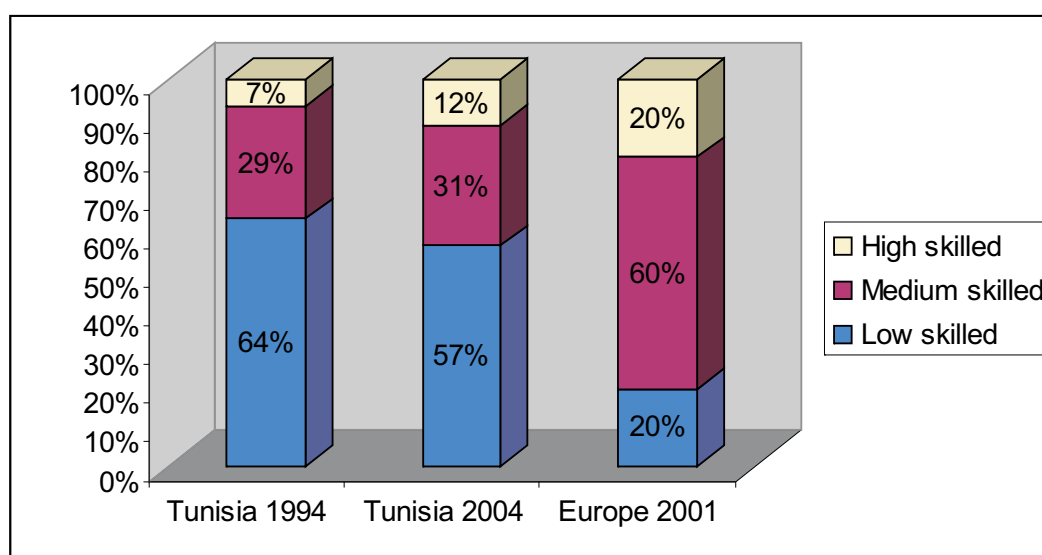
Source: Data provided by the Directorate General of Normalisation and Evaluation, Tunisian Ministry of Education and Training.

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10   Strong family ties may actually discourage the development of public welfare services; at the same time, weak public welfare provision may maintain and even increase the need for a strong family. It is worth mentioning here the famous studies of Esping-Andersen (1990) and Gallie and Paugam (2000) on the classification of welfare regime types in Europe and their special reference to the Southern European countries (Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal) as minimal/sub-protective systems. The complementary role of the family is very relevant to the labour market shortcomings in the Mediterranean region.

The ETF labour market analysis of selected Mediterranean countries[11] (Bardak et al., 2007) identified a number of problems, such as low labour force participation and employment rates (in particular for females and young people), and low levels of mobility between labour market segments. In most countries, labour demand in the public sector is slowing, and most new jobs are being created in the private sector, mainly in services. However, most of the new jobs have appeared in low-productivity activities resulting in large informal employment sectors. The overall conclusion of the ETF report is that labour markets in the Mediterranean region are not allocating human resources in the best way and that comprehensive and multidimensional structural reforms are necessary in the region's labour markets. This report will show that efficient and useful qualifications that command wide recognition have an important role to play.

Analysing the economic development prospects in the region, the World Bank report (2007) underlined the following.

- Job creation will remain a priority for Mediterranean countries and territories for the foreseeable future.
- This is particularly the case in the private sector.
- In social terms, the sheer size of the challenge means that international demand for labour (outward migration) will not fill the gap.

Clearly, there is a need for an increase in the number of jobs and for the development of better employment and higher skills utilisation. This creates a challenge that is difficult to resource when investment is limited. Therefore, the reality may be that Mediterranean countries and territories face a dilemma: to expand the quantity of jobs or to improve the quality of work. In these circumstances, the question is where the most likely win-win solutions are to be found.

2.4 Global trends in production and services: inward investment, outsourcing of services/manufacturing

Many developing countries depend for growth on inward investment from companies and financial institutions in other countries. This is linked to the outsourcing of production and services from one country to another. Since this section of the report is considering current ways in which capital funds are commonly transferred from one country to another, a third aspect under this heading is the important contribution of remittances that working migrants make to their home community or family.

As is now widely recognised, trends in manufacture and services are based on a new international division of labour. Investment flows are changing. Thus, factors such as technological change and the rapid transformation of communication technologies drive demands for improved educational levels and skills development in all countries. A complex priority for Mediterranean (and other) countries and territories is to create a home environment that can respond effectively to the demands of a global economy. Governments therefore have to achieve significant reforms in a range of policy areas if their country is to have a good chance of competing in the internationalised economy[12].

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11   The report covered Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.

12   In Europe, Ireland is the clearest example of a country that has recently succeeded in this core economic task.

Nevertheless, the uncertainties of the globalised age, which are currently being experienced in the form of severe downturns in financial sectors and many other aspects of the economy, create difficulties in terms of effective but flexible planning.

For the Mediterranean region as a whole, some aspects of investment are a consequence of the new global age, and are particularly important. Here we consider foreign direct investment (FDI) and the economic integration created through outsourcing manufacturing and services.

Foreign direct investment and global outsourcing of goods and services

The international investment portfolios of the oil-rich states and countries such as China, Russia and India, as well as the long-standing international capital investments of countries such as the USA, Japan, major European countries and the multinational companies, are evidence of the increasing flow of goods, services and capital in the world today, particularly as some of the barriers are lifted through regional agreements. However, the evidence suggests that countries and territories in the Mediterranean region, apart from oil producers, are not yet reaping many of the benefits of greater integration, but are continuing to experience the negative effects of some of the global changes.

An analysis conducted for the World Bank and the European Union (EU) only a few years ago (Müller-Jentsch, 2005) concluded that deeper economic integration of the Mediterranean region with EU countries could help to speed up the economic development of southern Mediterranean countries whose economic growth has been slow[13]. The main arguments were as follows.

- The enlarged EU accounts for a quarter of global GDP and FDI, even though many of the older members of the EU have experienced quite slow growth for some years.
- Many Mediterranean countries and territories, with the exception of oil producers, have experienced years of marginalisation in the global economy. The World Bank-EU report pointed out that at the time of writing the entire Mediterranean region had fewer non-oil exports than small, single countries in Europe such as Hungary and Finland.
- In the Mediterranean region, FDI accounted for only 0.5% of GDP. Consistent with this situation is the fact that only 2% of Europe's FDI goes to southern Mediterranean countries.
- Compared with similar countries, Mediterranean countries and territories have a gap in terms of exports and FDI. If half this gap could be closed over a decade, the region could quadruple its capital growth.
- Furthermore, EU enlargement and the growth of the Chinese, Indian and Russian economies threaten to further marginalise the position of the Mediterranean region, except where the oil industry is concerned.

Since 2005, however, Mediterranean countries and territories have been undergoing a period of economic growth. This has been most marked in countries such as Morocco and Tunisia and in some sectors of the Egyptian economy, and has had an impact on labour market outcomes. Job creation has accelerated and unemployment

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13   Of course, some countries without high levels of oil production in the region, such as Egypt and Tunisia, do have growth rates of around 4–6%.

declined, and the participation of women in the labour force has increased – at least to some degree. While the overall picture might be positive, regional indicators mask the diversity of results at country level.

Despite the job growth, the Mediterranean region still employs only a small proportion of its potential workforce. Overall, the growth in employment rates is likely to continue. Nevertheless, youth unemployment and the issue of gender equality in relation to access to the labour market will clearly continue to be major challenges in the region.

With regard to links with Europe, a strong basis for deeper economic integration should result in increases in FDI and also in higher levels of outsourcing of goods and services between countries to the north and to the south of the Mediterranean. For services, outsourcing can take place through cross-border supply (e.g. on-line services), consumption abroad (e.g. tourism), commercial presence (e.g. banks and supermarkets) and the presence of people (e.g. engineers or teachers). The World Bank-EU analysis points out that some of the barriers are due to tariffs and quotas, but that others result from non-tariff factors. The non-tariff factors are mainly legal, regulatory and institutional barriers. The World Bank-EU study suggests several linked approaches that can lower non-tariff barriers and open up greater flows:

- shift the developmental aspects of opening up free trade to service sectors; a strong case is made for more emphasis on agriculture;
- concentrate on 'backbone' financial services, which include banking, insurance, capital markets and telecommunications, as well as key sectors such as information technology, tourism, business services and distribution;
- develop responsive bilateral and multilateral approaches by country and/or sector, rather than single regional agreements; a regional framework should provide a workable framework for this;
- concentrate on legal and institutional reforms within the Mediterranean countries and territories to give formal agreements practical substance and provide incentives.

Despite these challenges the 2007 A.T. Kearney's Global Services Location Index[14] notes that Middle Eastern and North African countries and territories are increasing their visibility as remote services locations: 'Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates maintain roughly the same positions in the top 20, reflecting the increasing number of US, European and Asian companies choosing these locations as centres for regional or global support activities' (p. 10). The report also observes that the rise of outsourcing to Maghreb countries (Tunisia and Morocco) reflects growing interest in locations with the ability to serve francophone markets.

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14 The index analyses and ranks the top 50 locations worldwide that provide the most common remote functions, including IT services and support, contact centres and back office support. Each country's score is composed of a weighted combination of relative scores on 43 measurements, which are grouped into three categories: financial attractiveness (40%), people and skills availability (30%), and business environment (30%). See www.atkearney.com for detailed information on the index.

Table 1: Characteristics of Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco as outsourcing destinations

Country	Index ranking	Financial attractiveness[1]	Availability of people and skills[2]	Business environment[2]
Egypt	13	3.2	1.1	1.3
Jordan	14	3.1	1.0	1.5
Tunisia	26	3.0	0.9	1.5
Morocco	36	2.9	0.9	1.3

Source: Adapted from the A.T. Kearney Global Services Location Index, 2007.
[1] *Rated on a scale of 0 to 4.*
[2] *Rated on a scale of 0 to 3.*

It must be borne in mind that the movement in relation to inward investment and strengthening economic integration presupposes an opening up of opportunities for the movement of goods, capital, services and people. This needs to be strategic on the part of all parties, whether on a larger or smaller scale. Moreover, quality and transparency in education and training systems have an important role to play in respect of the educational levels of the population, skills in the labour market, and the employability and adaptability of citizens. Chapters 3 and 4 take up this theme, focusing on the international and national recognition of qualifications.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has emphasised several factors that are strong motivators for improving the legibility, currency and portability of qualifications in the region. It is important to underline that these factors are interrelated, and that reforms in education and training systems, which are discussed in Chapter 4, must connect strongly in order to achieve solutions to the challenges set out in this chapter.

In numerous cases, countries and territories in the region are working with the EU and its agencies in seeking to address education and training reform needs. Furthermore, developments in the EU might provide a context that can help to conceptualise reforms to the south and east of the Mediterranean.

3. INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND EU DEVELOPMENTS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the complex reality of international approaches to the recognition of qualifications, and considers historical and recent regional developments in this field. It also examines the most important developments in Europe, such as the EQF and the Bologna process in general. The chapter then considers how the vigour now being introduced into Euro-Mediterranean partnership activity could provide the impetus for more fruitful and practical forms of cooperation between the EU and Mediterranean countries and territories.

3.2 International approaches to recognising professional qualifications

In an examination of how countries recognise the skills and qualifications of individuals leaving or arriving to study or work, three types of recognition can be identified. These can be described as follows (ILO, 2007).

- *Unilateral.* Here a country of inward labour market migration decides on its own which skills and qualifications it will recognise. In Canada, for example, this is the responsibility of each province.
- *Mutual.* Two countries agree on equivalences, often for specific occupations, as is currently the case with Egypt and Italy.
- *Trade/regional agreements.* These are multilateral, as are the agreements developing between European countries through the European Qualifications Framework.

The ILO makes the point forcibly that unilateral skills recognition carries strong disadvantages. It is clear that migrants' skills and qualifications are often unrecognised. This has implications for systems of international recognition, but also for national qualifications systems and frameworks. The analysis will be taken further in Chapter 4.

A number of bilateral schemes for labour market and academic mobility are in place and operating. This requires policy and action on the part of both the migrant's country of origin and his or her host country. Thus, for example, Egypt and Italy are currently exploring ways to recognise appropriate Egyptian qualifications for entry into areas of labour market shortage in Italy. Similar agreements can be found between France and some of the North African countries.

QUALIFICATIONS THAT COUNT: STRENGTHENING THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Under the aegis of UNESCO[15], five regional and one interregional conventions for the recognition of higher education studies and qualifications have been adopted. UNESCO and the Council of Europe have attempted to set up an international system of national information centres to extend the rather successful European Network of Information Centres (ENIC[16]) on academic mobility and recognition. However, these attempts have not so far been very successful. As a broad umbrella, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS[17]) also covers, among other topics, the temporary movement of service providers. This implies gaining access to the labour markets of other countries, thus requiring recognition of qualifications. Bilateral or multilateral agreements on qualification recognition are envisaged.

As long ago as 1967, five Arab countries signed an agreement on labour force mobility[18]. Although it is not clear how far the agreement is specifically operational, it is certainly the case that the mobility of labour across Arab countries is a reality. Furthermore, mobility across the region works on the basis of mutual trust. Box 2 summaries the main articles contained in the agreement.

Box 2: Arab countries' agreement on labour market mobility

Article 1: The agreement requires member states to facilitate mobility of labour forces across Arab borders.

Article 2: Every member state will nominate the relevant authority that will organise the mobility of the labour force.

Article 3: All participating states will share relevant information and data on labour force mobility.

Article 4: All member states will give priority to employment of an Arab labour force.

Article 5: Each member state recognises qualifications gained in the other Arab countries as accredited by the relevant bodies in each member state.

Source: Arab Agreement No 2, 1967.

A further area of cooperation among several countries is the Arab standard classification of occupations (ASCO), which has been developed by the Arab Labour Organisation (ALO) in line with ISCO 88. It is not clear how far social partners are involved in such a process, nor is it clear how the ALO intends to make use of this tool for regional cooperation.

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15   http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=22124&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

16   www.enic-naric.net/

17   www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/gatsintr_e.htm

18   Arab Agreement N° 2, 1967.

Box 3: Arab standard classification of occupations

The Arab standard classification of occupations (ASCO) is an update of the 1989 standard. It is considered an important tool for the exchange of information on labour markets and for facilitating the mobility of workers across Arab countries. More particularly the ASCO aims to build a common language regarding the labour force in Arab countries in respect of: (i) collecting labour market information; (ii) automating and processing labour market data; and (iii) exchanging labour market data and comparing it at national, regional and international levels.

The ASCO covers five levels of qualifications, rather than the four covered in ISCO, in order to take into account the specificity of the labour markets of Arab countries and to be in line with education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems in Arab countries:

- level A – specialist
- level B – technician
- level C – professional worker
- level D – skilled worker
- level E – semi-skilled worker (limited skills).

Source: Adapted from the Arab standard classification of occupations, draft document, 2008.

It also remains to be seen how the ALO work ties in with the more recent interest in NQFs. This aspect is worthy of further serious consideration (see Chapter 4). Any overarching classification in the region will certainly need to take account of the energetic work being conducted in most countries to define national and occupational standards, and to the speed with which many occupations and areas of employment are changing. A cross-country approach, if it is nimble and well supported, does offer the opportunity to achieve economies of scale, at least for some occupational sectors that are relevant to TVET.

Across the globe, several regional attempts to develop mutual recognition of skills and qualifications are underway. The OECD has reviewed these (OECD, 2001; ILO, 2007). There follows a list of trade agreements that cover the recognition of qualifications to a greater or lesser extent. At the very least, they provide a basis for a legal framework:

- North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
- Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR)
- Caribbean Community (CARICOM)
- ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)
- EU.

MERCOSUR has adopted a reciprocal agreement involving professional bodies in agriculture, agronomy, geology and engineering. In 2003 AFTA called for mutual recognition of qualifications by 2008, although by 2007 this had been put into practice only for engineering. The ILO's judgement (ILO, 2007, p. 14) appears to be correct: even where regional recognition agreements are in place in principle, they tend to move very slowly in practice. The EU and CARICOM represent deep forms of regional integration aiming at developing a competitive region, and a high-quality and employable labour force. The EU's developments are mainly signalled by the adoption of the EQF. The latter has adopted principles and mechanisms for equivalence and mutual recognition of qualifications and skills, as the next section will show.

While it is helpful to analyse types and examples of recognition arrangements, it remains the case that there are many people who migrate in international labour markets for whom no procedures for recognising their skills and qualifications exist.

3.3 The European Qualifications Framework

Since 1990 the EU member states have sought to achieve an agreed set of social and economic goals for Europe[19]. The goals, which are seen as interlinked, are to achieve a highly competitive economy for Europe, social inclusion for groups at risk and socially cohesive societies, more and better jobs in the labour market, and environmental sustainability.

It was immediately clear that in order for these aims to be achievable, high-quality and easily accessible education and training for all European citizens would need to be an important generator of change. Therefore, the European Commission, national governments and other stakeholders (the social partners in particular) began working together to identify how they could cooperate efficiently to develop their own systems, processes and frameworks in pursuit of opening up lifelong learning for all.

The European Commission has no authority to issue directives for education and training, and the member states agreed to collaborate with each other and with the European Commission through a process known as the open method of coordination (OMC). This is now accepted as the modus operandi for cooperation in education and training, although some member states are more effective partners than others.

The process has four stages:

1. agreeing on the priorities and identifying benchmarks;
2. gathering data and carrying out benchmarking tasks;
3. identifying, through research and cooperation, where instances of good practice exist and are developing;
4. enabling, through peer learning processes, the different countries and stakeholders involved in the process to learn how best to make sustainable policy decisions that can contribute to opening up effective lifelong learning for citizens, and education and training reforms.

Numerous themes and mechanisms are now an established part of the EU education and training scene. As a result, Europe has made some significant progress in bringing researchers, policymakers and practitioners together from the different countries into what is best described as a peer learning process.

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19   These goals were agreed by the EU prime ministers at a conference in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1990. Hence they are called the Lisbon goals. The Lisbon process is the agreed strategy of voluntary collaboration between member states in areas such as education, where it is the member states, not the European Commission, who have powers under the rule of 'subsidiarity'. In 2000 the EU comprised 15 member states. This increased to 25 in 2004 and 27 in 2007, with Turkey and Croatia currently having the status of future member states.

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) is a tangible, if new, outcome of the Lisbon process for education and training[20]. The EQF is an eight-level framework based on learning outcomes that aims to facilitate the transparency and portability of qualifications and to support lifelong learning. The document launching the EQF (European Commission, 2008) provides a succinct summary of what the EQF is intended to achieve.

Box 4: EQF – Key aspects and intended benefits

The EQF will establish a common European reference that will link national qualifications systems and so facilitate better communication between them. This should lead to a network of mutually understandable qualifications.

The EQF will be relevant to a wide range of users at European and national levels. It uses learning outcomes as a common reference point, and this will facilitate the recognition, comparison and transfer of qualifications.

The wide interest in developing national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) in Europe shows that the principles behind the EQF are shared. However, the EQF is not intended to replace NQFs: this is why it is a reference tool.

The intention is that the EQF should support greater mobility of learners and workers.

It should benefit individuals by improving access to and participation in lifelong learning.

It should support individuals with extensive experience, particularly at work, to have their learning outcomes assessed and recognised, through the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Increasing transparency of qualifications should thus support users and providers of education and training, including those outside national systems.

With reference to education communities and interest outside Europe, the European Commission (2008, p. 4) concludes:

> 'The adoption of a common reference framework based on learning outcomes will facilitate the comparison and (potential) linking together of traditional qualifications awarded by national authorities and qualifications awarded by other stakeholders. The EQF will thus help sectors and individuals take advantage of this growing internationalisation of qualifications.'

This suggests that lessons learnt from the EQF development can be relevant to the international recognition of qualifications beyond Europe, and also to the recognition of knowledge and skills that individuals have acquired other than through national qualifications, whether they work in formal or informal parts of the labour market. The EQF, if it becomes part of a European currency, will surely have a wide influence in neighbouring regions.

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20   At the formal request of member states the European Commission began to consult on the EQF in 2004. After much consultation and development, the EQF was formally agreed in February 2008.

Box 5: The eight-level EQF*

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	Described as theoretical and/or factual	Described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)	Described in terms of responsibility and autonomy
1	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change Review and develop performance of self and others
6	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision making in unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Source: Cedefop, 2009. Adapted from the European Commission, 2008.
* Each of the eight levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating broadly the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.

It must be emphasised that the EQF is not intended to replace NQFs. It does not set out processes for the endorsement or quality assurance of national qualifications. It offers a series of broad principles that can act as a transparency mechanism. Thus, the EQF is commonly described as a meta-framework[21] or, to a French-speaking audience *convertisseur*.

The development of the EQF mirrors (and in part has generated) a strong interest across many EU member states in setting up their own NQF. Beyond this immediate impact, the EQF has been recently ratified and it is too early to know what its effects will be in practice. It will be some years before this can be assessed.

3.4 The Bologna process, sectoral developments and national reference points: developments associated with the European Qualifications Framework

In Europe the recognition of qualifications across national boundaries is seen as an important part of the development of the EU – an aspect of the European identity. Recognition also has a clear significance for efficient mobility arrangements. Thus, as the section on the EQF has shown, serious attention is being given to processes that can facilitate the mobility of individuals for studying and for working purposes.

Several associated developments are taking place through European collaboration in education and training under the lifelong learning policy umbrella. These include the higher education reforms associated with the Bologna process; cross-national developments in sectoral qualifications led by social partner cooperation; and the networks of national reference points that are helping to facilitate the international recognition of qualifications and to encourage wider use of tools such as Europass.

The Bologna process

The European process that coordinates the modernisation of universities in the EU and in 17 other signatory countries is widely known as the Bologna process. In Bologna, Italy, in 1999 (some time before the beginnings of the Lisbon process, with which the Bologna process is now closely linked) the EU member states agreed to reform the structures of their own higher education systems. The aim was to create a European higher education area (EHEA). Each signatory country committed itself to national reform in order to bring about an overall convergence in higher education structures at the European level. The drivers for this unanimity are the common internal and external challenges that European higher education systems face in terms of growth, diversity and global status, the employability of graduates and the knowledge and skills challenges faced by European countries.

Two factors are important for this report. Firstly, and perhaps surprisingly, the higher education sector across Europe has been willing to reach a consensus on a move to convergence that other sub-sectors have not sought. Secondly, a number of Mediterranean states are observing the Bologna process closely. The signatories to the Bologna process have agreed to develop a set of linked reforms, to be achieved by 2010. The aim is to create a European space for higher education. These reforms are summarised in Box 6.

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21 The ETF makes this point strongly in its comments on EQF consultation document (ETF, 2006a).

Box 6: Bologna objectives for 2010

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees.

Adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate: this is sub-divided into licence or Bachelor's degree (three years), Master's (one year) and doctorate (three years).

Establishment of a system of credits.

Promotion of mobility through giving rights on free movement and easier access.

Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education.

Source: Adapted from www.EurActiv.com – Bologna Process/EU Information on Education.

The governments involved meet every two years to review progress and agree actions. At the last stocktaking, which was held in London in 2007, it was concluded that the reorganisation of higher education degrees into the new structures is progressing quickly. Sets of specialist and generic competences are also a part of the Bologna reform process. The conclusion reached in this respect was that universities have by and large been slower to give greater priority to learning outcomes, despite the fact that programmes are being reformed, and that curriculum reform should be given more weight.

The London stocktaking also adopted a strategy for the external dimension. Although further expansion of the EHEA is unlikely in the near future, cooperation beyond borders is now very much part of the Bologna agenda. One of the examples of the effects of the Bologna process beyond the borders of the EHEA is its impact in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. All three countries are adapting their higher education systems in a way that is influenced by the Bologna process. Thus, Tunisia has already adopted a higher education act[22] to institutionalise the new structure. Numerous countries in the region are following the Bologna process closely.

The international component of the Bologna process – European Higher Education in a Global Setting – is intended primarily to promote the attractiveness of European higher education. It also has implications that have a significant impact on Mediterranean countries and territories as they reform higher education, as well as on Euro-Mediterranean partnerships.

Developments at sectoral level

In addition to the expectation that the development of NQFs and the EQF in Europe would be complementary, projects linking sectoral qualifications across EU member states have been facilitated by the EU's Leonardo and Lifelong Learning programmes and funded by the EU. It is important to recognise that these projects are a part of EU cooperation that is driven and led by sectoral organisations and stakeholders, rather than by national governments. In the EU, the social partners in particular have a strong voice, and political influence. All these projects now have a link to the implementation of the EQF.

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22   Act No 20081-19.

A few examples suggest the purpose, scope and range of these projects.

- *Car mechanics in the automotive industry*[23]*.* The participants from Germany, Hungary, Poland, Luxembourg and Austria developed and tested a common approach to outcomes-based VET curricula in initial training using occupational standards. The products of the project were linked to EQF levels in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.
- *Work in TV*[24]. The project aimed to support the establishment of a zone of mutual trust to aid mobility and inspire concerted development in training and employment of the Europe's audiovisual sector. The project produced a comparative web-based framework that allows the identification of differences and similarities in professional competences, employability requirements, training offers and practices for TV technical profession in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Germany, France, Ireland and the UK.
- *The European Professional Card Project for Engineers*[25]. 'Engcard' aims to increase and facilitate trans-European mobility of engineers by reducing the impact of an inhibitor – the recognition of professional qualifications. Engcard is still at a developmental stage, and the aims include integrating the Engcard concept with the Europass documentation, resolving quality assurance and IT issues (such as capacity, security and privacy) and developing a prototype that other occupations can use across borders.
- *Tourism*[26]. A project has both compared programmes of study and attempted to align tourism qualifications to the EQF for countries that include Malta, Austria, Italy, Greece, Slovenia and Spain.

Many such initiatives are operating. In character they are led by strong sectoral activity, encouraged by the governments of EU member states and supported by the European Commission. Sectors as diverse as sport and IT have, for example, undertaken a range of initiatives. This is a bottom-up reform initiative that depends on the influence and weight of both employers' organisations and employees' organisations in Europe.

National reference points and mobility tools

Each member state is responsible for its own system of education; moreover, universities enjoy a great deal of autonomy in many EU countries. Thus, no single European agency can have the authority to impose recognition conditions. Instead, particularly for higher education mobility, each member state has a national information centre for the recognition of diplomas (NARIC). NARICs come under the authority of the national government and are jointly funded through EU and national resources. The system of NARICs grew out of increasing levels of cross-country mobility in higher education, and the NARIC network is now one of several official European networks that

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23   See www.amor-project.eu

24   See www.workintv.org/prova.php?n&aim=ang

25   See www.feani.org/ENGCARD/ENGCARDhomepage2.htm

26   The following document provides an overview of a number of sectoral projects of the kind described here: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/eqf/documents/eqf_projects_overview.pdf

are based on national agencies, and provide active knowledge development or collaboration in their area of interest[27].

One of the products of the Lisbon and Bologna processes has been the identification of tools such as the Europass CV, which can facilitate cross-country recognition of an individual's skills and qualifications. Europass is a format that has been agreed by the EU ministers of education. It is intended to help individuals to present their experience and qualifications in a clear way. This is so that employers, education establishments and training providers understand what studies and training have been undertaken, and what has been learnt through experience. At the European level, several specific tools for cross-border recognition have been agreed on. These are listed in Box 7.

Box 7: European mobility tools associated with Europass

Europass CV. This template enables users to highlight their skills, qualifications and work experience. It is completed by the individual.

Europass Language Passport. This enables users to record their language skills and proficiency, using a common European six-point scale. It is completed by the individual.

Europass Mobility. This is used to record the experience and outcomes of a period spent learning or training abroad. It is completed by the individual.

Europass Certificate Supplement. This provides information on vocational training that the individual has completed. It is a supplement to the certificate, and is provided by the awarding body.

Europass Diploma Supplement. This is similar to the Certificate Supplement, but relates to higher education awards. Universities have committed to this as part of the Bologna process.

Source: Adapted from www.naric.org.uk

While Europass and the associated certificates have been agreed at European level, implementation and take-up vary by country. It is accurate to say that if the package of documents linked to Europass is to become the common currency, this will take time.

Cooperation at the Europe level includes working together on a number of other useful tools and approaches, such as the validation of informal and non-formal learning, the identification of key competences and approaches to credit and quality assurance in VET.

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27 EU networks that may be of particular interest in Mediterranean countries and territories are Eurydice (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/Eurydice), which provides information on national education systems and reforms, and ReferNet (www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Projects_Networks/Refernet/default.asp), which provides information on VET systems and their reform.

3.5 Regulated professions in Europe

In Europe, seven occupations fall outside the processes of voluntary collaboration described above because they are subject to EU directives. These regulated professions are doctor, dentist, nurse, veterinarian, pharmacist, midwife and architect. These are the so-called automatic recognition professions. The directive[28] requires member states to fulfil minimum training conditions that are set out in the directive so that the appropriate medical or professional bodies in each country guarantee that the basic conditions for achieving a diploma or qualification are satisfied. The result is that each member state recognises qualifications gained in other countries as sufficient for professional entry at the appropriate level.

There is a further area in which EU directives come into play: some occupations require the entrant to have a minimum diploma or qualification as a licence to practise. However, this does not establish any system of equivalence or recognition. For the occupations concerned the mobile worker has to ascertain whether the EU country of destination recognises the qualification that they hold, through NARIC or the responsible national agency.

In the 1960s and 1970s top-down attempts were made through specialist European cooperation to achieve a single and coherent system for the recognition of technical and vocational qualifications in trade, industry and craft between member states. Although the EU consisted of less than half the present number of member states, this attempt to provide a definitive centralised catalogue of cross-European equivalences proved to be too complex and unwieldy, and was impossible to implement.

The current approach of voluntary collaboration on the part of governments and bottom-up developments that are being led by the social partners in particular sectors seem to be more realistic and useful. In other words, developments based on the idea of building zones of mutual trust are proving to be more fruitful than earlier attempts at preparing top-down catalogues covering all occupations.

The international recognition of qualifications gained in the Mediterranean region is an important theme of this report. This raises a number of questions. What changes and reforms will be needed to systems and frameworks for qualifications in each country? How can sectoral qualification reform in the region form international linkages? How can international points of reference be established for recognising the skills of migrant workers, and the skills base of national labour markets to attract inward investment?

3.6 Euro-Mediterranean partnership

A deepening Euro-Mediterranean partnership should in time help to provide answers to some of these questions.

The factors and pressures described in Chapter 2 and the current chapter have all contributed to developments that have strengthened – or, in some cases, have the potential to strengthen – the partnerships between Europe and the countries and territories to the south and east of the Mediterranean. Since the mid 1990s an official

28   EC directive on the recognition of professional qualifications, 2005/36/EC.

process has been underway at interregional level, though progress has sometimes been rather slow. Some developments are bilateral, while other potentially important developments are taking place at regional level. The European Commission and governments in the region have linked the EU member states and countries and territories in the Mediterranean region through the Barcelona process of Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

The intergovernmental determination to set up a deeper Euro-Mediterranean partnership was agreed at a ministerial process in Barcelona in 1995[29]. The Barcelona declaration was intended to lead to an on-going process to establish a comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean partnership, so that the Mediterranean would become a common area characterised by peace, stability and prosperity. The means for this are identified as the reinforcement of political dialogue and security, economic and financial partnership, and cultural, social and human partnership. In the early stages, social, cultural and human partnership referred prominently to intercultural dialogue.

The Barcelona process is not intended to replace bilateral arrangements but to strengthen them and to provide a comprehensive regional approach. Dialogue and agreement are the chosen mechanisms. In part, this is because aspects such as levels of extra-EU migration, the recognition of skills and the development of education and social policies lie with governments and nations, not with the European Commission. In 2005 the Barcelona Summit set up an agreed five-year work programme.

Before the 2008 French Presidency of the EU made the development of the Mediterranean partnership one of its identified priorities, a Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference identified key themes for continuing cooperation[30]. The ministerial conference emphasised the continuing need for a comprehensive and integrated approach, but highlighted the need for improved practical cooperation at the regional level. This seems to suggest some difficulties in moving to practical applications on the part of countries to both the north and the south of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean ministers placed emphasis, among other things, on the contribution that migration makes to economic and social development. They agreed that building an institutional framework for the management of the flow of migrants would require an improvement in capacity in aspects such as vocational training projects. The ministerial conclusions dealt with topics such as remittances, micro-credit opportunities and illegal migration. Surprisingly, however, the opportunities for improved recognition of skills and qualifications – which is high on the European Commission agenda for lifelong learning – has not appeared specifically on the agenda of the Barcelona process (now Union for the Mediterranean).

The ETF has commented (2007) that, in line with the potential labour and skill shortages in some EU member states, a gradual policy change is taking place towards the legal recruitment of migrants in response to European labour market needs. However, in the Barcelona process the human resources element of recognising skills and qualifications for mobility in the labour market has received limited attention.

29　For a summary of the Barcelona Declaration and process, see
　　 http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/index_en.htm

30　Adapted from Portuguese EU Presidency–Euromed, 2007.

The meeting of labour ministers in Marrakech, Morocco, in November 2008 could result in this item being pushed higher up the policy agenda. If so, the benefits will be positive. The key new themes of the partnership are an integrated approach to migration, creating more decent jobs in the region, and enhancing the investment in human capital, training and employability. There is particular emphasis on giving priority to education system reforms and to demand-driven VET that is responsive to the needs of the labour market. There is a focus on young people and on creating quality TVET that is attractive to young people and their families. An agreed initiative is to develop with the EU a blue card scheme that will enable highly skilled immigrants to take jobs in skills-shortage sectors of the labour market.

Similarly, the Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation strand has foreseen the implementation of a Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise.

3.7 Conclusion

There is a clear opportunity and need to deepen Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in order to embrace more fully the movement of services and people, as well as goods and production. If this is to progress, with a concomitant opening up of labour markets, it is first of all necessary that Mediterranean countries and territories successfully give priority to improving the quality and recognition of their own qualifications and the systems or frameworks in which they are situated.

4. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

4.1 Introduction

There is no doubt that governments and stakeholders in the region – in common with those in countries in other parts of the world – are facing strong pressures to reform their education and training systems. This chapter reports on aspects of reforms that are being planned or implemented in the region. These reforms are closely connected to the powerful economic and social drivers highlighted in Chapter 2.

This chapter suggests that certain aspects of education and training strategy are well placed to create coherence between the economic and social drivers, the wider international context and particular reform programmes. This is the motivation that lies behind national attempts to achieve improved recognition of qualifications from the different sub-sectors, and to link qualifications achieved through general education, higher education and VET.

Furthermore, governments and stakeholders are seeking ways to align qualifications with the needs of the labour market, particularly – though not exclusively – in TVET. This involves tasks such as describing qualifications according to learning outcomes, not just inputs; creating a view of how different qualifications fit together to form a coherent picture; putting into place measures for quality assurance and transparency; and developing partnerships with users such as employers to design new qualifications. Together these can lead to a situation in which the qualifications are more transparent, more highly valued and more portable.

Following from this, the main argument of the report is that the careful development of tools such as an NQF can, potentially, be useful. An NQF can be a tool that (i) helps to achieve the tasks set out in the previous paragraph, and (ii) makes a significant contribution to achieving national and international recognition for a country's qualifications. For this reason, NQF developments form the pivot around which this chapter revolves.

4.2 Pressures on qualifications systems in the Mediterranean region

At the end of 2006, Jean Gordon drafted a report for the ETF (Gordon, 2007) synthesising key issues that had arisen from the ETF's work with a wide range of countries and territories in the region concerning the recognition of their qualifications. The prominent issues identified were:

- developing progression routes;
- improving access to learning opportunities and skills recognition;
- creating more flexibility;
- ensuring transparency, quality assurance and the relevance of qualifications, particularly to employment situations.

Box 8 summarises the pressures on qualifications systems in the region.

Box 8: Identified pressures on qualifications systems

Developing coherent *progression* routes that allow people to build on the qualifications they already have in order to move to the higher level.

Improving *access* to learning and qualifications to enable individuals to undertake further learning in order to develop their knowledge, skills and competences; improve their employability; and have their acquired competences validated. Depending on the country, developing access has also focused on gender issues and on specific groups of the population which tended to face major obstacles and barriers to learning, obtaining recognised qualifications and entering (or seeking to return to) the labour market.

Developing *flexibility* to allow people (young people and adults) who have left the school system to access training and qualifications more easily. It is a question of entitling adults to learn in ways which take account of their work and life constraints.

Reflecting on how best to ensure *transparency* among the different types of diplomas and/or certificates which exist in any given country so that people can more easily access higher level or specialist qualifications. This may include aligning qualifications to a set of reference levels that allow individuals, employers, training providers, etc. to locate where specific qualifications fit in relation to others.

Establishing criteria and procedures for ensuring the *quality* of the qualifications that may be issued by different ministries or bodies. Quality is important for building trust in the system and contributes to improving the image of VET.

Improving the links between learning and the labour market in order to ensure the *relevance* of the qualifications provided.

Source: Gordon, 2007.

Tunisia's national consultation on employment (2008) has been exploring the role of diplomas and qualifications in the light of the specific challenges that the country faces in improving competitiveness and combating unemployment. The consultation report reaches conclusions that are consistent with the tasks outlined in Box 8. Diagnosing the challenges facing employment in Tunisia as multidimensional, the report[31] identifies three key factors.

1. The economy is not creating sufficient numbers of new jobs.
2. Large numbers of people who seek jobs still do not have the qualifications profile needed and, even if they appear to have the right qualifications, many do not have the appropriate skills and competences.
3. The operation of the labour market shows clear signs of malfunction, and the supply and demand sides for labour are not well balanced.

In the case of Tunisia, where serious attempts have been made for some years to tackle the second of these challenges in order to alleviate labour market mismatches, several reasons are set out to explain why the qualifications of job seekers and the needs of the labour market are not well matched. Firstly, education and training processes are not always linked to employability. Young people often lack basic competences, as shown in the PISA results. In general, neither learners nor teachers have good links with enterprises. This is not so much the case in TVET, where the challenge is to raise the status of qualifications and open up pathways for graduates. Secondly, reforms are not implemented systematically, and hence, reform objectives are not achieved. Thirdly, social values perpetuate a high degree of separation between education and training, ascribing low status to the latter.

In Egypt, the task force preparing the ground for the development of an NQF identified a range of current qualifications weaknesses[32] that need to be addressed. These are shown in Box 9.

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31 Consultation has now been completed but the report has not yet been published in full. Hence, the information is taken from the intermediate report. The points that follow are the current author's translation from the French.

32 It should be noted that since the task force identified these weaknesses, originally for a concept paper for an NQF for Egypt, an accreditation and quality assurance board, NAQAAE, has been established and has begun to work energetically.

Box 9: Egypt – Weaknesses in the existing qualifications systems

Progression. Few possibilities for progression exist for many people, especially from the vocational to the academic routes. Furthermore, there are few opportunities to obtain recognised qualifications outside formal education.

Access. Access to qualifications is limited for many potentially successful learners, because there is no recognition of previous learning through experience. In particular, fewer women than men are able to gain access to education, especially in rural areas.

Transparency. Equivalence of qualifications is governed by validation procedures for certificates which are carried out on an individual basis, for example through a single ministry. There is as yet no unified or coherent national system for accrediting educational and TVET certificates, and no system that is based on transparency or learning outcomes.

Quality. Until now, limited efforts have been made to develop strong standards of performance. Current systems of quality assurance of educational institutions are limited to the supervision of the ministries to which they are affiliated. There is also a lack of data that could be used to indicate education quality.

Relevance. Major mismatches exist between the knowledge, skills and competences of young people who have obtained TVET qualifications, and the requirements of enterprises. There are no accepted mechanisms for modernising education and training programmes, or for adjusting them to labour market and wider social needs.

Source: ETF, 2008a.

While no two countries typify the region as a whole, the cases of Egypt and Tunisia illustrate the kinds of challenges that qualifications reform is expected to contribute to resolving in the Mediterranean region. These are, of course, quite similar to challenges that other countries face; the context varies, as does the severity of the challenges, but the nature of the challenges is fundamentally similar.

To summarise, and to look at the challenges from a wider angle, it is worth thinking about reforming systems and improving the recognition of qualifications from several policy perspectives.

An important aspect of research and policy development relates skills development to poverty reduction. While the relationship is complex, there is now consensus that poverty reduction needs to be understood in a multidimensional way (World Bank, 2000). In a recent conceptual paper for the ETF, King and Palmer (2007) argue that three factors differentiate between distinctive national and donor approaches. The first factor is the basic approach to tackling poverty: the distinction is made between alleviating poverty, lifting people out of poverty and preventing poverty. Secondly, King and Palmer point out that there is a well-established shift in the framing of policy, from technical skills imbued through tradition and narrow VET curricula to a wider concentration on broad skills such as communication and IT skills, interpersonal skills and learning-to-learn competences. Yet many systems still concentrate on the traditional mode and often these ideas about reform are not carried through into practice in education and training settings. Thirdly, the emphasis on skills acquisition is more appropriately placed on the productive capacities

that a person acquires through courses, programmes and experience, rather than on the education/training curriculum or programme. In other words, the central focus is on the learner.

The relationship between changing employment opportunities and education and training reforms is an important element in this complex situation. The ETF has recently reported (Bardak et al., 2007) on the current situation. The report points out in particular that the private sector is growing, yet the education and training systems have by and large not been successful in meeting the new skills needs. In addition, the traditional linkage between government employment and achieving graduate status has weakened, so that many graduates lack appropriate skills and find it difficult to gain employment. As the number of graduates increases rapidly, this creates a serious problem that has to be tackled. Furthermore, the large informal sectors of the economy that exist in many countries are little affected by training opportunities. This is in national contexts where a lack of continuing training provision is a deep-seated weakness. The ETF does not consider that the massive expansion of education, particularly elementary education, has led to a reduction in standards. 'The challenge remains, however, to build comprehensive and interwoven strategies that coordinate different policy areas (labour, economy, education and training, social policy, etc.) in the countries of the region' (Bardak et al., 2007, p. 7).

4.3 Continuing training, adult education and skills development in the informal sector – Opportunities and recognition

4.3.1 Continuing training

Providing a clear picture of continuing training programmes and participation in the Mediterranean countries and territories is a challenging task, since there is often simply no data on continuing training programmes. An exception is the information on programmes funded through in-service training schemes in Maghreb countries. The ETF research on continuing training systems in Maghreb countries (ETF, 2003) identifies four main issues: under-investment, access, and quality and certification.

For almost all countries and territories, clear policies and/or permanent instruments for promoting continuing training are still absent. This is particularly the case for countries and territories in the Middle East, where some new initiatives for the setting up of training funds in Jordan and Egypt are expected to contribute to increased continuing training opportunities for employees. For the Maghreb countries, questions on the current state of play are less concerned with the development of new instruments and more with the clarification and strategic implementation of the measures that already exist, and with ensuring that the system in place fulfils both short-term objectives towards competitiveness of enterprises in an area of 'free trade' and the longer-term objectives of economic and social development.

Few enterprises in the three Maghreb countries undertake in-service training for workers[33]. For example in Morocco, the funding mechanism (contrats spéciaux de formation) benefited around 1,450 companies in 2007 (less than 2% of private companies) while in Tunisia the tax rebate (taxe de la formation professionnelle) and the national programme for continuing training (PRONAFOC) benefited 2,024 and 3,730 enterprises respectively (less than 1% of private companies). Some enterprises have benefited from both mechanisms.

In Algeria the Fund for the Development of Apprenticeship and Continuing Training (FNAC), supports public and private enterprises in the design and implementation of continuing training in a number of sectors that have priority for the national economy, such as the construction, energy and chemical sectors.

In Egypt private business organisations have taken the initiative to overcome the dominance of supply-driven training. For example, the Tourism Federation has set up a human resource and training department that has developed a more demand-driven approach to continuing training. The department is providing continuing training for employees in this industry (Seyfried, 2008).

After a long tradition of protectionism, the link between the development of human resources and enterprise competitiveness is not yet understood by all enterprises in the Mediterranean countries and territories. The ETF research shows that participation in continuing training is still unequal, favouring those with higher levels of educational attainment and those working in larger firms. It also highlights the fact that a tax rebate, where it exists, is not a strong incentive for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), since the training tax they pay is small and would only partially cover the costs of training. In spite of these drawbacks, in Maghreb countries the recent reforms of tax rebate schemes have been designed to encourage greater participation on the part of SMEs, and to promote training for low-skilled adults, particularly through 'sectoral' training activities led in partnership with employers' associations.

Turning to the issue of quality control, the ETF research indicates that there is a need for quality assurance and programme assessment and evaluation beyond the current administrative control. In Morocco a new system for accreditation of training providers was introduced in 2007. In Tunisia training providers operate in a free market with an obligation to conform to specific standards in their operations.

Greater emphasis on financial incentives and on policies for opening up training opportunities for low-skilled individuals and for SMEs is a major policy challenge for all Mediterranean countries and territories. Another policy issue is the time scale (and resource base) for establishing a credible structure to certificate learning and competence outcomes of the continuing training for the individual. In this respect, both the future development of NQFs and the experimental projects on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Tunisia and Morocco can help the development of a lifelong learning perspective.

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33   Less than 2% of enterprises in Morocco and 1% in Tunisia.

4.3.2   Adult education

Faced with the challenge of high rates of adult illiteracy, most Mediterranean countries and territories have initiated ambitious non-formal adult education programmes targeting those who have not benefitted from formal instruction and those who left it early. Most countries in the region have made substantial progress in reducing illiteracy, though the problem is still significant, and adult education is still seen in terms of stand-alone campaigns that do not fit into a lifelong learning perspective.

A background report (Yousif, 2009) for the regional conference on adult learning and education held in Tunis in early 2009 synthesised the key issues in the Arab world and stressed the absence of viable national strategies for dealing with adult education in Arab countries. The report noted (p. 24):

> '[…] the quality of provision is generally low. There are various reasons given. Some relate to the social and economic conditions of learners; but the major deficit is attributed to inputs and processes, including untrained and unremunerated teachers, substandard facilities, one-size-fits-all curricula, didactic methodology, little application of ICTs, and no effective mechanism for quality control, benchmarking or regular monitoring and evaluation. There is an increasing obsession with numbers – how many come to classes and how many stay till the end. There is not much concern about whether those who stay have really learned something, or for what purpose they use what they have learned.'

This conclusion is informative in respect of the quality of adult education and the necessary focus on learning outcomes of this type of programme. It also provides some indication of the gaps regarding the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through these programmes, and the weak link and absence of pathways to formal education and training.

4.3.3   Skills development in the informal sector

In all countries and territories in the region there is a long tradition of skill development through informal or traditional apprenticeships. In countries such as Egypt these informal apprenticeships still represent the main training route for some sectors and occupations, including crafts, the construction sector, retail trade, garment making and repair, and automobile maintenance. A recent ETF study of work-based learning (Sweet, 2009, p. 29) concluded:

> 'Informal apprenticeships typically take place entirely within the workplace and do not involve any complementary classroom-based education or training. They exist without any formal contract, lead to no qualification, and are of unlimited duration without defined stages. In nearly all countries data on the extent of these informal apprenticeships do not exist.'

The same research notes that some limited quality assurance does exist in one or two cases. For example in Syria the Crafts Union checks that standards accord with those of the relevant crafts association and recognises those meeting these standards. In 1993 the Tunisian government developed a series of measures to improve the terms of engagement of traditional apprenticeships, for example by requiring contracts to be

signed and off-the-job training to be undertaken, but in practice the extent of such upgrading has remained limited (ETF–World Bank, 2006). In other countries – for example Algeria and Morocco – the extension of formal apprenticeships to sectors such as crafts and agriculture that have traditionally used informal apprenticeships has been a notable recent policy initiative.

4.4 Current reforms in education and training in the region

Before turning specifically to the national and international recognition of qualifications of countries and territories of the Mediterranean region, and to the question of NQFs, it is worth surveying some of the reform strategies and programmes that are underway. Some of these are at the macro level, generating reforms across the whole of a national system, while others are targeted at specific groups or communities. Some are generated and supported in-country, while others have international donor support. The focus of reforms also varies: the point of concentration may, for example, be teaching and learning, curriculum, assessment, teacher training, quality assurance or governance.

In general few Mediterranean countries or territories have developed systemic and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. Education systems in most states only allow limited opportunities for individuals to progress from VET to other sub-systems and to acquire more knowledge and skills if they have dropped out, or after they have completed their formal degree or started work. There follow descriptions of reforms in general education, VET and higher education.

General education

One major characteristic of general education reforms in the Mediterranean region is the 'massification' of education, as highlighted by the significant increase in enrolment at different levels starting from basic education. Enrolment in primary education has become almost universal across the region, for both boys and girls (Bardak et al., 2007; World Bank, 2008). In almost all countries and territories the introduction of compulsory basic education and new curriculum development and assessment were key endeavours. Curriculum reforms have identified the basic knowledge sets for each level of instruction and have led to the development of important programmes for teacher training combined with promotion schemes for teachers based on seniority and qualifications (World Bank, 2008). Boxes 10–12 describe a number of general education reforms in Tunisia, Syria and Egypt.

Box 10: Selected reforms in general education in Tunisia

Reforms include:

- placing the student at the core of the educational process;
- mastering new technologies;
- applying the principle of professionalism in teaching;
- focusing on educational institutions as the basic cell in the education system;
- emphasising principles of equal opportunity and fairness between regions and schools;
- modernising the education system and improving its performance and capacity to meet the current needs of Tunisian society.

In terms of curricula, the reform focuses on a competence-based approach that concentrates on knowledge, skills and attitudes, with specific emphasis on the core skills of reading, writing and numeracy. The new competence-based curriculum has been generalised at the primary level and is being adopted in upper basic and secondary education. The other components of the reforms cover:

- revising length of schooling, orientations and subjects;
- setting standards for each level according to international norms;
- establishing the competences required for entering active life and pursuing studies in secondary education, vocational education and higher education;
- establishing secondary education sections and flows between the different branches, and determining school orientation mechanisms;
- developing curricula for the second cycle of basic education according to the requirements of the competence-based approach, and developing related textbooks/teaching aids;
- developing secondary education curricula and related textbooks/teaching aids.

Source: Adapted from 'The New Education Reform in Tunisia' (Republic of Tunisia, 2002).

Box 11: Selected reforms in general education in Syria

Strategy

- Giving priority to the development of human resources sectors through government investment.
- Underlining the necessity of implementing a national policy for technical and vocational training and linking this with job opportunities and the state educational policy for the purpose of creating a consolidated environment that encourages the increase of strategic investment in human resources and skills development.
- Increasing the contribution of the private sector in education.
- Applying a new policy for developing human resources in the civil services and public sector.
- Implementing a national programme for quality that stipulates the development of human resources in private establishments.

Policies and work plan

- The reform will review the educational process to ensure that it contributes to the development of Syrian citizens who understand their rights and obligations in an atmosphere of diversity and democracy, arming them with critical and independent insight to enable them to interact with the new economic, socio-political and cultural life.
- The reform will also be linked to adopting a new relationship between academic institutions and production and services establishments in both the private and public sectors, in such a way that research and development play an appropriate role in increasing the competitiveness of the Syrian economy. This will be based on drawing up a national scientific and technological strategy.
- A policy will be adopted to link the eradication of illiteracy and non-standard education programmes with the policy of developing skills and the labour market. Programmes to raise public awareness will be adopted and consolidated, based on participation in gradual changes in social practices and traditions that hinder the development of human resources.

Box 12: Selected reforms in general education in Egypt

The Egyptian government has set up 12 priority programmes that are expected to have positive outcomes and impacts on the education system during the next five years.

1. *Comprehensive curriculum and instructional technology.* To enhance the quality of the curricula, instructional technology and teaching methodology and to maximise the use of such technology to achieve high-quality education.

2. *School-based reform, accreditation and accountability.* To adopt a performance-based approach that will enhance the quality assurance and accountability of school management. The main theme is to support schools to fulfil all the requirements for accreditation through relevant authorities.

3. *Human resources and professional development.* To establish professional development management systems, effective incentives and career ladders to improve the supply and quality of qualified teachers and administrators.

4. *Institutionalisation of decentralisation.* To support the institutional capacity of the education system to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of systems through decentralisation.

5. *Technological development and information systems.* To develop and install the ICT infrastructure and technical support needed to implement and sustain modern pedagogy and effective education management and planning.

6. *Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system.* To establish an independent system to evaluate the performance of all educational entities.

7. *School construction.* To build the required number of classrooms and achieve the decentralisation of school construction and maintenance systems in order to ensure equality of access and quality.

8. *Early childhood education.* To provide quality education for children (aged four to five years) that will reach a gross enrolment rate of 60% by the end of the plan.

9. *Basic education reform.* To establish universal enrolment in basic education that will reach a gross enrolment rate of 100% by the end of the plan.

10. *Modernisation of secondary education.* To modernise secondary education and achieve a balance in enrolment between general and technical secondary education by the end of the plan.

11. *Education for girls and out-of-school children.* To expand the establishment of community schools/classrooms for girls and out-of-schools children.

12. *Education for special groups – children with special needs.* To provide quality and equitable educational opportunities to ensure the inclusion of 10% of children with special needs in mainstream basic education schools by the end of the plan.

Source: Adapted from the National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt 2007/08–2011/12.

QUALIFICATIONS THAT COUNT: STRENGTHENING THE RECOGNITION OF
QUALIFICATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

ETF (Bardak et al., 2007) and World Bank (2008) analyses reveal a number of
issues regarding general education systems in the Mediterranean region. Firstly, the
challenges for almost all Mediterranean countries and territories is to go beyond creating
a mass education system for all to creating a modern education system capable of coping
with increased globalisation and technological innovations worldwide. Secondly, drop-out
rates are significant in most countries: nearly 5 million children aged 6–10 and another
4 million children aged 11–15 were out of school in 1995. Thirdly, Mediterranean
countries and territories are lagging behind in international assessments such as TIMSS:
the average score for Mediterranean countries and territories is below the world average,
and well below that of the top performers.

Vocational education and training

Most of the countries in the region are making substantial efforts to reform their VET
systems in order to shift them from a second-choice option for school drop-outs to a more
complex role that includes addressing the skills required by economies wishing to
integrate into the world market. These efforts include the following:

- a huge investment in VET centres to modernise equipment and to train trainers;
  new VET schools have been built to provide qualified workers mainly for new
  emerging sectors such as telecommunications and ICT;
- a progressive involvement of employers and employers' organisations in the
  definition of their needs in terms of qualifications; in a few countries (Tunisia,
  Morocco, Egypt) an effort has been made to empower employers' organisations to
  undertake this new role;
- a slow shift from input-based training to outcome-based training through the
  introduction of competence-based training, mainly in the Maghreb region (Algeria,
  Morocco and Tunisia);
- an emphasis on work-based training, whether through well-established
  programmes (apprenticeships), or small pilot programmes (dual system and
  alternance); these schemes still depend on support from donor agencies for their
  continued existence and viability (Sweet, 2009).

***Box 13: Selected reforms in vocational education and training in Syria –
Adopting a national policy for training and skill development***

A new training system will be adopted, to be administered by a supreme national commission that comprises the state and the private sector. It will provide the new skills and capacities required for production and service establishments in order to increase productivity and competitiveness and to create a new strategic perspective for training and education.

The new training system will include preliminary programmes (prior to entry into the labour market) and in-service programmes, in addition to special programmes targeting specific classes and areas.

These developments will be linked to the establishment of a national system of training and certification in accordance with specific criteria for practising jobs and professions in line with international standards.

There will be an emphasis on qualifying the working force, developing information technology systems and providing an advanced communication infrastructure that is appropriate to all sectors of development.

The training policy will be targeted at improving scientific capabilities in order to better provide the social and technical infrastructure based on cost calculation and maximal exploitation of revenues.

The training policy will strive to increase the quantity and improve the quality of medium-level skills.

Efforts will be concentrated on the area of production through the provision of training programmes at public and private establishments and the upgrading of the level of qualifications and training of staff who have access to the programmes.

The new training will depend on an advanced database that will allow strategic planning for skills development. This will be based on the collection, analysis and distribution of data that describe the quality of the newly established labour and vocational market, which requires qualifications and training to replace the old trades which require prequalification to suit market requirements.

The newly established training policy and its advanced informatics system will be linked to operational services. This should lead to innovation within the traditional operating and staffing systems and the eradication of unemployment, thus providing a number of back-up services through cooperation between the state and the private sector.

A new national programme will be relevant for the transformation of private establishments. The programme includes the development of human resources through the granting of qualification certificates according to international standards for establishments that show progress in their administrative, financial and human resources performance.

There will be training establishments that will specialise in fulfilling the requirements of the labour market, and particularly those of the private sector, for new and improved skills and expertise.

The tenth five-year plan will require a great deal of joint effort in training to upgrade human resources standards at private institutions.

Source: Adapted from the Tenth Five-Year Plan 2006–10, Syrian government (English translation).

Box 14: Selected reforms in vocational education and training in Egypt – Modernisation of secondary education

The modernisation of secondary education is part of the national strategic plan for the reform of pre-university education that has already been mentioned in the previous section. The major aim is to reach a balance between enrolments in general and technical education secondary education. This will be achieved through the following actions:

- transforming general and technical secondary education systems into an open system based on current global trends;
- modernising the secondary education curriculum;
- achieving a paradigm shift in pedagogy;
- enhancing the quality of secondary education students;
- providing professional development for secondary teachers;
- building the institutional capacity of secondary schools;
- improving the general secondary education certification system;
- improving the examination and assessment system of technical secondary education;
- integrating specialisation into technical secondary education;
- integrating vocational secondary schools into technical secondary schools;
- providing innovative models to be the bases for future technical secondary education.

Source: Adapted from the National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform in Egypt 2007/08–2011/12.

Despite the efforts of the governments of the region to modernise VET systems, many issues remain unresolved and are hampering the development of these systems. They mainly relate to governance, financing, quality and qualifications.

Higher education

The recent reforms in higher education in Mediterranean countries and territories can be summarised as follows:

- the expansion in enrolments;
- the incorporation of the main features of the Bologna process, and more particularly the Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) system and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS);
- the development of tertiary education;
- the expansion of private higher education provision;
- the development of university-industry partnerships;
- the establishment of quality assurance systems, including the setting up of new bodies in charge of accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes.

In recent years national frameworks have been envisaged for the accreditation of higher education institutions in Egypt, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan and Syria. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) is already operational. In Egypt the National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAA) started its operations in 2007, while in Syria the respective Law No 36 of 2007 has been adopted and has recently come into force.

> ***Box 15: Selected reforms in higher education in Tunisia***
>
> The Tunisia Higher Education Reform aims to develop the higher education system by increasing the capacity and efficiency in respect of expanding access and improving the quality of education and institutional performance. The main expected results are:
>
> - increased access to public higher education through the introduction of new pathways and programmes linked to the needs of the labour market and built in partnership with enterprises;
> - modernisation of the higher education system by strengthening quality assurance mechanisms, institutional autonomy and financial sustainability through the introduction of new financial management rules and accountability systems;
> - improved academic quality and institutional performance through the improvement of teachers' pedagogical skills.

A major issue facing almost all Mediterranean countries and territories is the growing unemployment rates among higher education graduates, indicating a clear mismatch between supply and demand and growing concerns about the balance between growth and quality. The ETF report on employment policies in the Mediterranean region (Bardak et al., 2007, p. 16) notes:

> 'Unemployment rates, which are generally high across the MENA region, largely affect young and well-educated potential entrants to the labour market. […] educated young people typically prefer to await jobs in the formal and public sectors, which offer better wages and more generous non-wage benefits. Growing numbers of well-educated young people combined with a stagnation in public sector employment have both increased the waiting times for formal jobs and generated high youth unemployment rates.'

4.5 Experience of developing national qualifications frameworks to link different qualifications

So far this report has set out a series of contexts, drivers and policies that need to be brought into a dynamic relationship if countries and territories in the region are to tackle key economic and social challenges. An important part of this complex task is to prepare people who have the knowledge, adaptability and skills that are needed in changing labour markets and increasingly knowledge-based communities. Thus, one task is to find ways in which qualifications perform a sharper role in mediating between the labour market, economic and social needs and the knowledge, skills and capabilities that people develop and attain as they learn in different settings.

All the stakeholders need to create a situation in which the available qualifications and the qualifications that people possess are fit for purpose. This is at the heart of the question of the recognition of qualifications. Achieving effective recognition of qualifications is a widely shared policy objective.

Developing an NQF appears to be a very useful tool for achieving this objective.

An ETF review of NQFs development describes the specific purposes of an NQF in
the following terms (ETF, 2006b):

- to establish national standards of knowledge, skills and wider competences;
- to promote the quality of education and training provision;
- to provide a system of coordination and for comparing qualifications by relating
  qualifications to each other;
- to promote and maintain procedures for access to learning, transfer of learning
  and progression in learning.

This logic is taken a step further in the document summarizing the ETF regional
conference on NQFs in the Mediterranean region[34] (ETF, 2008b, p. 20).

'National qualification frameworks or NQFs allow you to link existing
qualifications of different levels and types in a coherent and consistent way,
based on a common set of descriptions and criteria. Putting this superstructure
into place allows you to see what different qualifications really mean and
how they compare. They also help trace learning pathways people can follow
throughout their lives. No matter how far you get, the process of discussing
NQFs inevitably leads you to review all the key elements of your country's
VET system – how they relate to other parts of the system and how they feed
into the labour market.'

It is also reflected in the statements describing developments in each of the four
countries that are seeking to develop NQFs with the facilitating support of the ETF (as
described in Box 16).

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34   The conference was held in Rabat, Morocco, in November 2008.

Box 16: Why Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are developing an NQF

Egypt needs to update its qualification system to keep up with the fast pace of change in the Egyptian labour market and the wider economy. With the help of the ETF, the country aims to use the NQF as a way of moving from a traditional input-based model of education to something better able to cope with changing skill needs.

Jordan wishes to make its workforce more competitive and is striving to boost the quality and relevance of its outputs to the labour market with this aim in mind.

Morocco sees building an NQF as a way of revamping its entire education system. The ongoing debate with the EU on special status for Morocco has given greater urgency to this work. It is hoped it will bring greater coherence to the system by establishing pathways between the three sub-systems – vocational training, general education and higher education – and increasing the readability of Moroccan qualifications nationally, through the region and further afield.

Tunisia sees the NQF as a means of increasing the coherence, readability and quality of its human resources system and encouraging lifelong learning. These issues are at the heart of the reforms currently under way in vocational training and higher education. Growing mobility of labour as a result of free trade agreements between Tunisia and the EU has provided a second, more pressing reason for the mutual recognition of qualifications.

Source: ETF, 2008c.

The United Arab Emirates is another country that is developing a qualifications framework. The consultation document (Qualifications Framework Project, 2008) describes the development of an NQF as an important part of a multipronged strategy to create an open and inclusive learning environment in which every individual's learning is valued and recognised, leading to a highly knowledgeable and skilled society that can cope well in a competitive world.

Where countries and territories in the region are developing an NQF, there is also agreement about the broad concept for the architecture of a framework. This is described in Egypt's concept paper for the NQF as follows.

'There appear to be three main elements that are common to all NQFs. These are:

- a series of reference levels describing types of skill and knowledge contained in various qualifications;
- a set of quality assurance principles to guide implementers and developers of qualifications;
- methods for recognising learning gained in different programmes and contexts.'

Other factors are also important. In particular, the involvement of a range of stakeholders in developing and implementing a national qualification framework is vital in the development and use of a framework that is more than merely a formal classification. This is not only a question of consultation on the part of government ministries. It is a question of stakeholders, in particularly the social partners, taking on new responsibilities. This issue is taken up as a key part of further analysis in Chapter 5.

All four countries involved in the current ETF Mediterranean region NQF project are working largely through the medium of their own national policies and stakeholder partnerships, using their own developing expertise in aspects such as the reform of general and higher education qualifications. Expertise gained in finding ways to make TVET qualifications more responsive to the actual and future needs of the labour market has a particularly influential role. The ETF has appointed a local expert to coordinate the project in each country, and two European experts across the four countries. Essentially, a peer learning approach has developed across the four countries for the actors involved.

This brings to bear a powerful range of evidence and perspectives. Knowledge of international theory, research and developments combine with local knowledge and experience to provide a considerable evidence base for developments in each country. The national involvement also ensures that, from the start, ministries and other stakeholders are involved in a collaborative, developmental process.

At the time when this report was prepared (end of 2008), each country had a similar objective: to create a single NQF. Furthermore, each country is developing in its own way and at its own speed on account of local circumstances. Box 17 summarises developments as at the end of 2008.

Box 17: NQF development – State of play in the ETF project countries (end of 2008)

Egypt. A wide range of stakeholders is working on the road map for an NQF. A task force representing ministries and important stakeholders from several areas (including employment sectors) is working to develop a provisional framework into which all qualifications will fit. The appropriate number of levels and the broad descriptors for learning outcomes are currently being formulated. Three general descriptors have been road-tested: knowledge, skills and competences. In a country with complex government structures such as Egypt, a cooperating steering body with top-level involvement that is capable of garnering strong political support and clear leadership is needed if the NQF is to succeed.

Jordan. An NQF forms part of the national strategy, and is consistent with nationally agreed plans for social and economic development. Moves to develop an NQF began in 2006 when a technical team representing the education and training sector and the private sector was set up. There is limited direct experience of qualifications frameworks, so a step-by-step approach has been adopted. The approach is first of all to develop a framework for TVET qualifications using the tourism sector as a pilot. The team has developed a provisional seven-level NQF using three broad descriptors. It was expected to pass the results to the Employment and TVET Council by the end of 2008 for endorsement; this will produce a TVET qualifications framework and should be a major step towards the development of an NQF.

Morocco. A working group formed by the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training began work in 2007. There were initial delays while other ministries and social partners became involved. Using mainly occupational and skills profiles developed in other projects, the working group has designed a framework with seven levels of qualification using six broad descriptors. This is work in progress, and much remains to be done in terms of wider consultation, securing political agreement and consensus, and communication.

Tunisia. An NQF is being planned and developed for the whole of the education system. The 2008 VET legislation gives the NQF its place in the institutional landscape. A working party representing key stakeholders has developed a design for NQF comprising seven levels and a set of descriptors. The descriptors are known as CARA (complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability): in addition to the knowledge and skills categories, CARA brings into the framework different levels of complexity, autonomy, responsibility and adaptability. See Table 2. Existing qualifications have been fitted into the levels of the grid, and tests for coherence have been undertaken. A presidential decree on the NQF is being prepared.

Source: Adapted from the national peer reviews.

It can be seen from Box 17 that the countries involved have much in common in terms of the developments that are underway. Yet there are significant differences in the particular developments and the phase of development reached. Other countries such as the United Arab Emirates are taking their own steps, and several other countries in the region appear to be enthusiastic about setting out on the road to developing their own NQF.

Within the ETF project, NQF developments in Tunisia are the most advanced in terms of both policy and technical aspects. The CARA approach referred to above is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Tunisia's NQF based on the CARA descriptors

Descriptors	Adaptabi-lity	Responsibi-lity	Autonomy	Complexity	Skills	Knowledge
Level 1						
Level 2						
Level 3						
Level 4						
Level 5						
Level 6						
Level 7						

Source: Table provided by the Tunisian Working Party. Note that each descriptor has been completed at each level.

Morocco has selected broad descriptors that are similar to those of Tunisia. Jordan and Egypt have preferred the terms 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competences', each providing their own contextualised definitions.
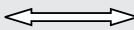
This summary of developments in the four countries provides a series of case studies, as do developments in the United Arab Emirates. However, it is quite logical that different countries' developments have differing emphases, depending on their needs, the evidence that they use to develop a framework and the collaborative and decision-making processes involved. The ILO (Tuck, 2007) has usefully published an introductory guide to NQFs.

Before concluding this section, it is appropriate to illustrate some of the differing nuances and approaches. Existing variations, as summarised by the ETF (2006b)[35], are described in Table 3.

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35   This working paper brings together a great deal of knowledge of European developments and also global developments, through associated work with the European Commission and OECD.

Table 3: Some design characteristics of NQFs

Main advantages	Design characteristic			Main advantages
	from		**to**	
Coherence across qualifications Genuine national system	**inclusive of all qualifications**	⟷	**partial coverage of qualifications**	Implementation easier Piloting possible Staged development strategy
System wide reform possible Linkage with other national policies	**designed and managed by central agency**		**organic development by stakeholders**	Encourages harmonisation Stakeholder buy-in Allows regional development
Policy coordination Quality assurance	**regulatory framework for assuring quality**		**classification of all qualifications**	Communication with stakeholders
Powerful authority for framework Sanctions for non compliance	**legal basis**		**voluntary basis**	Ownership secured Stakeholders work together
Builds on existing learning infrastructure	**descriptors composed of learning inputs**		**descriptors composed of learning outputs**	Independent of institutional structure Linkage with external frameworks
Relevance across all parts of education and training possible Linkage with external frameworks	**level defined by descriptor**		**level defined by national reference qualifications**	Builds on existing infrastructure Confidence in new framework higher
Close relationship to labour market Better linkage between education and work	**qualifications based on competency standards**		**qualifications based on units of learning or achievement**	Continues traditions of skills supply Builds on existing infrastructure

Source: ETF, 2006b, p. 10 (Table 1).

4.6 Recognising the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning

At a recent EU peer learning activity in London on the development of NQFs[36] there was discussion of the trend in Europe on the one hand to devote more attention to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, yet on the other hand to place the major emphasis of NQF development on the recognition of diplomas, awards and qualifications achieved through formal periods of learning leading directly to qualifications. The metaphor of an iceberg was used. Only a small element of people's learning over a lifetime takes place in the formal context of a taught course leading directly to a qualification. However, this tends to be the emphasis of recognition in many NQFs. Most of our learning takes place in informal settings, such as workplace training not intended to lead to a formal qualification. This learning occurs in family, community and working contexts; learning is certainly taking place, but informally. Informal and non-formal learning is thus the large and weighty part of the iceberg, but it remains below the surface and unrecognised.

The possible relevance of recognising learning that takes place outside formal qualification settings could be even more important in the Mediterranean setting. Not only do people employed in the formal sector continue to learn knowledge and skills; it is also the case that a large proportion of people work outside the formal sector of the economy, and often they are continuing to learn job-specific and broader knowledge and skills. Yet no recognition or value is attached to this learning, nor are the individuals encouraged or guided to engage in further learning. The recognition of informal and non-formal learning can have an impact on increasing people's opportunities in the fractured labour markets that were described in Chapter 2 of this report. Morocco and Tunisia, for example, have already set out to establish procedures and practices for recognising outcomes of informal and non-formal learning (validation), thus extending lifelong learning opportunities to a wider and often excluded population. Tunisia's 2008 Vocational Training Act established that the same VET diplomas can be obtained through initial training and through validation. The vocational training standards now being developed to take both pathways into account, and trials have been run to test validation procedures.

Developments in the EU concerning the recognition or validation of informal and non-formal learning have, at least in some countries, moved quickly. The European inventory on the validation of informal and non-formal learning was recently updated. The main finding is as follows (Cedefop, 2008a, p. 4):

> 'Based on the European inventory on validation 2007, European countries are divided into three main groups. First, those countries where validation has become a practical reality for individual citizens. Second, those countries where validation is emerging as a practical reality and third, those countries where activity is low or non-existent. […] The emergence of national qualifications frameworks, combined with a shift towards learning outcomes, seems to act as a catalyst for further development of validation, not least in countries where activity has been limited until now.'

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36 The seminar was held under the auspices of the EU peer learning cluster on learning outcomes, in London on 20 and 21 October 2008.

In practice it seems that countries in Europe are adopting one of two quite distinct approaches to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. These are best summed up in the approaches being taken in France and Ireland. Ireland's system of recognition is based on a developed national framework of learning outcomes, and enables organisations and sectors to tailor recognition systems to their own needs, at the same time as providing individuals with an entitlement. France's system of validation is based on procedures established through legislation that give individuals the right to the attainment of the same diplomas and qualifications that have traditionally been acquired through formal education and training, but via the route of validation of their informally acquired, experiential learning. The former emphasises the guiding role of learning outcomes and leaves the procedures as flexible and appropriate to local circumstances. The latter emphasises a rigorous single procedure for gaining validation for informal and non-formal learning, but is less specific about the outcomes to be assessed, in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences.

The teams working on NQF development in the countries and territories in the region are mindful of the need to keep open the door to recognising informal and non-formal learning, as part of the national approach and framework. Egypt expects that in the longer term an NQF should facilitate the recognition and improvement of people's skills, irrespective of how and where they acquire them[37]. Morocco intends that the development of an NQF should be piloted and tested to ensure that both existing qualifications and the validation of learning gained in working life are included in the framework. Tunisia, as we have shown, is developing procedures for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, and has already established the legal basis for this.

The countries involved in the ETF Mediterranean region project on qualifications frameworks are all working hard to set up a national framework for the first time. It seems appropriate that the attempt is made first to organise formal qualifications into more coherent, flexible and useful frameworks. Yet it is probably the case that extensions will soon be needed to encompass these wider aspects of recognition, and the concept and design of the new NQFs should leave open this possibility. Tunisia is already opening up this opportunity. This implies anticipating that at some point in the future there will be a strong enough basis to improve the opportunities for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning and, beyond that, for enabling people to build up their portfolio of certificates and diplomas through flexible systems of credit accumulation and transfer.

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37   The NQF Peer Reviews referred to in the bibliography provide the source for these
       references.

> **Box 18: Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Tunisia**
>
> Tunisia has introduced a pilot scheme for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in two trades: (i) the automotive sector; and (ii) ready-made garment production. This pilot helped to develop guidelines for the validation processes and the involvement of social partners and enterprises in the process.
>
> Legislation has been put in place to create a framework to recognise non-formal and informal learning. The new law for VET which came into force in February 2008 enables individuals to acquire qualification through validation. Article 61 of the law stipulates that all VET diplomas and certificates with the exception of the *baccalauréat professionnel* could be obtained through the validation of life-experience-based skills.

4.7 Conclusion: the impact of competence-based approaches on reforms

Asked to identify key aspects for reform in Europe after 2010, the VET directors of European countries (Cedefop, 2008b) identified 'learning outcomes based curricula and teaching as well as improved methods to measure, assess and validate competence' as the first issue that the future policy agenda is likely to focus on. This report has emphasised the importance of VET and other curricula and qualifications that are responsive to the needs of working life.

NQFs are a mechanism that can organise qualifications more coherently through the reference to learning outcomes. A shift is taking place from traditional standards in education and training that are based almost entirely on inputs. The inputs are often a combination of a traditionally content-based curriculum, assessed through written examinations to identify how much has been memorised. Such qualifications are seen as a passport to academic progression or a job, without recognition of the knowledge, skills and competences that the possessor of the qualification has gained.

Innovation tends to concentrate on curricula that are responsive to the needs of families, communities and the world of work, pedagogy that emphasises what learners can do as well as what they have memorised, and qualifications that reflect skills and competences that indicate the holders' capabilities rather than simply acting as a formal passport to progression. Similarly, innovation tends to concentrate on opening up pathways on the basis of what people can achieve as lifelong learners, rather than ascribing people to a fixed status, depending on where their mainstream qualifications (or lack of qualifications) left them at a certain time or stage in life.

This has led many analysts to conclude that we are witnessing changes with a wider reach than, for example, the formulation of an NQF between policymakers and stakeholders. Rather, a radically new approach to understanding and developing education systems has developed, characterised by flexible systems of lifelong learning that place the learner (not the education provider) at the centre, and that are attractive to stakeholders.

The EU's 32-country study of learning outcomes sums the situation up as follows (Cedefop, 2009, p. 9).

> '[...] learning outcomes approaches are now occupying an increasingly prominent position [in] the shift in European education and training systems towards lifelong learning frameworks. This gives learning outcomes a pivotal position in the redefinition of qualifications and the curriculum in VET, general and higher education.'

Naturally, the identification of learning outcomes as sets of knowledge, skills and competences, or some such formulation in the recognition of qualifications, can also be expected to have an important impact on approaches to teaching and learning. This is one of the themes for further analysis taken up in Chapter 5.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Why the recognition of qualifications is high on the agenda

There is no doubt that the recognition of qualifications is an important issue on policy agendas in the Mediterranean region.

This report began by identifying three defining aspects of the recognition of qualifications. Firstly, qualifications have to be legible or transparent, so that employers, universities, schools and colleges and learners have a reasonable and accurate idea of the kinds of knowledge, skills and competences that they can expect the holders of a qualification to possess. Secondly, qualifications have to be a respected currency so that universities and enterprises, for example, know that applicants are likely to have the attributes needed for entry or for employment. Thirdly, the holders of qualifications ought to be fairly certain that in a regional or global environment of mobility their qualifications are portable, and will be recognised if they want to learn or work abroad.

However, the evidence suggests that frequently[38]:

- qualifications in the region are supply driven, and employers in particular have little or no engagement in identifying what is appropriate and useful for learners to learn;
- qualifications have a formal function – for example for entry to administrative or senior government employment – yet the holders lack the skills and knowledge that are actually needed for progression;
- the holders find that their qualifications (and skills, for that matter) are not recognised in other countries when they decide to move abroad to work or study.

These and other considerations covered in Chapters 2 and 3 have pushed the issue of the recognition of qualifications to a prominent position in the region's national reform programmes. Governments are seeking to address these issues, among others, as they formulate policies and carry through reform. Employers are seeking better and more appropriately skilled workforces. Many people are in situations where access to meaningful learning and qualifications is not open to them. Often the skills and qualifications that they have do not count for much in mobile, international labour markets, and have not prepared them well for a dynamic role in local labour markets.

The motivation for governments and other partners to achieve higher-skilled labour markets populated by people with appropriate skills that are well recognised relates to the need to tackle immediate and longer-term economic challenges. Population growth and

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38   This report has drawn attention to numerous reforms that are underway or being planned across the region. The analysis presented here is intended to provide an overview of current situations and challenges, in order to help to clarify the options open to policymakers in the region.

global developments challenge countries and territories in the region to improve economic competitiveness and to generate or sustain growth. The demographic trends also provide an opportunity to improve growth, but only if the increase in the young and working-age population can be accompanied by higher levels of skill on the part of people entering into and progressing through the labour market.

Traditional qualifications have gone only some way towards raising education and knowledge levels in the population. This has left a legacy of marked disparities between the knowledge and skills that many people in the labour markets possess, and the levels of skills and competences that modern, knowledge-intensive production and service industries require.

The development of advanced technologies in various parts of the world can be linked to inward investment and technology transfer into countries in the Middle East and North Africa. If the players are alert and nimble, this can offer some short cuts to higher growth in developing economies. This requires a workforce with the requisite technical and transferable skills, including a pre-disposition to managing new learning effectively. Thus, the combination of technology transfer and inward investment opens up attractive economic possibilities: one of the conditions is that the skills of the working population are sufficient. A whole range of reforms in education and training provision is needed in order to achieve this, and countries and territories across the region are identifying and implementing, or beginning to implement, what needs to be done.

In summary, the recognition of qualifications – emphasising the themes of clarity, currency and portability – is a key test of the effectiveness of education and training reforms. The recognition of skills and qualifications mediates between efforts to improve the skills available in the labour market (the human resources, or the supply of skills) and the conditions for sustainable development in economies that are changing, fast-moving and global in their reach. A range of education and training reforms in the region is needed in order to achieve this.

Of course, the development of education and training also has important personal and social goals that relate to maximising individuals' potential, combating social exclusion and creating or maintaining social cohesion. Lifelong learning policies must place learners at the centre of the strategic approach, if this is to have an effect in practice[39].

5.2 Recognition of qualifications in segmented labour markets

As countries and territories in the region make progress, it is important that local and international partners recognise that there is no single 'Mediterranean labour market'. Planners, reformers and their partners in the region are working in the context of heterogeneous labour markets within each country and territory.

Nevertheless, the regional labour markets have some characteristics in common. For example, on the supply side there are growing numbers of young and working-age people in the population, yet education and training is not by and large providing people

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39   See Section 5.7 below.

with the level and range of skills they need for an era of change. Inward and/or outward migration for work is another common characteristic. Similarly, on the demand side economic growth has been faster over recent years in many countries and territories in the region than is the case in countries such as USA and in the EU, yet there is a wide discrepancy between fast-growth industries such as IT, construction and tourism (and oil production, of course, where it exists) and other traditional sectors in which growth is slow.

Two other factors are common to labour markets in the region. Firstly, state employment has historically dominated the formal labour markets, and this is increasingly (but in some cases gradually) giving way to areas of predominantly private sector employment[40]. Secondly, an important segment of the labour market is informal in almost all counties and territories in the region. These factors have a great impact on the availability and recognition of skills and qualifications.

The shift from state employment to the demands of a growing private sector[41] has created new conditions for the transition from education to work, and universities and the upper secondary system have on the whole been slow to recognise and respond to these demands. Traditionally, the state in most countries and territories in the region has allocated places in higher education to upper secondary school graduates, who have expected in turn to achieve a secure job in public service on graduating. The jobs might not have been of high quality, and career options were often unspectacular, but there was security, the status of government employment and the material advantages that this brought. The undergraduate degree (or in some cases an upper secondary school qualification) served as a passport to labour market entry. It was the certificate that counted, rather than the recognised sets of knowledge and competences that the learner was expected to have acquired. Schools and universities could thus rest comfortably on the basis of their traditional approaches to knowledge, and were not greatly aware of, let alone motivated by, specific demands from the labour market. This has led to a dislocation between what schools provide and what the labour market demands.

The growth of private sector employment has brought with it a sharper concentration on the skills and competences needed for labour market entry and progression, and this has started to shake up thoroughly expectations about what schools and universities should provide. This explains in particular why there is now such a strong emphasis on identifying the occupational skills and standards that are needed in different labour market sectors, and on then identifying how the qualifications and curricula provided need to be revamped. This has been a marked trend particularly in technical and vocational education. Three points must be noted. Firstly, TVET reforms are underway in all countries and territories, but are as yet far from being fully implemented. Secondly, general education providers and universities have not as yet progressed far towards identifying how their curricula and qualifications should reflect more precisely modern labour market needs[42]. Thirdly, as the private sector has become more important in the regional economies, the state-led sectors have in turn begun to focus more clearly on human resources development in public sector employment.

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40 The implications of this were discussed at the ETF regional conference on the development of NQFs, held in Rabat, Morocco in November 2008. See Section 5.6 below.

41 See Section 2.3.

42 Exceptions to this include work being carried out to define higher education programmes in Egypt to academic standards based on outcomes, and the introduction of a *socle commun* or key competences into Tunisia's system of general education.

QUALIFICATIONS THAT COUNT: STRENGTHENING THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Reform programmes designed to improve quality in education and training systems in the region can help to close this gap. The recent ETF report (Seyfried, 2008) emphasises four key policy objectives, all of which are linked to the recognition of qualifications:

- strengthening the links between education and training providers and the employment system;
- increasing the responsiveness of education and training to the real demands of the labour market;
- upgrading learners' skills and competences, especially for employability;
- improving the attractiveness of TVET (in particular) as a chosen pathway for learners in a system of lifelong learning.

Quality frameworks should forge and guarantee these links. The ETF report (Seyfried, 2008, p. 53) comments favourably on a framework being designed in Jordan[43]. The developing Jordanian framework is for TVET, and refers to:

- quality of teaching and learning programmes, including factors such as relevance to industry, industrial involvement in design and implementation, and greater flexibility for learners;
- improved institutional capacity at the local level;
- effective national support and leadership through a clear national policy;
- industrial support.

The question of the role and responsibilities of the state and of employers will be addressed in Section 5.6.

Developing and recognising skills (for which qualifications are often a proxy) in the informal parts of the economies of Mediterranean countries and territories is without doubt an even more challenging task. In Chapter 2 it was pointed out that the informal labour market is comparatively large and is mainly outside the influence of the state. Here, many people are struggling to find a way through different and often insecure forms of employment, and social protection and other forms of social underpinning are rare commodities. The informal economy encompasses many traditionally important areas of the economy and involves large numbers of micro- and family-run businesses. It involves production and craft skills, but also newer areas of employment in service industries, where entrepreneurially minded people have responded to opportunities to create new kinds of business.

Yet because the informal economy lies largely outside the sphere of activity that is influenced or controlled by the state, those who work in the informal parts of the labour market have few opportunities, either to have their skills recognised or to engage in further education and training. A gulf appears to exist between the 'outsider' position of huge numbers of individuals working in the informal economy and the efforts made in formal sectors of the economy to upgrade and improve people's skills and the currency of their qualifications.

The first serious steps towards the recognition of skills and the improvement of the qualification levels of people working in the informal sector have yet to be taken. However, the numbers involved indicate the importance of this to economic development

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43   The reference in the ETF report is to El-Saies, 2007.

in the medium and longer term. If lifelong learning policies are to be inclusive and life-wide in their scope and learner-centred in their dynamic, then ways should be found to extend the coverage of lifelong learning to people in the informal sectors. This concerns technical, advanced and generic skills as well as basic literacy skills.

One way to move towards this can be to open doors to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning; in other words, recognising learning gained though experience and non-qualifying training. Such a step addresses key social issues, including the disadvantageous position of women in the labour market, the underemployment of young people who left school early, and older people who lack basic schooling but have the potential and experience to go further. Morocco and Tunisia are setting up schemes for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Such schemes can experiment by targeting specific groups in the informal sector. They can also try out ways of building up a portfolio approach to qualifications, through the use of learning modules and credit accumulation.

In summary, fragmented labour markets in the region present a difficult challenge. On the one hand, current reform programmes and an emphasis on quality and quality assurance can clearly help to bridge the gap between the recognition of skills and qualifications in the public and the formal private sectors. On the other hand, efforts to introduce more creatively ways of recognising the results of learning experiences in the informal sector (and in the community) could begin to narrow the gulf (of exclusion) that many groups who live and work in the informal sectors experience. Small, skills-based units of recognition and certification that are well targeted could support this better than more extensive qualifications do.

5.3 Under-recognition and over-recognition of qualifications

This report has concluded that reforms are needed if mainstream qualifications are to be recognised as a reasonably effective way of preparing people for labour market entry, and if effective training for raising skills levels is to be part of human resource development programmes. It is also the case that the labour markets tend to be fractured, between the public and private sectors and in particular between the formal and informal sectors. Furthermore, qualifications for university entrance in the region tend to be fixed, and are linked to the results or grades achieved at the end of upper secondary general education.

Another complicating factor in the governance of education and training in numerous countries and territories in the region is that several ministries tend to have responsibility for the specific sub-sectors of education and training, yet effective coordination and system leadership is lacking. It is frequently the case that different ministries are responsible for general and higher education, and there may be several ministries that have responsibility for different aspects of TVET. This leaves a divided system of public sector governance. Gaps and overlaps in provision are a structural feature, and make it difficult to begin effective work on a comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning policy. This barrier is not unique to the region: it is a stumbling block to a lifelong learning policy in many countries.

QUALIFICATIONS THAT COUNT: STRENGTHENING THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The combination of these factors leads to some qualifications being under-valued for the holder's progression into pathways to further education, training or work. Meanwhile, other qualifications may be ascribed an exclusive value for access to a particular pathway. The first of these can be termed the under-recognition of qualifications, while the second is over-recognition.

Under-recognition occurs, for example, when a skilled and experienced specialist who has technical qualifications and who could make an enhanced contribution through a university degree is denied access, because she or he lacks the formal general education qualification that is a rigid requirement for university access. Under-recognition is also related to the way public administration and large public companies in several countries do not recognise non-formal vocational training and put in place rigid requirements in relation to formal education system qualifications.

Over-recognition is the converse: only the formal upper secondary qualification qualifies the holder for university access, and the mark or grade may even define the subject or faculty that is allocated. Similarly, a university degree may be a rigid requirement for government employment.

In both cases the system is inflexible.

Barriers and conduits such as these occur across the Mediterranean region. In effect, the education and training pathways resemble a series of tubes to which some are granted access and from which others are excluded. The evidence suggests that in some countries and territories these pathways are so clearly defined that once the learner has passed a certain stage in life (such as the end of upper secondary school) without a requisite qualification, there is almost no way of progressing beyond a certain educational/social status, whether academically or in working life. A great deal of the work being done in the region to reform TVET in particular is intended to make access, progression and recognition more transparent and open to as wide a range of learners as is practical. A lesson learnt in Europe has been that in order to make TVET more attractive to learners and their families and to employers, a key development is to open up diverse pathways into both the labour market and higher education to VET graduates.

In summary, the under-recognition of some qualifications and over-recognition of others is inefficient in terms of meeting social and labour market needs, and holds back human development potential. Education and training systems in the region tend to be rigid and inflexible. Thus, some are granted access to progression pathways, but many potential lifelong learners are blocked. A lifelong learning perspective is often absent from reform policies. Particularly where responsibilities for the different kinds of qualifications reside with different public bodies, notably ministries, ways need to be found to describe and link qualifications so as to generate optimal opportunities and mobility for potential learners.

5.4 Opening pathways to mobility

Avoiding dead ends and opening up learning opportunities for all learners is an important feature of successful lifelong learning policies.

Development work undertaken in Europe (Council of the European Union, 2006 and 2008[44]) suggests that there are four main criteria for successful lifelong learning systems. These are that lifelong learning policy and implementation:

- are comprehensive, in that they include all sectors of education;
- are coherent, in that the coverage is lifelong and life-wide, and successfully reaches groups at risk;
- are flexible, in that there are no dead ends for any learners;
- involve the stakeholders as partners in developing and implementing policy, particularly the social partners.

A further criterion is assumed in the above: the learner is the focal point at the centre of a lifelong learning policy and system.

The overarching goal of developing a lifelong strategy touches on all the reforms to structures and arrangements that are underway in the countries and territories in the region. The point is that a lifelong learning strategy brings all the different kinds and levels of reform in education and training systems into a clear and coherent strategy.

Therefore, it is important that lifelong learning policies and development have a strong link with national values and with the wider economic and social reforms to which they contribute. One can envisage several driving motives behind a lifelong learning strategy in the region. One approach is to prioritise the economic agenda by focusing on raising skills levels for the labour market and employability, including skills relating to entrepreneurship. A second approach might place the emphasis on social inclusion and on giving access to all learners to successively higher levels of knowledge and skill.

In practice, the European countries with the most successful lifelong learning policies tend to combine effectively the economic/labour market and social aspects, on the basis that a society of effective and expert learners is fundamental to an increasingly knowledge-driven society and economy.

The OECD report *Qualifications Systems: Bridges to Lifelong Learning* (OECD, 2007) helpfully identified 20 policy mechanisms that can modify the way in which education and training systems are structured and operate, so as to steer them towards a lifelong learning approach.

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44   Under the Lisbon process for education and training, a stocktaking is completed every two years. The European Commission's DG Education and Culture publishes a progress report on the priority areas for development, based on national reports prepared by EU member states. The organising idea for the reporting is the guiding principle of developing and implementing comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning policies. At the end of 2008 short descriptions for each county in the EU's lifelong learning policy state of play are under preparation. The author of this report is involved in this work.

Box 19: Mechanisms that can support a lifelong learning strategy

1   Communicating returns to learning for qualifications

2   Recognising skills for employability

3   Establishing qualification frameworks

4   Increasing learner choice in qualifications

5   Clarifying learner pathways

6   Providing credit transfer

7   Increasing flexibility in learning programmes leading to qualifications

8   Creating new routes to qualifications

9   Lowering the cost of qualifications

10   Recognising non-formal and informal learning

11   Monitoring the qualifications system

12   Optimising stakeholder involvement in the education system

13   Improving the needs analysis so that qualifications are up to date

14   Improving qualification use in recruitment

15   Ensuring that qualifications are portable

16   Investing in pedagogical innovation

17   Expressing qualifications as learning outcomes

18   Improving coordination in the qualifications system

19   Optimising quality assurance

20   Improving information and guidance about qualifications systems

Source: Adapted from OECD, 2007 (pp. 135–7, Table 4.1).

In summary, a survey of the reforms that are underway in the Mediterranean region[45] shows the extent to which these reforms are in line with the mechanisms that the OECD has summarised. The question is how well-linked the different reform programmes are into a national strategy, or how segmented the policy approaches are. The recognition of qualifications – in terms of their legibility, currency and portability – is a basic theme of reform. The optimal recognition of qualifications appears as a goal to be achieved if reforms are to be effective, and if a lifelong learning policy is to be developed, nurtured and implemented.

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45   See Section 4.4.

5.5 Qualifications frameworks: international compatibility of Mediterranean qualifications

As has been emphasised in this report, inward and outward labour mobility between countries and territories in the region and into countries in areas such as the Gulf, Europe and the USA is an important feature of the labour market in the region, as is the flow of inward investment.

International recognition of qualifications should be a priority. It is probably the case that the international recognition of qualifications is not the major driver for an individual who migrates. This is more likely to be the economic, labour market and social situations in the individual's country of origin and country of destination. However, it is clearly the case that if qualifications and skills are portable, one of the main barriers to mobility can be eased for people who travel abroad to work. Furthermore, for countries seeking to fill labour market shortages in part through migration, sufficient levels of confidence – mutual trust – in the skills and qualifications of potential migrants should be an important consideration. As has been shown, however, it often happens that the skills and qualifications of immigrants from outside the wealthier countries are not valued, to the detriment of educated or skilled individuals who are forced to take on poorer-quality or poorly paid jobs.

This report has given several examples of bilateral and multilateral moves to establish the portable recognition of a person's qualifications or skills. One drawback of multilateral approaches is that they often tend to be slow to producing tangible results.

However, the adoption of the EQF along with a time scale for countries in the EU to align their own qualifications and frameworks is an important development. It indicates that European governments and stakeholders are serious about facilitating the recognition of qualifications and skills aspect of international mobility within Europe. At the same time the Mediterranean partnership, which for some time has taken the upskilling and development of human resources as a serious issue in rather general terms, seems to be on the point of including the recognition of migrants' skills as an important and tangible aspect of cooperation between the EU and Mediterranean countries and territories. Thus the conference of labour ministers that was held in Marrakech, Morocco, in November 2008 began to examine various aspects of human resources development and to advance specific proposals aimed at fostering job creation, modernising labour markets and improving the quality of jobs. The conference (French EU Presidency, 2008, p. 2):

> 'highlighted the need for a better match between current and future labour market needs and the development of necessary skills through […] enhanced education and vocational training as well as through reforms at national and regional levels concerning the framework of qualifications and competences, and highlighted the benefits of cooperation in the Euromed context.'

Recent developments in the Mediterranean partnership thus appear to open the possibility for countries and territories in the Mediterranean region to find ways of relating to the EQF and associated activities through the partnership activity. This could serve as a point of reference for making qualifications better recognised and more portable between the regions. It could facilitate more efficient and dignified arrangements in both the country of origin and the receiving country for those who migrate to work. The ETF

could facilitate multilateral and bilateral developments in this direction, working with both the European Commission and Mediterranean authorities.

The challenges that Mediterranean countries and territories will face in their attempts to achieve progress in this direction will depend on their starting point and the success of their reforms. The success criteria, as in the EU member states, will depend on the reliability of the quality of skilled and qualified people, successful reforms and implementation, quality assurance and the ways in which qualifications are framed and expressed. Furthermore, aligning at least some of the national developments in qualifications and systems reform to the development of the EQF could in itself foster cooperation within the region.

In this respect the interest shown by several countries and territories in the region in developing and using NQFs seems to be a promising development.

In summary, international agreement on the recognition of qualifications gives a measure of confidence to inward investors that qualifications are reliable. International recognition also helps to assure the employers of internationally mobile workers and the workers themselves that qualifications and skills have improved portability. The current advances in Mediterranean partnership activity create the possibility of building a link between the qualification frameworks that some countries in the region are developing and the EQF. A peer learning process should build on current reform experiences of the Mediterranean countries and territories in order to explore how links can be built with the EQF. The ETF would be in a good position to provide expert advice and facilitate such a development.

5.6 Getting the groundwork right for a national qualifications framework: implications for governance

The participation of four countries in the region in the NQF project facilitated by the ETF between 2006 and 2008 enabled the countries concerned both to make progress and to identify difficulties in the development of an NQF. It was found that each of the countries faces similar challenges, but that each country has to work out solutions that are appropriate to their setting.

The following is a list of some of the lessons learnt.

1. NQFs allow existing qualifications of different levels and types to be linked in a coherent and consistent way, based on a common set of descriptions and criteria. Putting this superstructure into place creates a picture of what different qualifications really mean and how they compare.
2. NQFs help to trace learning pathways that people can follow throughout their lives.
3. Whatever the level of progress made, the process of discussing NQFs inevitably leads to a review of all the key elements of a country's education and training systems, how they relate to other parts of the system and how they feed into the labour market.
4. NQFs make for more transparent and legible education and training systems both nationally and internationally, but they are not neutral.

5. As tools for comparing qualifications and kick-starting reforms, NQFs raise important questions on governance and the modernisation of qualifications systems.
6. Fitting qualifications into a larger structure forces policymakers to consider what links and pathways are possible between the sub-systems of education. This forces the designers of an NQF to make room for non-formal and informal learning.
7. Social partners must be involved and the needs of the labour market must be addressed. Progress in the four countries is markedly different in this respect, as a result of the tighter or looser links between learning and work in each of them.
8. An NQF obliges policymakers to consider the implications of changing from an input-based system to one based upon learning outcomes[46].

Point 7 above anticipates an issue that emerged during the conference organised by the ETF in Rabat, Morocco, in November 2008 to share experience with participants from across the region. Stakeholder involvement in NQF development – particularly from those involved with the world of work, including representatives of employers and employees – represents a shift in culture for several countries in the region. Yet this is widely held to be a prerequisite for successful NQF development and for more responsive qualifications.

The issue is raised in terms of the role and tasks of the state and the role and tasks of the stakeholders, who may be employers or social partners and will be drawn from the wider civil society. The challenging issue is that in most countries in the region the state is traditionally perceived as the powerful player who both leads and drives through most change associated with education and training reform. The mindset of other players is to expect the state to occupy this role, even when a more participatory approach is needed for success, as in the identification of occupational skills from which to build responsive qualifications and curricula.

However, the successful development of an NQF, by all reliable accounts, calls for a partnership between the agencies of the state and the representatives of the industrial sectors. This is difficult to achieve in a culture where the state has so prominent a role, unless the state is prepared to change track in certain ways in order to engage in partnership. Furthermore, employers (except for a few large, often international, firms and associations) are themselves not clear or confident in their new role as social partners: capacity has to be built.

The crucial questions are therefore not only about the technical role and tasks of stakeholders. The technical aspects are underpinned by such questions as: What are the responsibilities of the state and social partners in the development in partnership of an NQF? Who decides on the new balance, and how? How can the state be persuaded to step back a little, so as to engage in effective partnership? How can the capability of the social partners be strengthened?

In summary, the development of an NQF carries its own challenges, but appears to offer a process and mechanism that can help to bring coherence to qualifications systems and can link a range of reforms. The NQF also challenges policymakers and providers to

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46   These points are adapted from a preparatory note prepared by the ETF team for the NQF project.

open up learning pathways for learners throughout their lives. A particular issue in the Mediterranean region is for the state to learn to step back to some extent – to retain a leading role while working in partnership with the social partners. This means that the employers in particular must take on a more prominent role as partners of the state. For this, the capacity of employers' organisations needs to be built up in many countries and territories in the region.

5.7 Learning outcomes: a shift in policy and practice

One conclusion of the regional work quoted above is that an NQF obliges policymakers and practitioners to consider the implications of changing from an input-based system to one based upon learning outcomes.

To the policymaker, the shift to learning outcomes provides a more satisfactory perspective than relying exclusively on input measures. A learning outcomes approach allows planners to identify the kinds and levels of knowledge, skills and competences that learners should have when they graduate. While input measures – such as teacher-student ratios and a detailed curriculum – may be important, the use of learning outcomes as part of the system of governance for setting objectives and guiding reforms helps to open education systems to the outside world. As this report has established, this is intrinsic to the improved recognition of qualifications. Equally, the active learning approach is material to quality assurance, system evaluation and a raft of reforms.

In the development of teaching and learning activity, the shift to learning outcomes does not mean disposing of sensible aims and objectives, or a sensible curriculum and assessment regime. But it does call for renewal.

There is a clear difference between traditional approaches to teaching and modern, active forms of teaching and learning. Summarising a great deal of research and theory on learning, Grootings and Nielsen (2009) have made a distinction between the traditional and active learning approaches[47]. They describe traditional approaches as being based on the following assumptions or principles.

- Learning is basically a steady accumulation of discrete entities of knowledge and skills that can be presented to learners.
- There is one best way of learning.
- Learning is essentially an individual activity.
- Learning that is non-transparent or tacit is inferior.
- Learning centres on the stable and enduring – facts and proven evidence.
- Learning is replicable.

On the other hand, Grootings and Nielsen describe active learning approaches as understanding learning as a selective process in which people give their own meaning to information, continuously interacting with their various environments. Thus, active learning is based on the follow principles.

- People build up their own meanings, based on what they already know and how they see the world around them.

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47   The information that follows is adapted from Cedefop, 2009.

- Different people give different interpretations to the same thing, may retain different aspects and may act differently on the basis of the same information.
- There are many ways through which people can learn without someone else passing on pieces of expert knowledge.
- Learning is a social activity and a lot of learning is tacit.
- Learning is dynamic and context-bound and, therefore, good learning depends on meaningful learning environments.

Reforms in the region show how TVET is moving towards an active learning approach. The adoption of competence-based approaches in several countries (including Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria) is an appropriate basis for moving toward learning outcomes. For example, the adoption of a *socle commun* in Tunisia and the continuing training of teachers for competence-based approaches to teaching and learning show that key competences, based on the idea of learning outcomes, are being introduced into primary and secondary schooling. This is encouraging, but the evidence suggests that reforms of pedagogy to reflect learning outcomes and an active learning approach are scattered, and lack coherence in the region.

A shift to the use of learning outcomes in teaching and learning needs to be balanced with clear aims, good planning, suitable curricula and assessment, appropriate pedagogy, and evaluation and quality assurance. The shift involves teachers and school leaders as stakeholders in reform.

Without this shift at the level of practice, that is to say, in teaching and learning, ideas about the improved recognition of qualifications – improved legibility, a more valued currency, greater portability – remain formal and lack authenticity.

In summary, broader ideas and approaches to the improved recognition of qualifications are unlikely to have much substance or reality unless they are matched by some fundamental change to teaching and learning activities in all settings. This involves a move away from the traditional approach to more active forms of learning. The shift can be understood in terms of the contrast between on the one hand the view of learning as basically a steady accumulation of discrete entities of knowledge and skills that can be presented to learner, and on the other hand, the view that people can learn in many ways, without someone else necessarily passing on pieces of expert knowledge. Changes in approaches to teaching and learning, and the inclusion of a competence-based or learning outcomes approach, are the sound basis on which the improved recognition of qualifications can be built, in terms of legibility, currency and portability.

6. QUALIFICATIONS THAT COUNT
SETTING THE AGENDA

This study has analysed the drivers that have created a climate for qualifications reform. It has suggested approaches to policy development that can help policymakers and practitioners to achieve optimal recognition for qualifications in their country and across the Mediterranean region. A basic theme of this thematic review is that in order to work well, qualifications must communicate important signals in terms of their transparency, currency and portability. Qualifications need to be useful to the learner, employers and other stakeholders and to education providers. Effective qualifications link the demand for skills, changes in the economy and labour market with education reforms; they also open up opportunities for lifelong learning for all learners.

To date there have been signs that some TVET qualifications are being reformed in this manner in the region, but less evidence of such reform in general and higher education qualifications. Qualifications that are working well provide a clear test of how effective education and training reforms are proving to be. Indeed, where improved recognition of qualifications does not occur as a result of the reform processes, reforms have not been truly effective.

Labour markets in the Mediterranean region are complex, as they are in other regions. Yet Mediterranean labour markets have specific characteristics. Employment in the public sector still dominates the smaller – but growing – private sector. The state is usually the dominant party in decisions on qualifications reform, and is characterised by several different ministries that often have divergent interests. This can have a harmful effect on the recognition of qualifications, since the supply side tends to dominate arrangements and reforms.

It is important to recognise that most people work in the informal sector in most countries and territories in the region. The informal sector lies outside the field of government-led initiatives for workforce development and training. In order for human resources development to be effective, ways must be found to improve the skills profile of public employment, to meet the fast-growing skills needs of the private sector and to bridge the qualifications, skills and training gap between the formal and the informal sectors. A first step is to improve the evidence base so that more intelligence is available concerning the informal labour markets than is currently the case. Furthermore, finding ways to validate and recognise the skills that individuals have gained outside formal education and qualifications can help to link the informal sectors of the labour market with education, training and skills provision.

It is currently the case that some qualifications do not receive sufficient recognition. Traditional TVET qualifications, for example, often have low status and offer no pathway to career progression and no way back into formal or higher education. They are, in effect, routes to exclusion from further learning. A complicating factor is that such qualifications are often out of touch with the needs of employers, and need to be

reformed. On the other hand, other qualifications are over-recognised. In numerous countries and territories in the region a university degree used to be a passport for entry to respected government-sector employment, and it is still the case in some countries and territories in the region that government employment beyond a certain level is only open to graduates. An upper secondary academic qualification gained at the end of post-compulsory schooling is often the only way into high-status university education. A more flexible system is required to ensure that pathways are open to all lifelong learners, without dead ends. Furthermore, qualifications should be based on a clearer view of the knowledge and skills that those who hold them can be expected to have.

Education and training reforms that are taking place in the region are increasingly designed to be better geared to competences or learning outcomes, and to meet user needs through the involvement of employers, social partners and other stakeholders. However, challenges remain, namely:

- to carry reforms through successfully to implementation;
- to link the various reforms into a coherent approach to lifelong learning, thus opening up learning opportunities for all citizens.

It is no longer sufficient for governments to undertake this wide range of reform activities on their own. Teachers and trainers and their leaders in their provider institutions need to be involved as reform partners, and must be given more devolved responsibility for developments and decision making. It is also important that industry – the employers and their organisations and employee representatives – become partners in the governance of reforms. This calls for a new role for the state and the education ministries to work in partnership, particularly with employers. Employers need support to take on new responsibilities, particularly in connection with initial and continuing TVET.

Current approaches to reform can lead to improved recognition of qualifications – qualifications that really count – provided that they are coherent and carried through to implementation. The final, and important, point to bear in mind is that this can only be effective if implementation leads to major changes in approaches to teaching and learning and to the reorganisation of schools and other education and training provision.

The improved recognition of qualifications is an important element of the reforms that relate to labour market and social developments in the countries and territories of the Mediterranean region. It also relates to the mobility of people and employment.

Multilateral or bilateral international recognition of qualifications can assist migrant workers, and can also create favourable conditions for inward investment. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation after the 2008 conference of labour and employment ministers in Marrakech, Morocco, is at a point at which initiatives relating to the mobility of services, labour and skills may develop more rapidly, with appropriate inputs and efforts from the partners and from expert organisations. The current development of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership will concentrate more specifically on improving TVET provision and on improving conditions for mobility and inward investment. This should encourage policymakers in the Mediterranean region and in the EU to identify some clear aims for improving international recognition.

To conclude, the final sections of this report will highlight specific issues for governments and partners in Euro-Mediterranean activity and for the ETF.

6.1 Issues for the Mediterranean governments

Governments in the region can take a number of steps to improve the recognition of their qualifications.

Governments should consider how to bring coherence to their education and training policy reforms so that qualifications from different fields and sub-sectors are well linked. This entails bringing the different providing ministries and other stakeholders into close cooperation. Among the tools that can assist this process, the development of an NQF is worthy of careful consideration. NQFs are potentially a powerful lever for vocational education and training reform but because of that they are not easy to be developed, nor are they in themselves a solution to all problems that countries may experience with their VET systems.

There is little evidence so far that the responsible government ministries and agencies are creating flexible entry arrangements and progression pathways through qualifications systems. Too many learners face dead ends. Creating learning and qualification pathways for all learners is at the heart of a successful lifelong learning approach. Governments should consider how to improve the flexibility of access and progression arrangements and should ensure that qualifications open up opportunities for all. A part of this agenda is to address the imbalance whereby some qualifications are over-recognised for purposes of progression while others are under-recognised.

Governments should support the formulation of new qualifications (and reformulate existing qualifications) in terms of learning outcomes expressed as knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences. This is an important aspect of improving both the quality of provision and the recognition of qualifications. Governments should not be content to describe a qualification only in terms of the traditional inputs such as duration and location of studies, a detailed content-based curriculum or prescribed text books.

An important consideration for governments wishing to raise both skills levels and productivity is how to include the informal sectors of the labour market. Focusing on the development of flexible qualifications, targeted adult and community education and measures to recognise informal and non-formal learning can play a role in this respect. It takes time for these to be set up and for them to bring results.

Governance of qualifications and their reform in modern settings is a matter of partnership. This means that governments must be capable of working with stakeholders – employers in particular – in a collaborative manner, with all partners bringing expertise to the table. Many employers' organisations are not geared up for this kind of activity, and it is partly the responsibility of governments to foster capacity. Teachers and trainers and their institutions also need to take more direct responsibility: this means involving their representatives as reform partners and, in particular, extending both the training and the local autonomy associated with reform.

6.2 Issues for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

Recent developments in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership appear to focus specifically on human resources and skills development. The final declaration of the VET Euromed forum in late December 2008 in Marseille under the French EU Presidency calls for the creation of a 'regional space for qualifications'.

The partners should consider how the current developments in the EQF can inform and support improved recognition of national qualifications systems and frameworks within the Mediterranean region. In the long term this might be achieved through Mediterranean regional qualification framework that could facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications among countries and territories, harmonise qualifications wherever possible, and create acceptable regional standards where appropriate.

The European Commission considers that the EQF could serve as a point of reference for making qualifications better recognised and more portable between the regions. In the long term this might open the possibility for Mediterranean countries and territories to find ways of relating to the EQF. As it currently stands, the EQF could act as a pragmatic reference instrument for NQFs, particularly taking into account the importance of labour mobility across the region and the crucial interest in attracting foreign investment for Mediterranean countries and territories.

Furthermore, the Euro-Mediterranean partnership should encourage both multilateral and bilateral approaches to the recognition of qualifications. A first step is to improve transparency of national qualifications systems. Transparent information forms the basis for the understanding of the qualifications' content, their scope, level, and relevance to the labour market. A second step is building capacities in Mediterranean partners to develop skills recognition systems and to negotiate mutual recognition agreement.

6.3 Issues for the ETF

This review has been commissioned and published by the ETF within the framework of the MEDA-ETE project. It is intended to make a contribution to the improved recognition of qualifications in the region through analysis and by raising issues on which participants can act. The ETF can develop its own contribution in a number of ways, four of which are suggested here.

1. Several ETF partner countries are developing NQFs. In order to improve its ability to provide sound, evidence-based analysis and advice to its partner countries and to the EC services, the ETF should develop a framework for analysing the reform of qualifications in different countries and regions, their priorities and implementation strategies. The framework should also, among others, develop methods and approaches to explore about impacts of the qualifications framework.
2. Countries have developed a large variety of institutions, procedures and mechanisms at the unilateral, bilateral and regional levels to assess and recognise skills and qualifications. In partnership with other interested institutions, national and international, the ETF should provide an up-to-date

account and analysis of existing frameworks for recognition of qualifications approaches and an indication of likely global trends.

3. There is a distinct lack of research and shared evidence on the way qualifications are considered, used and allocated in the informal sectors of the labour markets in the Mediterranean region. The ETF can help to fill this important gap by developing relevant methodologies to analyse this dimension and by commissioning national and regional studies.

4. The EQF offers distinct possibilities for improving the mutual recognition of qualifications in the renewed Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The ETF has expertise in developments in both the region and the EU. In terms of developing this aspect of formal Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the ETF can act as centre of expertise and a facilitator to maximise the benefits for all parties.

ACRONYMS

AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ALO	Arab Labour Organisation
CARA	complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EHEA	European higher education area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETE	Education and Training for Employment
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
FNAC	National Fund for the Development of Apprenticeship and Continuing Training (Fonds national de développement de l'apprentissage et de la formation continue)
GDP	gross domestic product
ICT	information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	information technology
Mercosur	Common Market of the South (Mercado Común del Sur)
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NQF	national qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRONAFOC	National Programme for Continuing Training (Programme national de formation continue)
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	vocational education and training

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