

## **NQF state of play**

 **Bosnia & Herzegovina 2022**

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# Overview

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# Introduction and context

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## 1.1. Policy context

In 2022 Bosnia and Herzegovina became a candidate country for European Union (EU) membership. Economic, political, labour market and educational reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been affected by the complexity of decision-making processes, slowing down progress in reforms. The country comprises two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (containing 10 cantons with their own autonomous administrations), the Republika Srpska and a smaller administrative region, Brčko District. At the state level, there is the Council of Ministers and a presidency (rotating every eight months among the three main communities, Bosniak, Croat and Serb). The education and training system is fragmented, lacking common standards, teacher training and performance evaluation. The institutional structure is complex, involving 14 different education authorities, counting state-level, entities, cantons, and Brčko District.

Migration is a very important phenomenon. In 2022 the population was 3.2 million inhabitants, 600 000 less than in 2010. Emigration among young people is on the rise, affecting the labour force, with nearly 47% of young individuals expressing a desire to leave the country for better opportunities elsewhere ([1]) Almost 60% of migrants were medium level vocational education and training (VET) graduates, which is in line with their share in the domestic labour market. Participation in VET in Bosnia and Herzegovina is high with 75% of secondary school students in VET. Migration is also important among low-educated individuals, but only 5% of migrants hold a higher education degree. People leaving the country to study abroad are about 5% of the emigrants.

The pool of labour is getting smaller. Employers in the country face increasing skill shortages. 38% of companies surveyed by OECD in 2022 reported lack of appropriate skills of job applicants as the reason for unfilled vacancies ([2]). Employers are increasingly looking at workers from abroad to fill skill shortages. Many of these issues are worsened because of rigidities in the domestic labour market. Labour mobility within the country is rather low. Unemployment is relatively high, although gradually falling. Labour participation is low, especially among women (only 36% of the female working age population is active).

Education reform largely focus on developing legislative, institutional and

policy frameworks, which can be a lengthy process requiring adoption at state, entity, and cantonal levels. According to current practices, the education policy cycle is often initiated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA), based on current European trends, and frequently supported by international projects. It is carried out by a group composed of representatives of all competent educational authorities, agencies, MoCA and other experts. The result of the process is an agreed education policy formulated in the format of a framework document (framework law, framework strategy, etc.) which is considered by the Conference of Ministers of Education composed of all 14 ministers responsible for education, and afterwards is adopted at the State level. After that, the competent educational authorities take over the implementation of the education policy, adopting documents based on the framework document (drafting a new law, drafting a new strategy, or adapting the existing one, drafting regulatory documents, developing new curricula, etc.), and ensure other prerequisites for the implementation (institutional framework, training, resources, etc.). The dynamics, and ways of implementing the education policy vary among competent educational authorities, as they may have different priorities and different approaches in implementation of reforms. Different visions and views on the division of responsibilities may already have emerged in the development of framework policies and as a result the process sometimes slows down or even stops.

The OECD reviews emphasised that the skill levels of the workforce are not sufficiently developed. There is a need to strengthen efforts towards effective, coherent and inclusive digital transformation of the education and training systems, including the capacity of the systems to develop digital skills. Large shares of students continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies and there are signs of inequities in the learning outcomes (OECD, 2022).

The qualifications framework aims to maximise the value of qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina within the country and abroad, offering better opportunities to citizens. A comprehensive and inclusive qualifications environment is important for mobility of workers and recognition of qualifications both within Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as with the European Union. As an instrument for reform, the Qualifications Framework supports the development of an education and training system based on lifelong learning principles, use of learning outcomes, and quality assurance at all levels of education. The framework is intended to enable the development and application of common education, occupational and qualification standards, plus

common standards for the certification of education service providers in a highly fragmented legal and institutional environment.

Given its potential to aid reform and create synergies, the QF is included in several strategic documents for the modernisation of education and training: 'Priorities for development of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2016-26'; 'Strategic platform for development of adult education in the context of lifelong learning for the period 2014-20', and the 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021-30, in line with the Riga conclusions' ([4]).

## **1.2. NQF legal basis**

There are two main legal acts concerning the Qualifications Framework.

- a. First, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers' *Decision on Adoption of the Baseline of Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 31/11, 39/12). The decision carries the force of law.
- b. Second, the Council of Ministers' *Decision on Adoption of the Action Plan for the Establishment and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Period 2014-2020* (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 28/15) ([5])

The Action Plan is a comprehensive document with clear actions but is no longer valid as it has expired. In the meantime, elements of the Action Plan for the design of the Qualifications Framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina have been developed. These have been tested by different EU projects and introduced in different entities. It is necessary therefore to update the Action Plan. What is lacking is further legislation on the adoption of the Qualification Framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina, work on quality assurance and on the referencing of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. A website for the Qualifications Framework has been established, but there is no common register of qualifications. Several occupational standards, qualification standards and programmes have been developed for vocational education and training and for higher education but far from a full coverage of qualifications needed. The Inter-sectoral Commission with representatives from all entities has been responsible for joint development of the qualifications framework. There is a need to establish a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

A qualifications framework for higher education was developed in line with the Bologna process, with support from the Council of Europe. Legislation was adopted in 2007 (<sup>5</sup>), making the HE framework an integral part of the QF ([6]).

Related legal acts at state level are ([7]):

- c. the framework law on primary and secondary education (2003);
- d. the framework law on pre-primary education (2007);
- e. the framework law on higher education (2007);
- f. the Law on the Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education (2007);
- g. the framework law on VET (2008).

# Policy objectives

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## 2.1. NQF objectives

The QF is intended as a tool for transparency and reform. While Bosnia and Herzegovina previously had a traditional qualifications classifier, the 'nomenklatura', which comprehensively described the education and training system, the QF aims not only to structure and classify qualifications, but also to provide meaningful links between education and the labour market (ETF, 2018).

The QF aims to increase access to education and social inclusion, including through supporting mechanisms for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and to enable comparability of qualifications to support mobility and progression, both within the country and abroad.

The QF aims to enhance trust in and understanding of qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- a. For citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina the QF can support them in finding sustainable employment at home and abroad, develop themselves further and gain access to lifelong learning,
- b. For society and the economy, the QF provides a tool to bridge decentralised approaches to skills development by focusing on the capacities of those who hold qualifications and on results rather than on how education and training is organised.

## 2.2. NQF functions

Specific functions of the QF include ([8]):

- a. making understandable the different types of qualifications and their inter-relationships.
- b. achieving comprehensible presentations of education achievements to employers, learners and parents.
- c. guiding individuals in the selection of education and career paths.
- d. facilitating mobility and more transparent access to education throughout life.

- e. facilitating identification and recognition of national qualifications abroad and of foreign qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- f. creating the pre-conditions for introducing a quality assurance system for existing and new qualifications.
- g. creating the pre-conditions for the development of a system of evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal education / learning.
- h. improvement of co-operation with all social partner.

# Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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## 3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The Baseline of the Qualifications Framework has eight levels, designed for 1-to-1 referencing to the EQF levels. It does not have the sub-levels commonly found in other countries in the region. The three domains of learning outcomes are used: knowledge, skills, and competences (responsibility and autonomy). According to the Action Plan the level descriptors may be further developed to better represent the country context, and to serve the EQF referencing process. No decision has been taken yet to adapt the level descriptors.

## 3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The Qualifications Framework is a comprehensive framework, including all types of qualifications from general education, VET, and higher education.

According to the 'Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework', a qualification is defined as 'a formal title of the result of a process of assessment and validation obtained once a competent body determines that an individual has achieved the learning outcomes as per the defined standards'. In practice, however, the distinction between curriculum and qualifications is not always clear.

Different types of qualifications distinguished are:

- a. General education qualifications.
- b. VET qualifications.
- c. Higher education qualifications.

Qualifications awarded outside formal education and training can be included, but criteria and procedures for inclusion and levelling these are yet to be defined. A methodology for such allocation was developed as part of the EU project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'.

ETF conducted an inventory of vocational qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2017, covering qualifications from Levels 2 to 5. It revealed that of the 1,155 qualifications reviewed, most were not based

on learning outcomes. Moreover, more than half were developed in 1995 and 1996, and required revision. Based on this analysis, the decision was made to include only newly developed and learning outcomes-based VET and higher education qualifications in the Qualifications Framework.

So far, only 23 VET and 5 higher education qualifications have been included in the Qualifications Framework. This number should significantly grow in VET and HE qualifications by 2026 with support of the EU funded projects. The process of populating the qualifications framework with qualifications goes too slow to ensure that the qualifications framework will encompass all quality assured and outcome-based qualifications in the country.

### **3.3. Use of learning outcomes**

#### **General Education**

Learning outcomes are central to secondary education reforms. The EU funded project for the Development of the Qualifications Framework for General Education (2014-2017) developed guidelines for teaching and learning but did not manage to develop an external Matura diploma at the end of secondary education for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The OECD Education Review (2022) has shown that large shares of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies and there are signs of inequities in the learning outcomes.

The Common Core Curriculum (CCC) for cross-cultural and intersubject area, based on learning outcomes and Life Skills ([9]) was adopted in 2018. The CCC is based on the EU key lifelong learning competences (2018) and two additional competences for creativity/productivity and for physical/health competences. The State Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education, APOSO has also been working on achievement standards for all subjects and grade levels in cooperation with educational authorities and pedagogical institutes. Principles for assessing key competences have been defined by specifying these in more detailed learning outcomes that can be assessed accurately and meaningfully. Standardised questions and assessment topics have been defined that can be used.

Unfortunately, the CCC is not yet adopted by all entities, although adoption is progressing gradually. Sarajevo Canton adopted pedagogical standards and norms in 2022 that integrate the principles, outlined above, but today there are still only few examples of standardized external assessments. This lack of coherent implementation reduces

progression opportunities and the possibility to start raising learning outcomes across the country.

## **Vocational Education and Training**

The inventory of VET qualifications performed in 2017 with support of ETF identified the existence of 1155 vocational qualifications of which 836 were formal and 310 for lifelong learning programmes. 42.9% were based on learning outcomes.

The EU-funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning' developed a Manual for the Enhancement of Vocational Qualifications intended for all institutions and bodies involved in developing the basic elements of the qualifications framework such as occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula and programmes and use of learning outcomes ([10]). The project also developed a manual for quality assurance in VET which includes guidelines, including standards and criteria, for external evaluation and self-assessment based on best European practice and models. However, its take-up and use by authorities and providers has been partial.

The new VET strategic document '*Improvement of Quality and Relevance of VET in Bosnia in the light of the Riga conclusions 2021-2030*' ([11]) outline many relevant developments for the use of learning outcomes. The document recommends the establishment of sector specific partner committees. It states that occupational standards that have been developed with relevant partners are the basis for qualification standards, learning outcomes and curricula. APOSO coordinates the current development of occupational standards.

A common template for occupational standards has been adopted for vocational education and for higher education which provides consistency and helps occupational standards be easily understood by different users, employers, HR managers, faculty, and students. It includes a description of key tasks and required knowledge, skills, and competence ([12]).

Better monitoring of VET graduates and student performance is necessary to collect feedback on the relevance and feasibility of learning outcomes of current qualifications and programmes. Pedagogical institutes should establish procedures for occupational standards and qualification standards development. They also play an important role in supporting employers and providers in developing occupational standards, qualification standards and curricula. Curricula need to be adapted to students with special needs, supporting gradual acquisition of

qualifications. For this it is important to group learning outcomes into units and breakdown qualifications into units.

Many VET graduates in Bosnia and Herzegovina lack key competences and perform poorer than their peers from general education. It has been agreed that key competences descriptions in subject and modular curricula should be connected to learning outcomes and contextualised, taking into account the specific tasks and occupations as defined in related occupational standards and qualification standards.

## **Higher Education**

With support of the EU funded project *Strategic Development of Higher Education and Qualification Standards (2013-2015)* qualifications standards in five different subject disciplines and occupational standard for two disciplines were developed as well as a manual for further development and use of qualifications and occupational standards for higher education, and a curriculum development good practice guide. The project also trained a core group of national experts from higher education in the development of occupational standards and qualification standards.

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance issued in 2009 the Instruction on the Form and Content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement Issued by Accredited Higher Education Institutions (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 86/09). This Instruction is obligatory for all competent education authorities and accredited higher education institutions. In 2023 a revision of Instruction on the Form and Content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement was published in the Official Gazette following a process in 2022 led by the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance. Learning outcomes, the ECTS credit value and level of the qualifications are part of the instruction. Each higher education programme needs to be designed for the labour market and for further learning.

## **Adult Education**

The document '[Principles and Standards in the Field of Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (2014) ([13]) was drafted in the framework of the EU project 'Strengthening the Capacity for Human Resources Development in BiH. It outlines the basic principles on which adult education is based, considering international agreements and best practice. It distinguishes between different approaches for formal and non-formal programmes. For formal programmes it describes the process

of certification based on assessment and validation of learning outcomes and refers as well to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The principles are gradually integrated in legislation at entity level (Cantons, Brcko District and Republika Srpska). In 2022 e.g. the government of Herceg-Nova Canton adopted a rulebook on standards and norms for adult education programmes.

### **3.4. Quality assurance arrangements**

Lack of quality assurance undermines trust in the value of qualifications. Quality assurance in qualifications is underdeveloped in the country; systematic monitoring of the quality of education and learning outcomes is not taking place at the level of the country. There is no real coordination between entities to ensure comparability. The only country wide instruments are international comparative studies such as PISA and TIMMS.

In higher education, the institutional lead lies with the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA). In recent years, it has conducted accreditation of higher education institutions, private and public, of which a few offer short-cycle, level 5 qualifications, which are VET-oriented. To date, this has been general accreditation for both providers and programmes, but not yet for individual qualifications. The Agency has also been updating quality assurance procedures in higher education, to meet the Bologna Process' European Standards and Guidelines, but the EU progress report 2023 stresses that a fully functional system of accreditation of higher education institutions and in particular study programmes is still lacking.

In VET quality assurance arrangements between different entities are unconnected. Significant challenges in quality assurance of VET qualifications are lack of comparable education or occupational standards, lack of agreed criteria for development and validation of qualifications, minimal external assessment, and fragmented functions among the many actors.

# Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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## 4.1. Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a complex and fragmented constitutional, legal and institutional landscape, which hinders implementation of the QF. The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 provided for a decentralised constitution, which poses challenges in creating a truly national qualifications framework with equal validity and application across the country (ETF, 2023).

The Ministry of Civil Affairs has a coordinating role in QF development and implementation, bringing together the relevant authorities from the Republika Srpska, the 10 cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brcko District. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, Sector for Education, acts as an unofficial secretariat of the QF in BiH and maintains the web page on QF (eqf.ba), in spite of its limited resources.

The educational authorities of the Republika Srpska, the 10 cantons in the federation and Brcko district are responsible for legislating and implementing education policies.

The Council of Ministers established an Inter-sectoral Commission (ISC)[14] in 2013 as an interim executive policy-making and executive structure. This body was intended to steer the QF's early development, including designing a detailed Action Plan to implement the QF. The Council had planned that, in time, the ISC's decision-making functions would pass to a permanent governing body, working alongside MoCA, to manage the QF, and that the ISC would continue in an advisory capacity.

The Inter-sectoral Commission comprises nineteen members in total. There are six members for each of the three major population groups - Bosniak, Croat and Serb - plus one member for minorities such as Roma, representing education and training, the academic community, labour and employment, statistics institutions, and other social partners[15]. Its decisions are made by majority vote, requiring a minimum of two thirds of votes from the representatives of each constituent community. The Ministry of Civil Affairs chairs the ISC.

The ISC's first task was developing the QF's Action Plan. The Plan's provisions on institutional arrangements foresaw establishment of a

permanent QF Council which would be a decision-making body, advised by the ISC and various technical expert groups, and cooperating with MoCA and the entities and cantons.

The technical expert groups would include sectoral councils, tasked to develop qualifications in specified sectors such as wood, metal processing etc. They currently operate on an ad-hoc basis, advising on request APOSO or bilateral donors when they are developing new VET qualifications.

However, for wider political reasons, the ISC itself has not sat since 2015 until 2023, which has blocked progress in implementing much of the Action Plan, including the setting-up of the permanent QF Council. In the absence of a permanent governance system, therefore temporary arrangements are made. The Conference of Education Ministers in BiH and an ad-hoc 'Referencing working group' set up for the EQF referencing process, have tried to bridge the gap until the bodies foreseen by the Action Plan are put in place. This process has not yet resulted in a positive outcome. The Inter-sectoral Commission was reestablished in 2023 and has met several times.

#### **4.2. Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

2003, MoCA has been responsible for coordination of activities, harmonisation of plans of entity authorities and defining strategies at the international level and in the education field (Article 15 of the Law on Ministries and Other Bodies of Administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Official Gazette of BiH No. 5/03').

MoCA is responsible for educational policy at state level, in liaison with the international community and has a coordinating role in QF implementation. It also chairs the ISC and is designated to chair the planned QF Council.

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA) is the lead institution for quality in higher education. It is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA). It accredits public and private higher education institutions and updates quality assurance procedures to meet European standards and guidelines.

The Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education (APOSO) has overall responsibility for quality in pre-university education. In cooperation with all responsible education authorities, it develops education and occupational standards and guides curriculum

development. Development of the occupational standards is carried out mainly with the support of pedagogic institutes, companies and schools, and often with significant donor support.

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

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## 5.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The Baseline of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina established that learning outcomes are acquired formally, non-formally and informally. Although, there is no state-wide system in place for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), given the high rate of labour migration, authorities see recognition and validation as useful tools. Returning migrants can especially benefit from validation. Creating the pre-conditions for the development of validation processes is one of the policy objectives for QF implementation and among the activities outlined in the Action Plan ([16]).

Apart from the Baseline Qualifications Framework two strategic documents were adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2014 as a basis for development of lifelong learning and for regulating adult learning: 'Principles and standards in the field of adult education in BiH and Strategic adult education development platform in the context of lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020'. Many entities have adopted adult education laws that incorporate the principles for validation, but education authorities have not yet developed appropriate models to enable implementation.

The first concepts for establishing country-wide VNFIL arrangements were developed in 2018, by a working group within the EU-funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'. Two concepts exist for VNFIL in VET and HE respectively, based on the European Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2012. Implementation in Higher Education is more advanced than in VET. The EU project Education4Employment developed a model rulebook for RPL in higher education with a guide for students that have been introduced e.g. in the University of Mostar. In VET there are only a few ad hoc activities (mainly as part of adult education programmes). So far there seems to be only progress in the education sector. The European inventory on validation country chapter (ETF, 2024) did not record any initiatives in the labour market or in the third sector.

The new EU funded project VET project IPA 2019 will develop country-

wide VNFIL arrangements to be implemented in all administrative units of BiH, the piloting of the VNFIL is foreseen for 2025 and 2026.

The new VET strategic document 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021 - 2030, in line with the Riga conclusions' makes a number of recommendations to support the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This starts with ensuring that vocational qualifications are facilitating validation by grouping learning outcomes into units and breaking down qualifications into units which opens the possibility of gradual acquisition of qualifications and validation of non-formal and informal learning. If people need training before VNFIL their experience should be considered to tailor the programme to their individual needs. Competent authorities should move forward by approving the documents used to define assessment requirements. The competences of professionals involved in the validation of non-formal and informal learning need to be defined in terms of requirements of examiners and requirements of institutions. A deadline is set by 2030 to implement VNFIL and to set the requirements for examiners.

A growing interest in digital and online learning and credit accumulation and transfer system are also seen as important factors that could facilitate validation.

## **5.2. Credit systems**

Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Bologna process in 2003. In 2006, all public universities began the process of implementing first and second cycle study programmes and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS has since been introduced in all higher education programmes.

A credit system is not described in detail for other levels in the Baseline for the Qualifications Framework document and the Action Plan, but the principle is acknowledged. ECVET is used for new VET qualifications as mentioned in the Manual for enhancement of VET qualifications developed as part of the EU project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning', but implementation is limited. All qualification standards that are published on the website <https://eqf.ba> have a credit value.

## **5.3. Promoting lifelong learning**

As outlined above, Principles and standards in the field of adult education in BiH were adopted as an umbrella document at the state level, which served as a reference framework for further harmonization of legislation

and policies at lower levels. The concept of lifelong education is emphasized at all levels of education. Adult education is seen as part of a comprehensive education system. It assumes the openness and flexibility of the system in learning and advancement as well as intersectoral activity. All social actors involved in the development of adult education must work on a partnership basis, and ultimately adults are responsible for their own development.

The main objectives of the strategic platform for development of adult education in the context of lifelong learning were the following:

- a. improving legislation for adult education in the context of lifelong learning and alignment with the EQF;
- b. establishing effective ways to involve relevant social partners in the process of adult education in the context of lifelong learning;
- c. developing programmes and increasing the accessibility of adult education;
- d. raising and ensuring the quality of adult education.

Currently, vocational secondary schools carry the main responsibility for adult and continuing education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). They offer training programs for adults mostly on the same lines as the programmes of formal vocational secondary education. The aim of these programs is to enable adults to upgrade their skills and acquire qualifications in order to improve their employment prospects.

# NQF implementation and impact

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## 6.1. Stage of implementation

Communication about the Qualifications Framework has so far been directed at stakeholders relevant for, and directly involved with, the development and implementation of related elements and processes. These included policy makers in education and employment, teachers, students, education and employment agencies and employers. The main channels used were the websites of different ministries, social media, leaflets, conferences and workshops. A website has been developed for further communication of the QF in relation to the EQF (<https://eqf.ba/>).

This website describes why the EQF is important, and how the EQF operates. It provides links to the most important document including the Baseline for the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the Action plan for the development and implementation of the QF in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Manual for the Development of Qualification standards and occupational standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina' the handbook for improving qualifications in VET; the ETF study 'List and Analysis of existing vocational qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina'; a template for occupational standards and qualification standards, links to reports, information materials and guidelines as well as selected standards and policy documents.

There are links to 24 occupational standards for VET and two occupational standards for higher education; and to 23 qualification standards for VET ([18]); that are part of the qualifications framework.

Levelling of greater numbers of qualifications is slowed by various factors. One reason is lack of capacity across the education and training system, as the country is generally dependent on donors for development of new qualifications. Another reason, related, is the wider political, and so education-administrative, fragmentation, which hinders cooperation by the necessary actors.

Initiatives and developments in the different education and training sub-systems have been undertaken over the past years, mostly as part of EU-funded projects ([19]), see section 8.2 below.

## 6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

The diploma supplement for higher education qualifications mentions the

level of the qualification. There is no reference to EQF levels yet as the qualifications framework has not been referenced yet. Qualification standards that are published on the webpage eqf.ba have a QF level.

### **6.3. NQF dissemination**

As described above the emphasis is still on stakeholders, relevant for the development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework, since the QF is not yet operational. There is however the website eqf.ba that provides essential information to a wider public.

### **6.4. Qualifications databases and registers**

The web portal for the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina includes occupational and qualification standards for VET and higher education. There are links to 24 occupational standards for VET and two occupational standards for higher education; and to 23 qualification standards for VET[21]); that are part of the qualifications framework. These numbers are expected to grow to 41 occupational standards and 32 qualification standards for VET by 2026. The repository of standards on the website is not a register that can be searched but just a list of files. There are no links to other databases, or direct links between the data of occupational standards and qualification standards. Learning outcomes are described but there are no specific criteria on how they should be represented. There is no difference between full and short descriptions. For all diplomas in higher education Europass diploma supplements should be issued, but these are not part of a database. Current data are not yet interoperable. EQF levels are not indicated yet. It is important to establish a proper database of qualifications in line with the European Learning Model v.3 and populate it with more qualifications.

### **6.5. Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications**

The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education is fully operational in BiH. The procedures of recognition of higher education qualifications in BiH are regulated primarily by the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education/ Lisbon Convention and are prescribed by laws on recognition, laws on higher education, by laws and statutes of higher education institutions.

In 2014 Recommendations were adopted on the use of qualifications frameworks in the process of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, number 81/14) ([22]) taking into account five key elements of the recognition process:

level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile.

In practice, there are still some differences in procedures between the ten cantons, Republika Srpska and Brčko District according to the Report on the assessment and recommendations for implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2019 ([24]).

There is also a regional dimension of the recognition processes, linked with the Berlin process and the ambition of establishing a Common Regional Market. In November 2022, the leaders of the Western Balkan economies signed three regional mobility agreements, deepening the intra-regional economic integration. The agreements comprise travel with identity cards within the region, recognition of higher education qualifications, and recognition of professional qualifications for doctors, dentists and architects.

### **6.6. Career guidance and counselling**

Both the ETF and the EU4Employment project have carried out recent reviews of career guidance in Bosnia and Herzegovina ([26] It stresses the need for young people to inform themselves and also mentions the Qualifications Framework as a possible source, but currently it is not clear how this could be used.

### **6.7. Awareness and use of the NQF**

The Qualifications Framework is a tool for education reform, and in that sense, it is used by stakeholders and international projects, but it is not yet operational for use by final beneficiaries.

### **6.8. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF**

As the QF is only at an early stage of implementation, no evaluation studies have been carried out to assess its impact. Given its major reforming role, QF implementation initiatives are starting to influence the introduction and use of learning outcomes, and the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications. The QF has helped formalise cooperation between stakeholders across education sub-sectors and institutions at different levels (political, technical, expert) and is seen as a solution for enhanced dialogue between stakeholders from education and training and those representing the labour market. It provides a basis for developing arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and is expected to increase permeability in the education and training system and to support recognition of foreign qualifications.

# Referencing to the EQF

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## 7.1. Referencing to the EQF

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a full member of the EQF Advisory Group since 2015 and referencing the BQF to the EQF is considered a state-wide priority. With the assistance of EU funded project on the Development of Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina, BiH developed a referencing report to the EQF with participation of all relevant stakeholders. The State of Play report was presented to the EQF Advisory Group in June 2019. A final draft of the EQF referencing report has been produced but was not adopted by the relevant authorities and was therefore not presented in the EQF Advisory Group. It covered both referencing to the EQF and self-certification against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education area (Bologna Process).

## 7.2. International cooperation

The Ministry of Civil Affairs carries out work related to the realization of the basic principles of coordinating activities and exchanging data with domestic and international institutions responsible for the field of education, based on EU and international reform and strategic documents, laws and by-laws for all levels and types of education. MoCA plays therefore a key role in coordinating international cooperation in education. The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA). Full membership has not been granted yet. The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education is representing Bosnia and Herzegovina in international projects in higher education; through the international network of information centres (ENIC/NARIC network). It provides information to the higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina on higher education institutions and programmes as the basis for recognition of degrees and diplomas for further education at higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it represents Bosnia and Herzegovina in those networks. Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the Bologna Process and in the European Education Area, including the VET initiatives, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, Europass, Eurydice, and the Erasmus+ programme. Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a signatory of the Lisbon Convention and participates with neighbouring countries in the Western

Balkans in the Berlin Process, the Regional Cooperation Council and the ERISSE, the education reform initiative for South-Eastern Europe. Bosnia and Herzegovina is also involved in bilateral cooperation on education and employment with e.g. Swiss, Austrian and German organisations.

### **7.3. International cooperation**

The EU has been the most important international donor in the area of qualifications reforms.

Under the Cards programme Bosnia and Herzegovina received support for the development of new VET curricula based on learning outcomes, which resulted in a methodology for developing occupational standards and curricula.

The focus shifted to qualifications and qualification standards under IPA. Under IPA 2007 there was support for Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a focus on quality assurance and the development of the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The Baseline for the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been developed with all responsible education authorities and state-level agencies (APOS0, HEA, CIP). Under IPA 2009 there was support adult education and training policies and the capacity building of the Agency for Primary, Pre-primary and Secondary Education (APOS0) that had been legislated in 2007 and established in 2008. The agency plays a key role in developing occupational standards, qualifications standards and framework curricula and the introduction of key competences in education. Under IPA 2011 there was support for entrepreneurial learning in education, and further development of higher education with an emphasis on labour market relevant qualifications, introducing occupational standards and qualification standards in higher education.

Under IPA 2012 support was given to developing the Qualifications Framework for general education, including qualification standards and curricula, and a proposal for an external matura. A first proposal was also developed to introduce a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Under the IPA 2016 programme new VET curricula were developed based on occupational standards and occupational standards and special attention was paid to the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition convention and career guidance.

The EU-funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning', which ran March 2016 to June 2018, focused on several aspects of the QF, such as quality assurance, accreditation procedures, EQF referencing and

validation of non-formal and informal learning. A 'Manual for Enhancement of Vocational Qualifications' was developed with involvement of representatives from all relevant education authorities and key partners; it is intended for all bodies involved in developing occupational and qualification standards, curricula and programmes, and in using learning outcomes. The criteria defined in the manual are considered when developing new qualifications.

The EU-funded project EU4Employment project (2020-2023) focused on developing modern lifelong career guidance services and the improvement of the quality of qualifications in VET and higher education as well as enhancing the capacity of human resources at all levels of education. The project provided teacher training and capacity building of education staff and develop new study programmes and curricula for teacher training colleges based on learning outcomes, which includes modern teaching methodologies and key competencies. For higher education it developed guidance materials for establishing procedures for validation of non-formal learning and a Handbook for the implementation of occupational/qualification standards in study programmes to make higher education programmes more relevant to the labour market.

The EU4Education project has started recently and aims to improve responsiveness of education to the labour market needs. It focusses on the development of 17 occupational and 9 qualification standards. This is complemented by the development and mainstreaming of programmes on entrepreneurial competences in VET schools and the development of VET teachers' digital competences. Both components aim at strengthening institutional capacities of educational authorities and VET schools and to promote the replicability of those actions after the end of the project.

## Important lessons and future plans

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Bosnia and Herzegovina became a candidate country in 2022. The Qualifications Framework is the key instrument for better education quality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, increased access to lifelong learning and more relevant qualifications for citizens and the labour market. With its connection to the European Qualifications Framework, the Bologna Process, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the recommendation for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, and with the policy processes to realise the European Area for Education, it is the tool for connecting qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina internationally. It is also part of the country's efforts to gain EU membership, as the QF is seen as contributing to the increased mobility, flexibility and competitiveness of the labour force.

In a country where the responsibilities for qualifications, curricula and education provision are decentralised the Qualifications Framework can act as a tool like the EQF in Europe or the QNQ in Italy and ensure transparency, trust, quality assurance, comparability and linkages between qualifications, without harmonisation. It is a necessary tool to overcome fragmentation and to ensure integration in the European Area for Education, particularly important for a country where so many people look for employment and study opportunities abroad as well as at home. It is unfortunate that this is not sufficiently recognised by all education authorities in the country, because its implementation depends on their cooperation. The normal functioning of the Inter-sectoral Commission needs to be restored. Support is needed to re-establish the operational capacities of the Inter-sectoral Commission at technical level, and to create the QF Council as a permanent NQF structure at decision-making and policy level.

Although work during the past years has advanced to allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to initiate referencing with the European Qualifications Framework, the plan for 2024 is to update the Action Plan and define the necessary steps to complete the QF design including quality assuring qualifications and develop a common approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Referencing can then take place in 2025 which will facilitate using of EQF levels on the qualifications that are part of the Qualifications Framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina and to link the register of the qualifications framework with the Qualifications Data Register of the EQF and obtain interoperability of data on qualifications,

learning opportunities, providers and digital credentials under Europass. Completing the referencing is therefore a first and necessary step to link qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina to those of other European countries.

The Action Plan for the development and implementation of the Qualifications Frameworks has expired and needs updating. A new Action Plan needs to be agreed and legislated that focuses on the necessary steps to make the Qualifications Framework fully functional, including a modern qualifications register that is populated with qualifications for general education, vocational education, higher education and adult learning, a functioning system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and use of occupational standards and qualifications standards in education and training. Reforms of general education, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education and training are continuing, but it is important that initiatives are consolidated at the grass root level, so that learners and employers can really benefit from them.

When qualifications are widely provided and individuals can use them for career choices, employment and further learning, and are able to combine qualifications and obtain them in different ways, recognising non-formal and informal learning, when the holders of qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina that are part of the Qualifications Framework are in great demand for their skills, the Qualifications Framework will have achieved its purpose.

# National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	<p><b>PhD Category</b> Third cycle of higher education</p> <p><b>Doctorate diploma and Diploma supplement Category</b> Third cycle of higher education</p>	No EQF level
7	<p><b>Master Diploma (MA) Category</b> Second cycle of higher education</p> <p><b>Master level Diploma with a Diploma supplement Category</b> Second cycle of higher education</p>	No EQF level
6	<p><b>Bachelor Diploma (BA) Category</b> First cycle of higher education</p> <p><b>Diploma issued by the institution of higher education with a Diploma supplement Category</b> First cycle of higher education</p>	No EQF level
5	<p><b>Diploma/certificate of completed post-secondary education or passed master craftsman exam and/or similar exam for a certain occupation, with a supplement Category</b> Postsecondary education, including master craftsman exams and similar exams</p>	No EQF level

4	<p><b>Secondary school graduation diploma with a supplement</b>  <b>Category</b>  Secondary general education</p> <p><b>Diploma/Certificate of secondary graduation with a supplement</b>  <b>Category</b>  Secondary technical education</p>	No EQF level
3	<p><b>Diploma/certificate of final examination (matriculation) with practical work, including a supplement</b>  <b>Category</b>  Vocational Education and training</p>	No EQF level
2	<p><b>Certificate on completed programme or education for lower-level occupational qualifications</b>  <b>Category</b>  Occupational training programmes</p>	No EQF level
1	<p><b>Certificate on completed elementary education (nine years)</b>  <b>Category</b>  elementary education</p>	No EQF level

# Acronyms

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APOSO	Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education
CCC	Common Core Curriculum for cross-cultural and intersubject area, based on learning outcomes and Life Skills
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System for Higher Education
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
ENIC NARIC Centres	National Information Centres on Academic Recognition of Qualifications
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
EQF AG	EQF Advisory Group
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Agency for development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance
HR	Human Resources
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
ISC	Inter-Sectoral Commission
MoCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

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PISA	OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment
QF	Qualifications Framework
QF EHEA	Qualifications Framework for the European Area for Higher Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study of the IEA
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

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Overview of laws and strategic plans:

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## Notes

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[1]<https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/publications/survey-youth-emigration-bosnia-and-herzegovina-0>

[2]<https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/programme/Labour-Migration-report.pdf>

[4]Adopted by the Council of Ministers on 22 October 2020

[5]Documents are available in English or local languages

at: <http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanje-dokumenti>

[6]The Framework for higher education qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the strategy for its implementation were adopted in December 2007 through Decision of the Council of Ministries on the adoption of documents needed for further implementation of the Bologna process in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 13/08). Other key documents adopted through this decision included: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Recommendations for Implementing Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina; National Action Plan for Qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Diploma Supplement model for Bosnia and Herzegovina; User Manuals for the Diploma Supplement for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[7]Documents are available in English or local languages at:

<http://www.mcp.gov.ba/Content/Read/obrazovanje-dokumenti>

[8]Documents are available in English or local languages at:

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[9]<https://aposo.gov.ba/sadržaj/uploads/ZJNPP-Kroskurikularno.pdf>

[10]Priručnik za unapređenje kvalifikacija u stručnom obrazovanju i obuci

[11][https://oead.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/oead.at/KIM/&#x2D;](https://oead.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/oead.at/KIM/&#x2D;BIKO_Ost_und_Suedosteuropa/Strateski_dokument_engleski.pdf)

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[12]<https://eqf.ba/lista-standarda/standardi-zanimanja/>

[13]Dokumenti ([mcp.gov.ba](http://www.mcp.gov.ba))

[16]Action plan for the development and implementation of

the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2014-20 (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 28/15)

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[18]<https://eqf.ba/pregled-standarda-kvalifikacije-u-visokom-obrazovanju/>

[19]The proposal for the Bosnia and Herzegovina qualifications framework was developed as part of the EU VET III project, and the VET IV project developed vocational qualifications based on occupational standards, which were a new development in the country. A joint EU and

Council of Europe project developed a good practice guide for development of qualifications and occupational standards in higher education. An IPA-funded project managed by the British Council (2014-2016) sought to raise the quality of primary and general secondary education and to reform the school-leaving Matura exam; the project prioritized training for teachers, pre- and in-service, in the primary and secondary education. Other projects are described in 8.2

[21]<https://eqf.ba/pregled-standarda-kvalifikacije-u-visokom-obrazovanju/>

[22]<http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/TIN6goyH3io=>

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[26]<https://education4employment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Manual-Career-Guidance-for-Ninth-Grade-of-Primary-School.pdf>