



Concept note

Introduction

UNESCO has long been working in the areas of skills and qualifications and the recognition of prior learning, including through informal employment. It has been advising and supporting Member States in the development of their Qualifications Frameworks, and mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning and for skills recognition to support mobility across borders. UNESCO also carries out research and analytical studies in the above areas that disseminate knowledge and inform the global debate.

The objective of this event is to showcase UNESCO's recent work in these areas, disseminate the findings of recent and forthcoming analytical studies and publications and provide a space for stakeholders and experts to share knowledge and exchange views and experiences.

Background

National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs/RQFs) have been increasingly used around the world as tools to improve the quality of education and training systems, by improving the transparency of qualifications systems, increasing trust and facilitating mobility of learners and workers across borders. Often, the development of NQFs, at local and regional level, also serves as a basis for the development of Recognition of Prior learning (RPL) systems.

Both NQFs and RPL contribute to increasing the relevance and quality of education systems. While NQFs establish what the holder of a specific qualification is expected to know, understand and be able to do, RPL is a system that helps assessing individual's skills and competencies acquired in non-traditional learning settings. It is crucial to recognize and value skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning environments, including the workplace, and to determine to which extent an individual has achieved the required learning or competency outcomes.

Both NQFs and RPL are widely adopted across TVET systems worldwide. They are of particular relevance in developing countries, where issues like informality are the norm rather than the exception. More than 61% of the world's employed population are in the informal economy, of whom 93% is in emerging and developing countries (ILO, 2018)¹. RPL allows TVET systems at national level to ensure competencies that learners acquired in diverse learning contexts are certified, valued and rewarded by the labour markets. A large majority of uncertified skills are acquired through the informal sector and by employees of micro, small and medium enterprises. Those are a key component of developing countries' economies, occupying populations' poorest segments and vulnerable groups. Establishing proper RPL systems thus brings with it a strong equity and inclusion connotation, which is of great value in countries at lower levels of socio-economic development.

Globally, more and more countries have started recognizing prior learning (RPL) and are strengthening their systems of skills validation and certification so that skills acquired informally and non-formally can be more easily recognizedⁱ. NQFs can set the criteria against which skills and competencies developed in non-formal and informal settings should be evaluated and which certificates should be attributed to people mastering them. In addition to the recognition of skills acquired through time-based training, formal apprenticeships and competency-based qualifications, RPL recognizes non-formal and informal learning in national qualifications systems, encourages certification for non-formal education and training, and harnesses technology to certify skillsⁱⁱ. An additional benefit of RPL is that it can lead to the international harmonization of skills recognition and certification.

There has been an international shift in thinking and practices favouring general education and more flexible forms of training at the expense of pre-employment narrow skills development. In addition to increased efforts to identify the characteristics, measure the extent and documenting the trends of various forms of informality, practically all international organizations and many countries now recognize the role of formal, informal, and non-formal lifelong education and training, including formal and informal apprenticeships.

Objectives

The event will:

- Enable participants to share knowledge and experiences on initiatives related to regional and national qualifications frameworks;
- Discuss the needs for improvement of mechanisms and practices of recognition of skills and qualifications at regional and global level;
- Promote an exchange between international and regional stakeholders involved in the harmonization of certification frameworks and discuss ways for moving towards a global framework;
- Disseminate the findings of the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Framework and other analytical studies on qualifications frameworks, recognition of prior learning and informality carried out by UNESCO and its partners;
- Launch and present the UNESCO Manual for Recognition of Prior Learning, a practical tool for stakeholders engaged in planning, developing, and implementing an RPL system, as well as analyzing the political choices associated with initiating the process.

Structure

The webinar will be organised around two key sessions:

Session I: Launch of the Global Inventory of NQFs/RQFs

UNESCO and its partners, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and Cedefop have been following developments in NQFs and RQFs, including through the regular publication of the Global Inventory of NQFs and RQFs. The fifth edition of the Global Inventory will be published in 2023. It maintains the role established by preceding editions, presenting knowledge and insight from the international range of contexts in which regional and national qualifications frameworks operate. In continuing this observatory function, the inventory highlights progress and areas for improvement in the context of emerging trends and policy priorities.

This edition of the Global Inventory also presents for the first time a cross-country analysis of national case studies. Based on the rich data presented in the case studies and drawing on their wider expertise, the presenters will examine in depth and in a systematic way the objectives, functions and characteristics of NQFs and evaluate their progress in implementation and their contributions to wider educational and training systems.

The session will also focus on recent developments in the field of qualifications, including microcredentials. A range of different types of qualifications and credentials are emerging in most countries, awarded often outside of the formal education and training systems. There is also a growing trend for these new, non-formal types of qualifications to be included in countries' NQFs. The session will showcase recent developments in this area and discuss the opportunities and challenges they present, and their implications on education and lifelong learning systems.

Session II: Recognition of prior learning

This session will focus on issues related to the recognition and validation of prior learning. It will entail discussions on the main challenges and opportunities of RPL design and implementations, touching upon key political processes involved, and shed light on the role of RPL in addressing informality. Speakers will explore both theoretical and conceptual issues around our understanding of recognition and validation practices, but also present and share concrete tools that have been developed and being used for supporting RPL, with a focus on developing countries.

As part of the session, the recently developed UNESCO Operational Manual for RPL will be launched and presented as a tool to support practitioners in designing and operationalising RPL systems at country level. The significance of informal, non-formal, and lifelong learning, along with the acquisition and development of skills through informal training will also be emphasised and discussed during the panel. The session will also feature a country example, with interventions from a practitioner in charge of RPL implementation in the country and a learner that benefited from the system in place.

Format

The event will take place online **on 27 September at 13:00 – 16:00 CEST**. Presentations and discussions will focus on the key findings of the fifth edition of the Global Inventory of NQF/RQFs, including the cross-country analysis of NQFs, and on the forthcoming UNESCO manual on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Participants of the webinar will include experts and policy-makers in the field of qualifications and credentials at national, regional, and global level. English and French interpretation will be provided.

Provisional agenda

Wednesday, 27 September 2023	
13:00 – 13:15	Welcome remarks by UNESCO
13:15 – 14:30	Session I: Global Inventory of NQFs/RQFs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Findings of the cross-country analysis of NQFs• Developments in the recognition of prior learning systems• Digitalisation of qualification systems• The role of microcredentials in qualifications systems• Digitalisation of RPL for refugees
14.30 – 15:45	Session II: Recognition of prior learning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RPL: its relevance, challenges, and opportunities in developing countries• Launch of UNESCO RPL Operational Manual• Country case study: RPL in Madagascar• Testimony of a learner• Policies for informal worker
15:45 – 16:00	Closing remarks by UNESCO

¹ ILO (2022b); OECD (2018a; 2018b).

² Recognizing prior learning (RPL) – Skills acquired in the informal economy remain recognized by informal economy actors only. Opening pathways to further learning opportunities and to formal sector jobs requires the engagement of actors in the formal economy and mechanisms to validate and recognize skills acquired.