NQF state of play

North Macedonia 2022

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Overview

Introduction and context

1.1. Policy context

North Macedonia is a candidate for EU accession. The NQF is a key reform instrument in the country's principal economic, social, employment and education strategies. The revised Employment and social reform programme 2022 ([1]) and the Economic reform programme 2022-24 ([2]) provide the broad policy framework in employment and education. These strategies highlight the NQF's role in improving the quality of the education and training system, adapting it to labour market needs, and promoting lifelong learning and mobility.

The return to economic growth after the COVID-19 crisis has been slower in North Macedonia than in the other Western Balkan countries. The Macedonian labour market is characterised by low activity rates (54.1% in 2021 for age group 15+) particularly among women and youth, and a high unemployment rate (15.8% in 2021) with a high share of long-term unemployed. A large share of youth aged 15-29 remains not in employment, education, or training (NEET), at 24.3% in 2021. Young people face a difficult transition from school to work.

Despite major improvements in performance, in the PISA tests compared to scores in earlier years, the 2018 results showed that around 50% of 15-year-old students in North Macedonia still do not achieve basic numeracy and literacy skill levels. The National employment strategy 2021-2027 ([3]) sets the 'improvement of the quality of education and training outcomes for all' as its priority.

VET enrolment, according to ETF's analysis, accounts for 60% of the country's upper secondary cohort.

Transition to higher levels of education and training has been facilitated in the past decade through several policies, such as making secondary education compulsory for all, streamlining progression routes in VET programmes from three to four years, giving access to higher education, and stimulating participation in higher education.

Higher education institutions have been reforming their curricula and qualifications in implementation of the Bologna principles.

The key education sector-specific strategic documents are the Comprehensive strategy for education 2018-2025 ([4]) and the Adult

education strategy 2019-2023 ([5]). The Comprehensive Strategy for Education defines a vision of an inclusive and integrated education system focused on the learner, based on modern programmes equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and competences for participation in society and the labour market. It addresses all education sectors, including VET and adult education. It seeks to improve the education system infrastructure, including building facilities, equipment and teaching and supporting technologies; capacities of human resources including managers, teaching, and support staff; the autonomy of education institutions; and legislation, management and funding.

The main policy priorities established for VET are to harmonise VET with labour market needs, improve the learning environment and quality of VET, increase enrolment, and improve capacities of human resources. The two key policy initiatives launched recently in VET are the successful roll-out of classes with a substantial component of work-based learning, and the establishment of Regional VET Centres[6] which will combine functions related to excellence in teaching and learning, increased collaboration with local industry, as well as inclusion of vulnerable groups, training for adults and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

1.2. NQF legal basis

The NQF in North Macedonia for Lifelong Learning was formally adopted in 2013 via the Law on the NQF, (Official Gazette No 137/2013), which came into effect in 2015 and which was amended in 2016 (Official Gazette No 30/2016) ([7]). It defines the principles and goals of the framework, its structure, levels, sublevels and level descriptors, mandatory elements of qualification standards, volume, and types of qualifications, as well as its governance, quality assurance aspects and the roles of stakeholders in the qualification system.

The VET system is mainly regulated by the Law on Vocational Education and Training approved in 2006 and amended in 2019 (Official Gazette No. 71/2006; 117/2008; 148/2009; 17/2011; 24/2013; 137/2013, 41/2014 и 55/2016 275/2019).

The Law on Higher Education was amended in 2019 and 2021 (Official Gazette No. 82/2018 and 178/2021).

In 2019, in view of the reforms planned in the new Comprehensive Strategy, the government started to review the entire education legislative framework, but the parliamentary adoption of new draft laws

has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and frequent changes in the government.

Policy objectives

2.1. NQF objectives

The main goals listed in the law on the NQF ([8]) are to:

a. define the learning outcomes at the different levels;

b. establish a system for validation of different qualifications within the overall qualifications system;

c. encourage and promote lifelong learning;

d. demonstrate clear links between different parts of the education and training system;

e. indicate transfer and progression (horizontally and vertically) across and within all types of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal);

f. enable international comparability of qualifications;

g. promote the importance of key and professional competences;

h. ensure mobility of participants in education and training and inclusion in the labour market at national and international levels;

i. create a single system for quality assurance;

j. balance quality of service providers;

k. ensure cooperation of all stakeholders;

l. ensure harmonisation with national economic, social and cultural needs;

m. be part of the developments related to the EQF.

2.2. NQF functions

The framework aims to improve education and training through implementation of the learning outcomes approach; to aid access to learning in every context and make learning outcomes explicit for every citizen; to raise the overall level of qualifications of the population; and to strengthen the links between qualifications and employment prospects

([9]).

The main goals of the NQF are to integrate and coordinate the education sub-systems and to improve the transparency, access, progression, and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society ([10]).

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The NQF in North Macedonia is a comprehensive, lifelong learning framework. It consists of eight levels, of which levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each to reflect the specificities of the national education and training system and meet the requirements of employers[11].

Level descriptors are defined in terms of expected learning outcomes and follow the EQF domains: knowledge and understanding, skills and competence. They were developed for each level taking into account the EQF level descriptors, the Dublin descriptors for levels 6 to 8, the characteristics of national education and training levels, and strategic national priorities. Different dimensions of the Dublin descriptors have been integrated into the three domains of the NQF.

Levels 5 to 7 have two sublevels each, so that the framework contains Levels 5A and 5B, 6A and 6B and 7A and 7B. The specifications for learning outcomes are the same in the A and B sublevels. Instead, the function of the extra levels is to cater for different types of qualifications (see below).

3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The NQF includes qualifications of two types defined by the NQF Law ([12]): educational qualifications from all formal education sectors (general education, VET, higher education), and vocational (or occupational) qualifications based on occupational standards. The general education qualifications are allocated to the NQF levels 1 and 4, VET qualifications correspond to the 2-5B NQF levels, the higher education qualifications are allocated to the NQF levels 5A-8. Occupational qualifications can be allocated at NQF levels up to 5B according to their level of complexity.

Only educational qualifications enable vertical progression in the formal education system. Vocational qualifications are regarded as partial (CVET) qualifications, which can be acquired by completing a formally recognised training course - either part of a formal education programme (modules, courses) or a verified special programme for adult education; or through validation of non-formal learning.

3.3. Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards

All new and reformed qualifications are based on learning outcomes. The law on the NQF stipulates inclusion of 'measurable indicators of learning outcomes relating to the acquired knowledge and understanding, skills and competence' as one of the mandatory elements of qualifications standards ([13]).

Reformed VET programmes are based on the qualification standards linked with relevant occupational standards. Programmes are modular. In adult education, verified non-formal training programmes are designed in the language of learning outcomes and based on occupational standards.

Since 2010, higher education institutions have designed their programmes in the language of learning outcomes. In accordance with the Law on Higher Education ([14]), higher education programmes should contain learning outcomes according to the national framework for higher education qualifications ([15]).

The national stakeholders are currently working on development of a methodology for a review of qualifications which, according to the Law on NQF, is to be carried out every five years.

3.4. Quality assurance of qualifications

The NQF law establishes the competent bodies and procedures for the development and quality assurance of qualifications. The institutions responsible for the development of qualifications at levels 1 to 5B are:

a. the VET Centre

b. the Centre for Adult Education and

c. the Bureau for Development of Education.

A request for entering a qualification into the Register can be submitted by a legal entity or a natural person. The approval and allocation of qualifications in the NQF are the responsibility of the National Board for the NQF following the opinion of the respective Sectoral Council.

Vocational (CVET) and VET qualifications are developed based on occupational standards, and awarded by the verified or accredited providers. Educational and training programmes are verified both in formal VET as well as Adult Education.

Qualifications at levels 5A to 8 are developed and awarded by accredited

higher education institutions. All higher education institutions are obliged to undergo both institutional and programme accreditation by the Agency for Quality of Higher Education. The ongoing EU Twinning Project is reviewing the formulation of benchmarks for higher education programmes and the degree of their alignment with the Bologna requirements and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

4.1. Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQF law stipulates that the development, adoption, approval, and classification of qualifications are the responsibility of the National Board for NQF, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bureau for Development of Education, VET Centre, Centre for Adult Education, and Sectoral Qualifications Councils.

The Ministry of Education and Science has overall responsibility for developing the NQF and for EQF referencing; it is the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP). It has a coordinating role, shared with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in leading the NQF's development and implementation. In quality assurance, it verifies programmes for formal VET and runs accreditation and verification of VET and adult education providers.

The National Board for the NQF, created in October 2015, ensures the involvement of stakeholders in framework governance. Its role is to evaluate education, employment and regional development policies, to help forge links between education and the labour market, to propose development of qualifications and decide on their allocation in the NQF in North Macedonia, to set up and supervise the sectoral qualifications councils; it also has a monitoring and methodological role. It has two representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science and one from each of the following: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, higher education, the chambers of commerce, the Organisation of Employers, and the Independent Union for Education, Science and Culture.

Day-to-day running of the NQF is supported by the permanent NQF Unit in the Ministry of Education with three staff members. The operational budget of the NQF Unit, of approximately 5 million MKD, includes budget lines for the works of Sectoral Councils and the National Board, awareness raising and management of the register. A separate budget for the development of standards is included in the operations of the VET Centre.

4.2. Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy proposes the development of qualifications, adopts occupational standards and is responsible for setting up a system for collecting information on labour market needs and changes in required competences.

Sectoral qualifications councils are provided for in the NQF law, one for each of the 16 NQF sectors ([16]), of which 15 have so far been established (the arts sectoral council remains to be set up). However, the mandate of several of the councils has expired or is due to expire soon and the processing of new appointments is necessary. The members represent the Ministry of Education and Science, the ministry responsible for the sector, the employers' association for that sector, the relevant trades unions in the sector, universities, the VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education, the Bureau for Development of Education, and the relevant body for regulated professions. The mandate of sectoral qualifications councils is to analyse labour market trends, propose and promote qualifications in a particular sector or subsector, evaluate current qualifications and propose priorities in developing new ones, give opinions on the compliance of examination programmes (assessment standards) with occupational and qualification standards, and establish commissions for assessment and validation of non-formal learning.

The VET Centre is responsible for the VET content: development of occupation standards, VET qualifications, programmes and curricula, and monitoring of their implementation. The Bureau for Development of Education is responsible for the development of programmes and curricula for primary and general secondary education, including the general subjects taught in VET programmes.

The Centre for Adult Education proposes the development of vocational qualifications, verifies adult education programmes, and monitors their delivery, develops programmes and curricula for primary and secondary education of adults.

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

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

Development of a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in North Macedonia is tied to development of the NQF and largely inspired by the EU's 2012 Recommendation. So far, while authorities have devised plans, developed methodological packages ([17]) and run pilot activities, the system is not yet implemented. The Education Strategy 2018-25 and the Strategy on Adult Education for 2019-2023 include measures on validation. A draft legal act containing the main principles and provisions for setting up and implementing a validation system was developed in 2019 but the delayed adoption of the new Law on Adult Education prevents further rollout of validation arrangements. Meanwhile, pilot activities for selected occupations have been carried out.

According to the draft Law on Adult Education, validation can be carried out by accredited education institutions or adult education providers. In addition, the Regional VET Centres will have the mandate to deliver VNFIL services. It will be possible to award qualifications up to level 5B of the NQF through validation for both types of qualification: educational and vocational. However, only educational qualifications obtained through validation will allow vertical mobility within the formal education system. The vocational certificates awarded through validation will not certify the general education component of the qualifications and therefore will not allow for continuation of learning at a higher level within the formal education system.

The Ministry of Education and Science will oversee the overall VNFIL policy and the verification of validation service providers. The Centre of Adult Education will lead on the implementation and will provide the capacity-building support to the VNFIL practitioners. In addition, it will carry out monitoring of the implementation.

Two currently running EU technical assistance projects will support the rollout of validation services in 11 qualifications.

The law on higher education ([18]) stipulates that higher education qualifications may be awarded via VNFIL as well, but quality assurance

regulations are yet to be adopted.

5.2. Credit systems

The volume of qualifications is expressed in credits, using three credit systems. The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) is used for higher education qualifications, the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) for VET qualifications, and the North Macedonian credit system for general education (NMCSGE) for primary and general secondary education. ECTS has been applied to all three cycles of higher education since 2005.

5.3. Promoting lifelong learning

According to the NQF law, vocational qualifications can be awarded for successful completion of part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education, or through validation of non-formal learning. Improvement of adult education programmes, widening the training offer and further development of the VNFIL system, with a focus on disadvantaged groups are prioritised in the national policies and strategic documents ([19]). The establishment of Regional VET Centres, which is among top priorities in the VET sector, will be accompanied by expansion of the training offer for adults.

However, the flexible learning pathways have not yet materialised in practice, mainly due to the bottlenecks encountered in adopting legislation. The approach to validation of vocational qualifications still must tackle the vertical mobility issues that concerns the general education component. In addition, the current approach to describing learning outcomes in the educational standards provides information that is not granular enough to allow for validation of learning outcomes acquired beyond the formal education system. To launch validation, the development of more granular standards allowing assessment against individual units of learning outcomes is necessary.

The Concept of Secondary Education for Adults adopted in 2022 ([20]) envisages development of an offer for so called second-chance courses for adults which will build on learning outcomes developed around key competences ([21]) and incorporate experiential learning through validation. The qualifications awarded in the adult education system will be placed on the NQF as equivalent to those acquired in formal education.

Development and inclusion of microcredentials in the qualification system is not yet on the national agenda and VNFIL arrangements in higher education are missing.

NQF implementation and impact

6.1. Stage of implementation

All new and reformed qualifications are based on learning outcomes. Reformed vocational programmes are linked with qualification standards and occupational standards. The establishment of a system for validation on non-formal and informal learning is prioritised in VET and adult education policies, and the foundations for launching the validation services have been laid.

NQF governance arrangements are in place; most of the necessary enabling regulations have been adopted; instruments and systems for quality assurance are being applied; and the framework has begun to play a role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications domestically and internationally.

North Macedonia's NQF is therefore at the activation stage.

6.2. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

VET qualifications are certified by a certificate for vocational training (NQF level 2) or diploma (NQF levels 3-5), vocational (occupational) qualifications are certified by a certificate. NQF levels are currently indicated only in higher education diplomas and diploma supplements ([22]). The EQF levels are not yet indicated on the certificates, diplomas or in the register.

6.3. NQF dissemination

The website of the Ministry of Education and of the NQF, as well as social media are used as the main communication channels. Within the framework of the currently running Twinning Project, the NQF Communication Strategy for the years 2023-2025 was developed, to increase the awareness of NQF among different stakeholders. The Strategy identifies two main target groups (NQF developers and implementers, and system beneficiaries and end-users), key messages for each of the main groups of stakeholders, communication channels and tools and delivery responsibilities. It includes an implementation plan with clear targets and indicators.

6.4. Qualifications databases and registers

The Centre for Adult Education portal includes information on adult education providers and programmes. The Employment Service Agency uses these programmes as part of its active labour market measures.

Qualifications approved by the National Board for NQF are registered in the NQF Register which is designed as a comprehensive NQF register to include all NQF qualifications. However, it currently includes only VET qualifications (110 in total). The register is available in Macedonian language only and is not yet connected to other national databases.

As a starting point for the development of a qualifications register, a comprehensive inventory of qualifications was made in 2015 in cooperation with the ETF. It covered all formal qualifications from higher education, general education and VET, and the verified non-formal adult education programmes.

Qualifications are classified according to type, NQF level and sector. For higher education qualifications, OECD classification of Fields of Research and Development is applied. Occupational standards, VET programmes, curricula and examination programmes are published at the VET Centre portal.

The register has a basis in law which structure clearly the elements of qualifications descriptions. The register currently includes the following data fields:

a. title of qualification

b. code of qualification

c. type or sub-level of qualification

d. level or sublevel

e. sector of qualification (for higher education qualifications the science field is determined according to the Frascati classification)

f. volume (number of credits and duration)

g. description of qualification (measurable indicators of learning outcomes relating to the acquired knowledge and understanding, skills and competence)

h. contents: entry requirements, number of mandatory and optional subjects, assessment methods and criteria for assessment of learning outcomes

i. type of public document (diploma/certificate)

j. type of institution issuing the public document (primary school, secondary school, higher education institution, educational provider, adult education provider)

k. mobility/progression

l. date of adoption of qualification standard

m. date of revision.

The register includes a search function.

EQF levels are not yet included in the data fields. Work to connect with the Europass platform via Qualifications Dataset Register have started. Further areas of ongoing works include defining qualifications in line with ISCED 2013 fields, defining awarding bodies and their websites, writing short descriptions of qualifications, including EQF levels of qualifications in the register and improving user experience including digitalisation of the process of application for qualifications standard and development of a new module for processing requests for occupational standards.

6.5. Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications

Recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out by the ENIC/NARIC Centre, housed in MES.

In higher education, regulation for recognition of full qualifications needs to be revised to follow the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles and the use of NQF in recognition processes.

6.6. Career guidance and counselling

The Law on Primary Education prescribes the professional orientation of students in the 8th and 9th grades of primary schools. In 2020 the Programme for Professional Orientation (8th and 9th grade) was developed.

In secondary education, career centres have been set up in the schools, engaging trained career guidance advisors selected from school personnel and supported by a standardised web-based tool Battery of instruments for professional orientation (BIPO)·

VET several documents supporting career guidance have been produced for the Centre for Vocational Education and Training, such as the Guide to

[VET qualifications](#) or a [programme on career planning for career guidance work in secondary VET](#).

In higher education, the Law on Higher Education specifies that each university should have at least one career centre.

In the employment sector, the National Employment Strategy 2021-2027 notes that in 2019 over 95% of registered unemployed people (around 144 000 persons) received labour market information and counselling through the public employment services (Ibid, p. 52.).

6.7. Awareness and use of the NQF

In December 2022 the survey The understanding and visibility of the NQF and NQF Digital Register was conducted on a sample of 180 respondents. The survey targeted three groups of stakeholders: (1) national authorities and social partners, (2) learners, (3) education providers and career counsellors. The research questions covered the usability of the NQF, assessment of the NQF Board and its work and sources of information about the NQF.

The knowledge of NQF among national authorities and social partners was higher than among other groups. Among the learners, 43.8% confirmed that the NQF is a useful tool, while one third of the respondents did not have clear opinions about the NQF. Around half of respondents in this group indicated interest in receiving regular information about new qualifications and occupational standards. Among education providers and career counsellors, half agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the NQF is a useful tool. 43.8% did not have an opinion. 57.7% indicated that they wish to be informed about new qualifications and occupational standards developed.

6.8. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

No comprehensive evaluation of the NQF's impact or use has been conducted yet.

6.9. Impact of the NQF

The NQF is now an integral part of the qualifications system, seen as an important reform tool and embedded in several strategies. North Macedonia reached a milestone in 2016 when it referenced its NQF to the EQF, which gave the national qualifications system international visibility.

The NQF provides the basis for acquiring qualifications and progressing

through qualification levels. It is a tool supporting the quality of qualifications.

Reform of VET and adult education programmes in line with the NQF is in progress. Two and three- year VET programmes (NQF levels 2 to 3) have been revised or newly developed based on learning outcomes. The four-year programmes (NQF level 4) are being updated and their implementation started in 2017. In adult education, a total of 749 verified programmes based on learning outcomes are currently available. A qualifications register was set up and inclusion of qualifications in the register started in 2017. Currently, it includes over 110 VET qualifications at NQF levels 2-5.

The work on establishing a VNFIL system is ongoing. The Centre for Adult Education has developed a concept and roadmap for VNFIL, procedures and guidelines and has trained assessors in line with principles of the 2012 EU Council recommendation. VNFIL provisions have been included in the draft of a new Adult Education Law.

The quality assurance arrangements in higher education are undergoing a review to ensure their stronger alignment with the Bologna Process requirements.

Referencing to the EQF

7.1. Referencing to the EQF

North Macedonia referenced its NQF to the EQF in 2016 and self-certified in the same report against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process).

The report is published on the NQF website and the Europass portal.

North Macedonia is a member of the EQF Advisory Group. The Ministry of Education and Science is the designated National Coordination Point for participation in the EQF process.

The national stakeholders are planning to start working on a revised referencing report in 2024. The update will be drafted based on the criteria for referencing as described in the 2017 EQF Recommendation. It will cover the increasing level NQF implementation ([23]) in the country, new developments in the standards for higher education, and the amendments included in the draft of the new NQF law that concern changes in governance arrangements (such as those on the role and status of Sectoral Councils), validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the results of the ongoing works on the qualifications register.

7.2. International cooperation

North Macedonia's strategic priority is accession to the EU, and it has been a formal candidate for EU entry since 2005. Accession negotiations were launched in 2022.

North Macedonia participates in the joint monitoring process for the Osnabrück Declaration 2020 ([24]) and the EU VET Recommendation ([25]). The North Macedonian National Implementation Plan prepared for the purpose of this monitoring includes mid-term deliverable no. 3 is related to the NQF: Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The priorities of EU assistance in education and training in North Macedonia include widening access to quality education, training and lifelong learning; raising attainment; developing VET and promoting work-

based learning to facilitate transitions to the labour market; and improving the quality and labour market relevance of higher education. North Macedonia also participates in EU programmes such as Erasmus Plus, as a programme country.

The new Agency for Quality of Higher Education (AQA) established in 2019 is an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

In regional cooperation, North Macedonia is a member of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) of South-East Europe. RCC's aims include establishment of a Regional Economic Area which foresees such actions as promoting mobility of professionals, students, researchers, and academics.

National and international actors have provided the funding for the functioning and capacity-building of NQF structures. International donors, notably the World Bank and the EU, through its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), fund most of the NQF implementation activities, in particular development of new VET programmes. International projects have also supported the modernisation of post-secondary education ([26]); cooperation between higher education institutions and the business community ([27]); and building capacity of the EQF national coordination point (EQF NCP) and other relevant stakeholders ([28]).

The ETF has supported the referencing of the NQF to the EQF, capacity-building for stakeholders, revision and analysis of qualifications, and levelling of several VET qualifications using learning outcomes.

The ongoing EU twinning project Further support to the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (2021- 2024), is working on strengthening quality assurance of qualifications, improving the NQF register, with the general objective of speeding up the operationalisation of the system, including through awareness-building activities.

The Technical Assistance project Increasing attractiveness, inclusiveness and relevance of VET and adult education (2021-24) includes components on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and on improving the system for post-secondary education.

Important lessons and future plans

The implementation of the NQF is negatively affected by the delayed adoption of the regulatory framework. The pandemic and frequent changes of government have slowed down the adoption processes for three key laws: those on the NQF Adult Education and VET. Revisions to the Higher Education Law began in 2022.

Implementation of the NQF in higher education lags somewhat implementation in other education sectors in development of the necessary legal framework, governance structures and quality assurance arrangements. HE qualifications are not yet included in the NQF register.

Further efforts are needed for qualifications to become more responsive to labour market and individuals' needs. Insufficient involvement of stakeholders representing the labour market and a need to take labour market information more into account remain a challenge. The processes of development of new qualifications have proven to be complex for the stakeholders, and those bodies with key roles in development of qualifications, in particular the VET Centre, suffer from staff shortages.

Plans include strengthening communication and dissemination activities, empowering sectoral commissions and a broader group of stakeholders for stronger participation in NQF implementation including QA procedures, development of criteria for evaluation and review of qualifications, as well as developing further the qualifications register.

National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	**Doctorate diploma** **Category** Educational qualifications	8
	NVQ **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	
7 - 7 A	**Second cycle Master of Science diploma (from 60 to 120 ECTS)** **Category** Educational qualifications	7
	NVQ **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	

7 - 7 B	**Second cycle diploma for specialist studies (60 ECTS)** **Category** Educational qualifications **NVQ** **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	
6 - 6 A	**First cycle university diploma (240 ECTS)** **Category** Educational qualifications **First cycle vocational diploma (240 ECTS)** **Category** Educational qualifications **NVQ** **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	6

6 - 6 B	**First cycle university diploma (180 ECTS)** **Category** Educational qualifications **First cycle vocational diploma (180 ECTS)** **Category** Educational qualifications **NVQ** **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	
5 - 5 A	**Short cycle higher education (vocational) diploma** **Category** Educational qualifications **NVQ** **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	5

5 - 5 B	**Post-secondary diploma for specialist education** **Category** Educational qualifications **Craftsman diploma** **Category** Educational qualifications **NVQ** **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	
4	**Upper secondary general education diploma** **Category** Educational qualifications **Upper secondary technical diploma** **Category** Educational qualifications **Upper secondary arts diploma** **Category** Educational qualifications **NVQ** **Category** Vocational qualifications According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	4

3	**Vocational diploma (three years)**	3
	Category	
	Educational qualifications	
	NVQ	
	Category	
	Vocational qualifications	
	According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	
2	**Vocational certificate (two years)**	2
	Category	
	Educational qualifications	
	NVQ	
	Category	
	Vocational qualifications	
	According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning	

1 **Certificate of primary education**
Category

Educational qualifications

NVQ
Category

Vocational qualifications

According to the NQF law, NVQs (vocational/occupational qualifications) can be acquired for part of a formal education programme (modules, courses), by completing a special programme in adult education or through validation of non-formal learning

1

Acronyms

AQA	Agency for Quality of Higher Education
BIPO	Battery of Instruments for Professional Orientation
CVET	Continuous vocational education and training
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EQF NCP	European Qualifications Framework National Contact Point
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
MQF	Macedonian Qualifications Framework
NEET	not in employment education or training
NMCSGE	North Macedonian credit system for general education
PISA	Programme for International Student *Assessment*
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
VNFIL	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

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[10]The Roadmap for Further Development and Implementation of the MQF (2016).

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[14]Ministry of Education and Science (2018). Law on higher education. Article 140.

[15]Decree on the national framework for higher education qualifications. Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 154, 30.11.2010.

[16]Article 18 of the Law on the national qualifications framework stipulates that qualifications are grouped according to sectors which are defined in 16 groups as follows: (1) Geology, mining and metallurgy, (2) Civil engineering and geodesy, (3) Graphic industry, (4) Economics, law

and trade, (5) Electrical engineering, (6) Healthcare and social protection, (7) Agriculture, fishing and veterinary medicine, (8) Personal services, (9) Mechanical engineering, (10) Traffic, transport and storage, (11) Textile, leather and similar products, (12) Food service industry and tourism, (13) Chemistry and technology, (14) Forestry and wood processing, (15) Sport and recreation, (16) Arts. The sectoral qualification councils define further sub-sectors, areas and sub-areas. For higher education qualifications, the international Frascati classification is used in scientific disciplines, fields and areas. Law on the national qualifications framework. Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 137/2013 and 30/2016. Article 18.

[17]Two methodological documents were developed: the Guide note on VNFIL processes and the Handbook for assessment in the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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[21]As described in the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competencies for lifelong learning.

[22]A bylaw that stipulates the indication of levels on higher education qualifications was adopted in June 2018. National Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 102, 1 June 2018.

[23]At the time of the presentation of the referencing report the EQF the referencing criteria 3 and 4 were at the time not fulfilled in all areas.

[24]Osnabrück Declaration 2020 on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies.

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[26]IPA project Support to the modernisation of the system for post-secondary education (2016-17).

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