

## **NQF state of play**



**Serbia 2024**

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# Overview

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**Stage of development:** [Operational stage](#)

**NQF linked to EQF:** ✓

**Scope of the framework:**

General and vocational qualifications covering pre-university education, and academic and professional qualifications covering higher education. It also includes qualifications awarded outside formal education

**Number of levels:**

Eight, with sublevels at levels 6 and 7

**Legal basis/stage of development:**

Law on the NQF for Serbia (2018)  
([in Serbian](#))

**NQF/EQF website:**

[Website](#)

**Qualifications register/database:**

[National qualifications register](#)

# Introduction and context

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## 1.1. Policy context

Serbia is an EU candidate country. The Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2023-2025 identifies key challenges in achieving the priorities of competitiveness, economic growth and employment: increasing employment, especially among young people, women and vulnerable groups; social protection against poverty; creating a business environment more favourable for investment; and greening the energy sector and fully opening the energy market ([1]).

The general objective of the National Employment Strategy 2021-2026 ([2]) is the establishment of stable and sustainable employment growth based on knowledge and decent work. This objective refers to the development of a high-quality labour force, including through the development of occupational and qualification standards, dual education programmes, developing a network of nonformal education service providers and a system for recognition of prior learning.

Serbia's Economic Reform Programme (ERP) forecasts growth for 2024-2026. Still impacted by the economic fallout of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, in particular by the inflation of energy and food prices, real GDP growth was 4 % in 2023. The Programme also projects that economic growth will remain around 3.5 %, rising to 4 % in 2025 and 4.3 % in 2026 ([3]).

Serbia's population is declining due to low birth rates and emigration.

Overall, unemployment rates (Labour Force Survey) ([4]) have been decreasing since 2021, reaching 9.5 % in 2023, with a slightly higher incidence among women and persons with medium and low levels of educational attainment.

Serbia has a high proportion of students - about 74 % - who go into upper-secondary VET. While Serbia has the highest share, among the regional economies, of people who participate in adult learning (4.8 % in 2021, up from 3.7 % in 2020), this remains well below the EU average level of 10.8 % ([5]).

## Education and Training Reform

Serbia has signed key EU strategic documents, or participates in major

EU initiatives or processes, such as the Osnabrück Declaration on VET, the European Quality Assurance in VET framework (EQAVET), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA.)

The National Implementation Plan for the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration defines general objectives and measures in VET up to 2025 ([6]):

- a. increasing the relevance of VET at all levels of education, by: strengthening social partnership in modernising qualification standards and VET programmes; graduate tracking; developing new, and improving existing, qualification standards; basing IVET curricula and CVET programmes on qualification standards; delivering an improved offer of vocational and dual study programmes in higher education.
- b. increasing flexibility and permeability of VET at all levels of education through: expanding the network of RPL providers; integrating short cycle qualifications into the NQF; developing post-secondary education programmes at NQF level 5.
- c. improving quality assurance policies and practices in VET via improving the quality assurance systems in IVET (both school-based and dual VET) and non-formal CVET; in RPL procedures; and the broader introduction of appropriate EQAVET standards and indicators.

The [Action Plan for the period 2024 to 2026](#) for the implementation of the [Education Development Strategy to 2030](#) envisages the enhancement of the NQFS through:

- a. improvement of the legislative, institutional, and methodological frameworks for the development of qualification standards based on occupational standards.
- b. continuous monitoring of the relationship between qualifications and employment and lifelong learning.
- c. ongoing monitoring and assurance of the quality of adult education, non-formal education, and the operations of publicly-recognised organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA).
- d. formation of a database of experts for the implementation of the NQFS system.
- e. training staff involved in the process of recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- f. promotion of the NQFS system and lifelong learning.
- g. preparation of data for the NQFS Portal and the NQFS Register.

- h. capacity-building for institutions and bodies participating in the NQFS system and social partners for active participation in the development of the qualification system, with a special emphasis on enhancing the work and capacity of sector skill councils.
- i. development of a forecasting system for knowledge and skills.
- j. dialogue with stakeholders to consider merging the current sub-levels 6.1 and 7.1 into levels 6 and 7 respectively.

Serbia has adopted the [Smart Specialisations in Serbia Strategy 2020-2027](#), which is to be implemented via its accompanying [Action Plan](#). The Strategy encourages education oriented towards innovation and entrepreneurship, and which can contribute to making the country a highly competitive economy via research, development, innovation, and entrepreneurial initiatives in four defined strategic areas. A specific measure adopted in HE and related to the NQF is the development of qualification standards for an interdisciplinary master's programme in bioinformatics studies, and the development of new interdisciplinary master's programmes for the application of artificial intelligence in BIO4 fields.

Another broader initiative to which the NQF will contribute is the Strategy for creation of a stimulating environment for Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia 2022-2030. The Strategy and its accompanying Action plan set goals and measures for cooperation between government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in increasing and enhancing non-formal education, specifically increasing the number of accredited non-formal education programmes conducted by CSOs which would lead to qualifications, these to be listed in the NQFS Register, in its Sub-register of Publicly Recognised Organisers of Adult Education Activities (PROAEA).

Further, the action plans to implement the country's Industrial Policy Strategy and Employment Strategy respectively specify measures in qualifications, such as identifying redundant qualifications, and updating those still relevant but requiring modernisation; and introducing RPL opportunities into the Youth Guarantee, and introducing partial qualifications.

## **1.2. NQF legal basis**

The main legal act for the NQFS is the [Law on the National Qualifications Framework of Serbia](#), adopted by parliament in April 2018 ([7]).

Amendments to the Law on the NQFS were adopted in 2023. These are the Amendments to the Law on the National Qualifications Framework of

Serbia, recorded in the Official Gazette of RS, Numbers 27/2018-3, 6/2020-3, 129/2021-15, and 76/2023-19. They variously authorise or address:

- a. introduction of the General Matura examination for secondary school graduates.
- b. development of qualifications at NQF level 5.
- c. the work of the NQF Council and Sector Skills Councils.
- d. provision of career guidance and counselling services.
- e. the responsibilities of the Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework in qualifications.
- f. procedures for recognition of primary and secondary schools and other organisations as organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA) ([8]).
- g. the procedures for recognition of prior learning.

Other NQF-related laws are the Law on Foundations of the Education System ([9]), the Law on Secondary Education ([10]), the Law on Higher Education ([11]) and the Law on Adult Education ([12]).

Further, based on the [Law on the NQFS](#), the following bylaws have thus far been adopted by Ministers (most recent first):

- a. Regulations on Public Documents Issued by Secondary Schools, in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, [No. 102 of 7 September 2022](#), and [No. 34 of 28 April 2023](#). The regulations stipulate that these public documents for completed education at Levels 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the NQFS must also include information on both the NQFS and EQF levels.
- b. Regulations on the Type, Name, and Content of Forms, as well as the Method of Keeping Records and the Name, Content, and Format of Public Documents and Certificates in Adult Education, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, [No. 89 of 27 October 2015](#), [No. 102 of 11 December 2015](#), and [No. 102 of 7 September 2022](#). The regulations stipulate that the Certificate of Achieved Qualification Standard must include information on the corresponding levels of the NQFS and the EQF.
- c. Regulations on the Content and Method of Keeping Records and Issuing Public Documents in Primary Schools, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, [No. 102/2022 of 7 September, 2022](#). The regulations stipulate that the Certificate of Completed Primary Education and Upbringing includes information about the level of NQFS and the level of EQF.
- d. Rulebook on standards for self-assessment and external

assessment of the quality of operations of publicly recognized organizer of adult education activities, Official Gazette of RS, [No. 27/2022](#).

- e. Regulation on the Content, Form, and Method of Submitting the Unified Application for Mandatory Social Insurance, Unified Methodological Principles, and Unified Code of Codes for Data Entry in the Unified Database of the Central Register of Mandatory Social Insurance, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, [No. 132 of 30 December 2021](#). The regulations stipulate that the List of Qualifications, which is an integral part of the NQFS Register, must be used for entering and encoding data in employment records.
- f. Decision on the Unified Code of Codes for Entering and Encoding Data in Employment Records, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, [No. 56 of July 18, 2018](#), [No. 101 of 17 July 2020](#), and [No. 74 of 23 July 2021](#). The regulations stipulate that the List of Qualifications, which is an integral part of the NQFS Register, must be used for entering and encoding data in employment records.
- g. Rulebook on detailed programmes, staff, premises, equipment, and teaching aids related requirements for acquiring the status of Publicly recognized organizer of adult education activities, 'Official Gazette of RS', [No. 130/2021](#).
- h. Rulebook on the content and appearance of the initiative form for the development and adoption of qualification standards, Official Gazette of RS, [No. 53 of 9 April, 2020](#).
- i. Rulebook on the content and manner of keeping the Register of the National qualifications' framework of the Republic of Serbia, 'Official Gazette of RS', [No. 159/2020](#).
- j. Rulebook on the system for classification and coding of qualifications in the National qualifications' framework of the Republic of Serbia, Official Gazette of RS, [No. 159/2020](#).
- k. Rulebook on the methodology for the development of qualification standards, Official Gazette of RS, [No. 156/2020](#).
- l. Rulebook on standards and manner of conducting the procedure of recognition of prior learning, 'Official Gazette of RS', [No. 148/2020](#)[13].
- m. Rulebook on standards of career guidance and counselling services, Official Gazette of RS, [No. 43 of 19 June, 2019](#).

Various other implementing regulations are in draft. These span quality assurance in adult education, RPL, the qualifications register, and recognition of foreign qualifications, among others.

## Policy objectives

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The aim of the NQFS is to structure and improve the qualification system in such a way that it is aligned with the requirements of socio-economic development, supports lifelong learning and facilitates workforce mobility ([14]).

NQFS objectives are:

- a. ensuring the readability and transparency of qualifications, as well as their interconnection.
- b. developing qualification standards based on the needs of the labour market and society as a whole.
- c. ensuring a learning outcomes-based education system.
- d. improving access and flexible learning paths in both formal and non-formal education.
- e. ensuring identification and recognition of non-formal education and informal learning.
- f. affirming the importance of key, general, and cross-curricular competencies for lifelong learning.
- g. enhancing cooperation between relevant stakeholders and social partners.
- h. establishing a quality assurance system for the development and acquisition of qualifications.
- i. ensuring comparability and recognition of qualifications acquired in Serbia with those acquired in other countries.

The implementation of the NQFS is intended to contribute to the promotion of different strategies and policies in different sectors, such as education, employment, and labour market reform. In particular, the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2023-2025 emphasises the role of the National Qualifications Framework in ensuring the diversification and relevance of the educational offer in higher education and lifelong learning, the transparency of the national qualifications system, and the comparability and recognition of qualifications obtained in Serbia with qualifications awarded in other countries ([15]).

Most strategic documents across various sectoral policies recognise the NQFS as a key instrument for adapting the education and training system to the evolving needs of the labour market.

# Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

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## 3.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The NQFS comprises eight levels, with two sub-levels each at Levels 6 and 7 i.e., 6.1 and 6.2, and 7.1 and 7.2, respectively.

NQFS level descriptors are learning outcomes-based, defined for each level and the sublevels at Levels 6 and 7, and increase in complexity rising up through the levels.

NQFS domains are 'Knowledge', 'Skills', and 'Abilities and Attitude'.

## 3.2. NQF scope and coverage

The NQFS includes qualifications divided into four types:

- a. General qualifications: covering primary education and general secondary (gymnasium) education.
- b. Vocational qualifications: covering vocational secondary education and training and adult education. This type of qualification also includes secondary school artistic qualifications.
- c. Academic qualifications: covering higher education based on accredited academic study programmes, namely bachelor, masters, specialised and doctoral studies. This type of qualification also includes academic artistic qualifications.
- d. Professional/applied qualifications: covering higher education based on accredited applied study programmes i.e., bachelor, specialised and master studies.
- e. [General qualifications](#) correspond to NQFS levels 1 and 4, vocational qualifications to NQFS levels 2 to 5, academic qualifications to NQFS levels 6.1 to 8 and professional qualifications to NQFS levels 6.1 to 7.1.
- f. Qualifications belonging to regulated professions are determined by a separate law, in accordance with EC Directive 2013/55 /EU, and are an integral part of the NQFS.

Qualifications are included in the NQFS as presented in the Table.

Including a qualification in the framework begins with development of a qualification standard. Qualification standards are developed by the Qualifications Agency following the procedures established by the NQFS

Law, and in accordance with the Methodology for the development of qualification standards. Initiatives for developing and adopting new standards or updating the existing qualification standard can be submitted by sector skill councils, the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the National Education Council, the National Council for Higher Education, the National Employment Service, higher education institutions, state bodies or other legal entity e.g., companies, PROAEA, etc. Qualification standards are validated by the NQFS Council and adopted by the Ministry of Education.

Higher education institutions are yet to implement the process of aligning their qualifications with the NQFS. Currently, a methodology for developing qualification standards in higher education, which will serve as the framework for creating qualification standards for NQFS Levels 6, 7, and 8, is being prepared. Once the qualification standards are developed in line with the methodology, higher education institutions will begin revising their study programmes to align with these standards.

Qualifications obtained through non-formal education and training or those acquired through the process of recognition of prior learning, can be included in the NQFS. Currently, these are vocational qualifications that can be obtained at NQFS levels 2, 3 and 5.

Microcredentials were introduced in the recent Amendments to the Law on Higher Education but are yet to be regulated by the Law on NQF and further operationalized through accreditation procedures.

### **3.3. Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards**

The NQFS ensures that qualifications, educational and training programmes, and assessment are based on learning outcomes. Qualifications are included in the NQFS based on qualification standards for general and vocational qualifications; or accreditation of a higher education programme for academic and professional qualifications. Learning outcomes are one of the key elements of educational and qualification standards, and education and training programmes for qualifications of all NQFS levels.

Educational standards include the Standards of achievement and general cross-curricular competencies, describing the goals and outcomes of general pre-university education, as well as the key competencies based on the European framework of key competencies for lifelong learning.

Standards in higher education include the Standards for the accreditation of higher education institutions and standards for accreditation of study

programmes ([16]). The first standard adheres to the Dublin Descriptors for a given study level. The second, concerning study programmes, describes general and subject-specific competencies of graduates in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes of a programme must be in line with relevant NQFS level descriptors.

Qualification standards include learning outcomes statements based on a description of the duties, tasks and competencies required for a specific job, occupation or group of occupations e.g., in the occupational standards or job descriptions, and cover knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes at the level of the overall qualification ([17]).

Assessment of learning outcomes for general and vocational qualifications is based on the standards of achievement for general education subjects and on qualification standards.

Qualification standards serve as crucial foundations for the development of non-formal education and training programmes, as well as for the implementation of processes for recognising prior learning. When creating non-formal education programmes, learning outcomes derived from the qualification standards are systematically organised into modules that align with the competencies or occupations defined within those standards.

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

The development of qualifications entails the development of a qualification standard. Qualification standards are developed by the Qualifications Agency according to the procedure established by the NQFS Law ([18]) and based on the Methodology for the development of qualification standards ([19]). An initiative for developing and adopting standards for a qualification or for updating the existing qualification standard can be submitted by a Sector Skills Council, the Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education, the National Education Council, the National Council for Higher Education, the National Employment Service, a higher education institution, a state body or other legal entity (a company, a PROAEA, etc.). Qualification standards are validated by the NQFS council and adopted by the Ministry of Education.

Qualification standards are the basis for the development of education programmes for qualifications at all levels of education ([20]). In pre-university education, programmes are defined at national level and developed by the Institute for the Improvement of Education, in higher education by higher education institutions, and in adult education by

publicly recognised organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA) ([21]).

Schools delivering programmes in pre-university education are externally evaluated by the Institute for Evaluation of Education Quality; in higher education, study programmes are subject to accreditation by the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education; and in adult education, providers of non-formal education are accredited by the Ministry of Education for primary and secondary schools, and by the Qualifications Agency for other providers. Primary and secondary schools recognised as organisers of non-formal adult education (PROAEA) can also be recognised for the RPL activity ([22]).

# Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

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## 4.1. Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

The NQFS law defines bodies and institutions responsible for the NQFS' development and implementation: the Ministry of Education, the Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework, the Qualifications Agency, the NQFS Council, and the Sector Skills Councils.

The Ministry of Education is the main governing body responsible for the development and implementation of educational policy. It adopts qualification standards, accredits primary and secondary schools as publicly recognised organisers of adult education activities (PROAEA), adopts acts within the legal framework for the NQFS, and promotes its implementation.

The Office for Dual Education and the National Qualifications Framework ([23]) performs administrative and technical tasks for the NQFS Council; prepares draft legislation and monitors the implementation of the legal framework for the NQFS; designs development projects in a qualification area, monitors their implementation and the impact of (new) qualifications on employment and lifelong learning; and functions as the National Coordination Point and on referencing the NQFS to the EQF.

The Qualifications Agency is responsible for the implementation and day-to-day running of the NQF. It ([24]) is responsible for considering initiatives for introducing new qualifications or modernising the existing ones; developing qualification standards; providing professional, administrative and technical support to sector skills councils; registering qualifications and maintaining the NQFS Register; classification and encoding qualifications according to the CLASSNQFS system; accrediting and external evaluation of non-formal adult education providers; recognition of foreign qualifications, including professional recognition of higher education qualifications and validation of foreign education programmes; evaluation of public documents obtained in religious education institutions; monitoring career guidance and counselling activities and implementation of career guidance and counselling service standards; preparation of development projects, analysis and research of importance for the development of qualifications and proposes quality assurance measures throughout the entire education system.

The NQFS Council is an advisory body appointed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia whose main tasks include: providing recommendations on the process of planning and development of human resources in accordance with public policies in the field of lifelong learning, employment, career guidance and counselling, and on improving links between education and labour market needs; validation of qualification standards for all NQFS levels and making recommendations for repealing educational programmes that do not meet them; making proposals for establishing Sector Skills Councils, monitoring and providing recommendations on improving their work; providing opinion on the enrolment policy in secondary schools and in higher education institutions.

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

Sector Skills Councils (SSC) are expert and advisory bodies established by the Government at the proposal of the NQFS Council based on the principle of social partnership ([25]). Their main role is to define the need for qualifications within a certain sector of the labour market in Serbia.

SSCs analyse existing qualifications within a certain sector, identify those needing to be modernised and that no longer meet the needs of the sector; develop proposals for qualification standards within the sector; articulate the expected knowledge and skills outcomes within the sector; promote dialogue and direct cooperation between the world of work and education; promote opportunities for education, training and employment and identify opportunities for adult training within the sector; examine the implications of the NQF on the qualifications within the sector; analyse the connection of qualifications with relevant occupations in the sector and examine the need to update qualification standards after five years of application.

# 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

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) has been introduced for vocational qualifications at Levels 2, 3 and 5 of the NQFS. The term 'Recognition of prior learning' (RPL) has been adopted as being equivalent to VNFIL. The [NQFS Law](#) defines RPL as an adult education activity that can be implemented only by primary and secondary schools having the status of publicly recognised organisers of adult education (PROAEA). Assessment of learning outcomes and competencies within the RPL process is based on qualification standards.

A legal framework for RPL includes the NQFS Law and the Law on Adult Education. The standards for quality assurance and operational details for the RPL procedure have been established. The assessment commission is formed by the school and includes two assessors from the school and an assessor from the business sector. A candidate can recognise learning outcomes and competencies for the qualification as a whole, or part of it, at least at the level of one occupation, confirmed by a public document in adult education. The school can also issue a certificate for learning outcomes/competencies validated during assessment.

The VNFIL system in Serbia is in its initial phase. So far, seven secondary vocational schools have been accredited for RPL activity for 12 qualifications.

## 5.2. Credit systems

Credits (ECTS) are used in higher education only. In VET and adult education, the volume of qualifications and education programmes is expressed in years and hours.

## 5.3. Promoting lifelong learning

The NQF law establishes progression pathways between qualification levels in terms of minimum requirements for acquiring qualifications. Vocational qualifications can be acquired either by completing a formal education programme, or through non-formal adult education, or recognition of prior learning.

# NQF implementation and impact

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## 6.1. Stage of implementation

The NQFS has reached the operational stage.

Coordinating and implementing bodies are established and functioning. The NQF Council, the Qualifications Agency, and the Sector Skills Councils have been established and are operational.

The methodology for developing qualification standards has been developed and, by the end of 2024, 138 qualification standards had been developed and published in the NQFS register. Further progress has been made with the development of the RPL system: an RPL procedure has been adopted and piloted, accreditation of schools as RPL providers has started, and the first candidates are receiving certificates.

An important milestone was the referencing of the NQFS to the EQF in February 2020.

The NQFS is continuously strengthening its role in improving transparency and comparability of qualifications at the national and international level. NQF and EQF levels are indicated in public documents - certificates, diplomas - for qualifications at the pre-university education level, including qualifications acquired in adult education.

The NQFS register includes information on NQF/EQF levels and on learning outcomes for vocational qualifications based on qualification standards.

## 6.2. Indicating RQF/NQF levels

NQFS and EQF levels are indicated in public documents such as certificates and diplomas for qualifications at the pre-university education level, including qualifications acquired in adult education. The NQFS register includes information on the NQF/EQF level for all types of qualifications included in the NQFS.

## 6.3. NQF dissemination

Methodologies, instructions and handbooks to facilitate the implementation of the NQFS have been developed. These documents aim at supporting stakeholders in submitting initiatives for the development and adoption of qualification standards, and application of the list of

qualifications of the Republic of Serbia; in the accreditation process for acquiring the PROAE status for nonformal adult education, the RPL and Career Guidance and Counselling services; in development of training programmes based on qualification standards, and in preparation of instruments for competence assessment.

In mid-2024, the implementation of the project IPA2020 Increased Offer and Diversification of Accredited Non-Formal Training Courses and Adult Training Providers commenced. It includes a component dedicated to promoting the visibility of the NQFS and lifelong learning. As part of this initiative, an NQFS promotion plan is currently under development.

An innovative promotion of the NQFS is a video tutorial, featured on the Qualifications Agency's web pages, which explains how developers can submit proposals to develop and have adopted qualification standards.

Via the Erasmus EQF IBA 2021 project, an NQFS Register leaflet and brochure on NQFS Referencing, both in Serbian and English, were produced in late 2023 ([26]).

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

The NQFS Register was established in 2021 and is available through the NQFS portal ([27]). The register is managed by the Qualifications Agency. It consists of three sub-registers:

- a. the Sub-register of national qualifications.
- b. the Sub-register of qualification standards.
- c. the Sub-register of PROAEA with a list of employers with whom the PROAEA conducts practical work.

General and vocational qualifications are entered into the sub-register of national qualifications based on the adoption of qualification standards used for qualifications at NQFS Levels 1 to 5, with higher education qualifications being based on accreditation of relevant higher education programmes at NQF Levels 6.1 to 8. By spring 2025 1 528 qualifications of all types in the register were in use ([28]).

Qualifications entered into the sub-register of national qualifications are classified according to type, NQFS/EQF level and national classification of qualifications CLASSNQFS based on ISCED-F. Only qualifications based on qualification standards include learning outcomes descriptions.

The NQFS register is integrated into the Unified Information System of Education. Serbia has also connected the NQFS Register with the

Europass online platform. This integration has initiated the entering of qualifications data into the NQFS Register in both Serbian and English.

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

The NQFS Law distinguishes between recognition of foreign school documents and professional recognition of foreign higher education documents.

The recognition procedure is carried out by the ENIC/NARIC Centre, which is housed within the Qualifications Agency ([29]). Academic recognition is carried out by higher education institutions. Foreign qualifications receiving recognition are considered equivalent to the corresponding public document obtained in Serbia. The recognition decision shall contain the NQFS level to which the recognised qualification corresponds.

While the NQFS has simplified the recognition of foreign educational certificates, there remains a challenge to recognise Serbian qualifications at Level 5 of the NQFS which belong to higher education, as Serbia has not yet integrated short-cycle programmes at this level into its qualification system.

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

Career Guidance and Counselling services are regulated by the NQFS law. They shall be provided in accordance with the Standards for Career Guidance and Counselling Services (CGS standards)[30] by the National Employment Agency and PROAEA, higher education institutions, youth offices, civil society organizations, employment agencies, as well as primary and secondary schools.

CGS standards establish special conditions for acquiring the PROAEA status for providing career guidance and counselling services, including as part of the RPL activities. They include standards for developing career management skills, competencies of career practitioners, organisation of career guidance services and of the programme.

The providers of career guidance and counselling activities are career practitioners who work with individuals or groups of different ages, helping them to manage the processes of learning, work, career changes and other aspects of personal development and who have the competencies determined by the NQFS law.

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

The National Employment Service, Central Register of Compulsory Social Insurance and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia all use data on qualifications, and are expected to connect their databases with the NQFS register.

Connection of Serbia's register of qualifications with the Europass platform has also had the effect of promoting the NQFS and EQF, including encouraging their use by social partners.

The establishment of the Office for Dual Education and the NQF has also facilitated better communication and promotion, as steps are being taken to improve the visibility and understanding of the NQF within the education and labour sectors.

As implied above by their role in advising jobseekers, careers guidance professionals have good awareness of the NQFS. The National Employment Service emphasized the importance of the NQFS/EQF when assisting job seekers in identifying qualifications that align with specific roles in the labour market. Conversely, awareness is generally low among jobseekers themselves unless they have participated in specific VET or re-skilling programmes.

Employers engaged in dual education system or industries with specific qualification requirements, as well as international companies, are more familiar with the NQFS/EQF. Awareness remains lower among small and medium-sized enterprises.

Among trades unions, awareness of the NQFS and its value to their workers in training and retraining remains quite low, notwithstanding the role of union representatives in the Sector Skills Councils and the Council for the NQFS.

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

No systematic evaluation of the NQF's use or impact has been carried out. The Office for Dual Education and National Qualifications Framework is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the NQF.

A methodology for monitoring the impact of the NQFS is currently being developed and will be implemented as part of the Erasmus EQF IBA 2024 project.

## **6.9. Impact of the NQF**

Educational providers submit initiatives for introducing new qualifications

or updating existing ones. Based on the qualification standards, they develop curricula, learning programmes, training programmes and assessment instruments, and conduct processes for recognition of prior learning. In accordance with the standards for career guidance and counselling, they implement programmes and services to support career guidance and counselling.

Education and training providers, particularly those engaged in VET, dual VET and adult education, thus have a high level of awareness of the NQFS/EQF. They often participate in workshops, training sessions and other capacity-building activities organised to support the ongoing NQFS implementation process.

The implementation of the NQFS has significantly influenced the quality assurance system for qualifications, as qualifications are now introduced into the system following standardised procedures. This process includes analysis of the need for specific qualifications and fosters social dialogue on this topic through meetings of sector skill councils, which are bodies based on social partnership. Additionally, the development of qualification standards has enabled the enhancement of the quality assurance system within non-formal education programmes and the recognition of prior learning processes, which are fundamentally based on these qualification standards.

Quality assurance bodies therefore have in-depth understanding of the NQFS/EQF, being deeply involved in monitoring the compliance of programmes and institutions to NQFS standards.

For similar reasons outlined in the paragraph above i.e., the greater contact of the NQF with VET than with HE so far, awareness of the NQFS/EQF among VET students, in dual VET programmes and in adult education, is increasing, due to the NQFS's integration into curricula and career guidance services.

Also, NQFS/EQF levels up to Level 5 are clearly indicated on certificates and diplomas, reinforcing the connection between qualifications and their alignment with European standards. Awareness among students in general education and higher education students remains lower. However, this gap is expected to close soon, driven by ongoing initiatives aiming at incorporating the NQFS into higher education.

# Referencing to the EQF

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## 7.1. Referencing to the EQF

Serbia referenced its NQF to the EQF in February 2020 and self-certified in the same report against the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, within the Bologna Process. A [joint report](#) is available on the Europass portal.

## 7.2. International cooperation

As an EU candidate country, Serbia receives financial assistance to support education and labour market reforms under the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) ([31]). It is a member of the regional ERISSE projects ([32]) and of the EQF Advisory Group. The National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA) is an ENQA affiliate ([33]).

The Ministry of Education, the Office for Dual Education and National Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Agency receive support from the Erasmus+ projects to support updating qualification standards and improve transparency and comparability of national qualifications at the national and international level, including entering data on qualifications and PROAEA into the NQFS register and linking the register to the Europass platform ([34]).

The Office for Dual Education and National Qualifications Framework receives support from the Swiss Agency for development and cooperation (SDC) to improve the system of dual education and support the NQFS implementation. The German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ) supports selected secondary vocational schools in expanding their offer to adult education and RPL activities ([35]).

## Important lessons and future plans

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A key factor contributing to the implementation of the NQFS is political support, particularly the high prioritisation of the NQFS in all strategic government documents. Both the Education Strategy 2030 and the National Employment Strategy 2021-2026 prioritise the development of qualifications in line with labour market needs through the development of qualifications standards and programmes based on them.

One key challenge is the inclusion of non-formal qualifications obtained outside the formal education and training system, which lacks clear mechanisms for recognition. Similarly, the procedures for including regulated qualifications governed by various ministries outside the formal education system are not yet fully streamlined. The potential inclusion of partial qualifications, such as those tied to specific professions, presents another challenge, particularly in aligning these with the NQF.

In higher education, the introduction of qualification standards remains a significant hurdle, both in terms of procedural complexities and the need to balance the autonomy and competence of institutions.

The large number of qualifications in secondary and higher education also raises concerns about their relevance to labour market needs. A particular challenge is the inclusion of institutions and bodies from the NQF system in the accreditation process of study programs, which requires changes to the higher education regulations and accreditation standards.

Finally, the composition and number of Sectoral Commissions, which are essential for developing and updating qualifications, need to be reconsidered to ensure they effectively represent the sectors they serve.

It follows from the challenges identified above that priorities include closer integration of the HE sector into the NQFS, and development of micro credentials and partial qualifications and their incorporation into the NQF.

In HE, the need is development of a methodology for qualifications standards development and introduction of qualification standards in higher education to ensure consistency, transparency, and alignment with labour market demands. The goal is to improve recognition of qualifications and facilitate mobility for students both within Serbia and

across Europe.

Additionally, enhancing permeability using the NQF, with a focus on NQFS Level 5. This includes introducing flexible pathways between secondary and higher education to allow learners to transition more easily between different types of education and qualifications.

Microcredentials will allow for the recognition of smaller units of learning, enabling learners to acquire specific skills and competences that meet immediate labour market needs or personal career development goals. Partial qualifications will support individuals in gaining recognition for specific skills without completing a full qualification, providing flexibility for adult learners and those engaged in continuous professional development.

# National qualification framework (NQF)

NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPES	EQF LEVEL
8	doctoral studies volume of 180 ECTS credits (with previously completed integrated academic i.e., master academic studies)	8
7 - 7.2	specialised academic studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits (with previously completed master academic studies)	7
7 - 7.1	<p>integrated academic studies scope of 300 to 360 ECTS credits</p> <p>master academic studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits, with previously achieved bachelor academic studies scope of at least 240 ECTS credits</p> <p>master academic studies scope of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved bachelor academic studies scope of 180 ECTS credits).</p> <p>master applied studies scope of at least 120 ECTS credits (with previously achieved bachelor applied studies scope of 180 ECTS credits)</p>	7
6 - 6.2	bachelor academic studies scope of at least 240 ECTS credits, specialised applied studies scope of at least 60 ECTS credits	6
6 - 6.1	bachelor academic studies scope of at least 180 ECTS credits bachelor applied studies scope starting from 180 ECTS credits	6
5	craftsman i.e., specialist education lasting up to two years; or non-formal adult education lasting from six months to one year (C)	5

4	<b>four-year secondary school education - vocational education, arts education, general education</b>	4
3	<b>secondary vocational education lasting three years, non-formal adult education with training duration of minimum 960 hours</b>	3
2	<b>vocational training lasting up to one year, education for work lasting up to two years, non-formal adult education with 120-360 hours of training</b>	2
1	<b>primary education, primary adult education, primary music education, primary ballet education</b>	1

# Acronyms

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<b>BIO4</b>	Fields related to bioinformatics and artificial intelligence
<b>CGS</b>	Career Guidance and Counselling Services
<b>CLASSNQFS</b>	National Qualifications Classification System
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>ENIC/NARIC</b>	European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres
<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>ERISEE</b>	Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
<b>EQAVET</b>	European Quality Assurance in VET
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework
<b>ERP</b>	Economic Reform Programme
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GIZ</b>	German Organisation for International Cooperation
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
<b>IVET</b>	Initial vocational education and training
<b>ISCED-F</b>	International Standard Classification of Education, Fields of Education and Training
<b>NEAQA</b>	National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>NEET</b>	Not in employment, education or training

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<b>NES</b>	National Employment Services
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NQFS</b>	National Qualifications Framework of Serbia
<b>PROAEA</b>	Publicly Recognised Organiser of Adult Education Activities
<b>QF-EHEA</b>	Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area
<b>PROAEA</b>	Publicly recognised organisers of adult education activities
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>RS</b>	Republic of Serbia
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SSC</b>	Sector Skills Councils
<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training
<b>VNFIL</b>	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

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# Notes

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- [27][NOKS: Search national qualifications \(azk.gov.rs\)](#)
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