MONTENEGRO
European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

The Government of Montenegro adopted the *Vocational education development
strategy in Montenegro (2015-20)* ([1]) in December 2014, and sought to meet the
strategic objectives set by the EU framework. The latest figures show that, thanks
to strong improvement in the last five years, the country has progressed and
performs well on selected indicators of the EU 2020 benchmarks in education
and training: early leavers from education and training (18-24) are at 5.7%, better
than the EU-28 average of 11.4% in 2015; tertiary educational attainment (30-34)
is 31% in 2015, close to the EU-28 average of 38.7%. However, the picture
remains challenging on the indicator of adult participation in learning (25-64), at
3% in 2015 against the EU average of 10.7%. Structural employment problems
are also an issue: labour market participation is below 60% of the working age
population and has declined over the past four years as a result of the crisis
(European Training Foundation, 2016).

Montenegro has adopted a comprehensive national qualifications framework
for lifelong learning (MQF), based on learning outcomes, as part of a wider set of
economic, labour market and education policies to support human capital
developments. It includes all formal education qualifications (general, vocational
education and training (VET) and higher) as well as a system of national
vocational qualifications, which can be acquired though validation of non-formal
learning. The MQF is intended to give a clear overview of different paths to
qualifications and how they are interconnected, as well as to allow for
development and comparison of qualifications. It has reached an early
operational stage.

The MQF was referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the
qualifications framework of the European higher education area in November
2014.

([1]) http://www.erisee.org/node/59

Policy objectives

The government sees MQF development and alignment to the European qualifications framework (EQF) as an important political priority. The law on MQF defines its principles and main policy objectives, focusing on learning outcomes defined as knowledge, skills and competences; importance of quality assurance in all phases of qualifications development; establishing cooperation among stakeholders; and creating conditions for transfer of credits.

The main goals of the MQF as defined by law are:

(a) supporting the shift to learning outcomes-based qualifications;
(b) linking education and training more effectively to the labour market;
(c) better integrating various education and training subsystems;
(d) making progression possibilities (vertical and horizontal) within the education and training system visible;
(e) supporting lifelong learning and aiding recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
(f) improving international comparability of qualifications;
(g) ensuring quality of qualifications.

The EQF referencing report (Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014, p.22) presents the NQF as a tool to make the system of qualifications based on learning outcomes easier to understand at national and international levels, and to increase coherence of the qualifications system by correlating different parts of education and training.

Qualifications in tourism and agriculture are currently given special attention, with the goal of strengthening and sustaining economic development in these key sectors.

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The MQF has eight levels, based on learning outcomes, with sublevels at levels 1, 4 and 7. They cover all types of qualifications in formal education (general, VET and higher). Levels and sub-levels have their descriptors, each based on three categories: knowledge, skills and competence. Each qualification placed in the framework includes learning outcomes described through these three categories of descriptors and each higher level incorporates knowledge, skills and competence from the lower level (Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014).

The first four levels include qualifications from primary, secondary general and vocational education. Level 5 is an intermediate level between upper secondary education and higher education (post-secondary VET qualifications).

2

Levels 6 to 8 cover qualifications awarded in higher education institutions. The framework also includes old pre-Bologna qualifications.

All MQF levels accept labour market-oriented vocational qualifications ([2]), as defined by the law on national vocational qualifications (NVQ) adopted in 2008 ([3]). This law defines procedures regulating validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, as well as referring to 'additional qualifications'. Qualifications are inserted in the MQF following principles laid out in the NQF law and a number of education regulations, and particularly in specific bylaws:

(a) rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels ([4]);

(b) rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 1 to level 5 ([5]);

(c) rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 6 to level 8 ([6]).

The decision to place existing qualifications in the framework was made because they have been recognised nationally and citizens use them.

The shift to learning outcomes is seen as an essential part of national qualifications framework development. The NQF Act introduced orientation towards learning outcomes as a standard for all levels of qualifications: methodologies were developed to support appropriate redesign. Occupational standards were introduced in VET as a basis for development of qualification standards and curricula. In higher education, revisions or proposals for upgrading study programmes were launched. Although learning outcomes principles have

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([2]) As of summer 2014, 16 qualifications were placed in the MQF, from 5 sectors: tourism and hospitality; agriculture, food and veterinary; economics and law; mining, metallurgy and chemical industries; and traffic and communication. Most are at levels 3 and 4. Latest information can be found at MQC's website at:
http://www.cko.edu.me

([3]) Law on national professional qualifications (Zakon o nacionalnim strucnim kvalifikacijama):
http://www.iccg.co.me/1/dok/regulativa/Zakon%20o%20nacionalnim%20i%20strucnim%20kvalifikacijama.pdf

([4]) Rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels, Official Gazette of Montenegro 51/11.

([5]) Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications form level 1 to level 5, Official Gazette of Montenegro 21/12.

([6]) Rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications form level 6 to level 8, Official Gazette of Montenegro 21/12.

been adopted, there is much work to do to define qualifications and curricula based on them.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The Montenegrin system of qualifications is governed by the law on the Montenegrin qualifications framework (adopted in December 2010), the rulebook on descriptors for qualification levels and sub-levels, the rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 1 to level 5, the rulebook on procedures for developing qualifications from level 6 to level 8, and by a set of education regulations including the National Vocational Qualifications Act. The government established the Qualifications Council ([7]) in line with the law on MQF, and for the purpose of improving the qualifications system, approving and placing qualifications in the framework. The council consists of representatives from ministries, institutions involved in qualifications development, employment services, universities, the social partners and chambers of commerce and representatives of employers and trade unions. The council is a permanent body, whose principal tasks are to:

(a) take decisions on inclusion and classification of qualifications in the MQF;
(b) make proposals for new qualifications to institutions in charge of developing them;
(c) take decisions on the methodological documents for classifying qualifications;
(d) adopt instructions and guidelines for sectoral commissions.

The Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for developing and implementing the MQF. Responsibilities as national coordination point (NCP) lie with the qualifications department at the ministry. The framework is managed by the Montenegro Qualifications Council, in cooperation with the National Council of Education and Higher Education Council.

Different institutions are involved in developing and awarding qualifications at different levels. For each of 15 qualification sectors, defined by the national qualifications framework law, the Qualifications Council has set up sectoral

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([7]) Decision of the Government of Montenegro on constitution of the Qualifications Council, Official Gazette of Montenegro 29/11.

commissions ([8]).Various partners have been involved as members of working groups, councils, committees and commissions in defining the framework concept, setting procedures and responsibilities for developing qualifications that are part of the framework, and drafting regulations and a referencing report.

Resources from the State budget assure functioning of the Qualifications unit at the Ministry of Education. Several IPA projects ([9]) have supported activities and expertise related with NQF implementation; this is a continuing process of cooperation.

Montenegro does not have an independent quality assurance agency so the Ministry has taken steps that aim to support the capacity of the Council for Higher Education, through regulations in line with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education. The EQF referencing report (Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014) clarifies compatibility with European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education, mainly the status of the Council for Higher Education.

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

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is regulated by the law on national vocational qualifications (2008) ([10]) and a series of rulebooks linked to acquiring vocational qualifications. Some qualifications can be obtained either wholly or partially via validation and can be levelled to the NQF. Candidates can now apply to be assessed for qualifications for agriculture technician, tourism technician and some qualifications in the transport sector (European Training Foundation, 2016).

The National Vocational Qualifications Act enables individuals to attain a national vocational qualification through assessment and evaluation of their prior knowledge. Many education programmes are being modularised, allowing

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([8]) The composition of all sectoral commissions, as well as information on their activities, can be found at: http://www.cko.edu.me/Default.aspx?cid=13

([9]) Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA):
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en

([10]) Law on national vocational qualifications (2008):
http://www.iccg.co.me/1/dok/regulativa/Zakon%20o%20nacionalnim%20i%20strucni
m%20kvalifikacijama.pdf

candidates to attain a single qualification or a specific module based on an occupational standard or several modules over time. However, a vocational qualification certificate does not equal a diploma, a formal education level document.

An occupational standard is an element connecting formal education and non-formal and informal learning, for qualification levels 1-5. Montenegro has developed 220 occupational standards and 53 qualification standards. Currently, 23 occupational standards are undergoing verification (European Training Foundation, 2016).

Validation is seen as a way of meeting the needs of young people and adults with a loose connection to formal schooling and the needs of the labour market, as well as supporting lifelong learning. It is a priority to intensify activities on implementation of validation described in existing legislation. The website of the Montenegrin qualifications framework provides information on licensed institutions and examiners; quality assurance obligations and procedures are applied in licensing of education and training institutions and throughout their activity (via external and internal assessment). Although preparations for this new system have improved, it is still in an early phase. There is no information yet about the number of candidates who have been assessed and how many have obtained certificates.

NQF implementation

The eight-level MQF is perceived as a framework for reform and modernisation of the national qualifications system. It is a comprehensive framework, encompassing qualifications at all levels and all degrees of complexity. The MQF aims to improve quality and availability of qualifications, in line with labour market and society needs; and to improve transparency and support recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The concept of the MQF emphasises that the framework is a vehicle to compare qualifications that will be used by learners, employers and the general public, to show the links between different types and levels of qualification.

In 2010, the Montenegro parliament passed the national qualifications framework law (*Zakon o nacionalnom okviru kvalifikacija*) ([11]), which defines

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([11]) Law on NQF: http://www.qas.ac.me/docs/reakreditacija/r5.pdf

principles and objectives of the MQF, structure of levels and sublevels, qualification types to be included and governance structure. This legislation was followed by adoption of methodology-related documents and rules, and setting up sectoral commissions in 2011-12. The qualifications department at the Ministry of Education was established and nominated as the national coordination point (NCP).

The framework has entered an early operational stage. Implementation is in progress, including work on information and transfer and dissemination of experience and knowledge from pilot undertakings. Development of qualifications is under way, and criteria and procedures for placing qualifications in the framework have been decided. A qualifications register, maintained by the NCP, includes all details on new qualifications. The qualifications framework information system ([12]) was designed within the IPA 2007 project ([13]). The database of qualifications currently contains 57 qualifications (certificates and diplomas) with complete descriptions of codes, learning outcomes, structure of credits, progression to related qualifications, and assessment methods. Such detailed information is available in the Montenegrin website ([14]). In addition to data on current activities, the database includes information on completed qualifications, as well as on their contents and information on the meetings of commissions and the Qualifications Council. The Ministry of Education and its Qualifications Department maintains the site and updates these data.

Montenegro monitors and reports on NQF implementation progress and issues that need to be solved (action plan 2016-17) through the reporting procedures linked with the Riga objectives. Feedback is reflected in these measures, so the review and further development of NQF instruments is being prepared.

Learners are using the framework qualifications and some candidates have obtained certificates via validation of non-formal learning mechanisms.

([12]) See the MQF website: www.cko.edu.me

([13]) Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA):
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en

([14]) Example of a VET-4 IVET qualification: http://www.cko.edu.me/ckoview/Default.aspx

Referencing to the EQF

The MQF has placed qualifications in its levels, indicating early implementation. It is already referenced to the EQF and self-certified against the qualifications framework of the European higher education area, since November 2014.

Important lessons and future plans

The Montenegrin qualifications framework has entered an early operational stage with qualifications already included. However, the population of the framework needs to be improved, so efforts are being made to redefine and develop further qualifications to reflect the learning outcomes perspective and allow for alignment to the MQF. An important activity is raising awareness of the framework among stakeholders and improving the existing qualifications register to make the information available to different target groups. Involvement of representatives from the world of work has increased at national and sectoral levels but strengthening implementation, particularly at provider level, is needed.

The number of sectoral commissions is growing steadily but challenges remain; enhancing their capacities is necessary, so they can analyse labour market and society needs and identify missing qualifications and skills. It is essential to improve not only the availability of vocational qualification attainment for each individual but also the procedures for assessing non-formal and informal learning, and the development of a comprehensive quality assurance system. The EQF referencing report (2014) has detailed information on qualification and NQF governance and sees the application of learning outcomes as a basis for increasing process transparency and recognition of learning.

Montenegrin national qualification (MQF)

Types/levels of qualifications			
NQF levels	Formal education/educational qualifications	Vocational qualifications (qualifications attained outside formal education and assessed by relevant bodies)	EQF levels
8	Diploma of doctoral studies	NVQ	8
7.2	Diploma of master studies (**) Diploma of master studies Graduate specialist academic and applied studies diploma	NVQ	7
7.1	Higher education diploma (**) First cycle academic and applied studies diploma (**)	NVQ	
6	Diploma of first cycle academic and applied studies	NVQ	6
5	Diploma of post-secondary vocational education	NVQ	5
4.2	Master craftsman examination certificate		4
4.1	Upper secondary school leaving diploma (general, gymnasium) Upper secondary school leaving diploma (vocational, four years)	NVQ	
3	Diploma of secondary vocational education (three years)	NVQ	3

		Types/levels of qualifications		
NQF levels	Formal education/educational qualifications	Vocational qualifications (qualifications attained outside formal education and assessed by relevant bodies)	EQF levels
2	Diploma of lower vocational education (two years)	NVQ	2
1.2	Certificate of completed primary education (nine years)	NVQ	1
1.1	Certificate of completed first cycle of primary education or completed functional literacy programme	NVQ	

(*)   The procedure for additional qualifications will be developed in the next stage.
(**)   Pre-Bologna diplomas, until adoption of the Higher Education Act 2002.
Source: Adapted from the Montenegrin Ministry of Education, 2014.

List of abbreviations

EQF	European qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession, the EU support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries
MQC	Montenegrin Qualification Council
MQF	Montenegrin qualifications framework
NCP	national coordination point
NVQ	national vocational qualifications
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 20.12.2016]

European Training Foundation (2016). Inventory of NQF recent developments in
    ETF partner countries: Montenegro.
    https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607
    e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Montenegro%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

Ministry of Education (2014). *Referencing the Montenegrin qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework for the European higher education area.* https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/documentation