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EUROPEAN
INVENTORY
OF NQFs 2022
ALBANIA

European inventory of National Qualifications Frameworks 2022 – Albania

Contents

1.   Introduction

Albania first adopted in law its NQF in 2010, then adopted a revised NQF in 2018. The Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) comprises eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certification. Albania is a candidate country for EU accession and is a member of the EQF Advisory Group. It referenced its AQF to the EQF and self-certified against the Qualifications Framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2021. Albania has reached the activation stage.

2.   National context

2.1   Policy context

Albania has been a candidate country for EU entry since 2014 and seeks integration and compatibility with EU policies, tools and systems in education and training.

The AQF is integral to meeting the country's employment and skills needs, and so is a principal instrument to contribute to the objectives specified in the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) of 2014-21 and its successor, 2019-2022. A mid-term report on the first NESS in 2018 concluded Albania had made partial progress towards its original objectives of fostering decent work, providing quality VET, promoting social cohesion, and strengthening labour market governance and modernising the qualifications system. The 2020 annual progress report on NESS 2022 confirmed the progress made in implementing the AQF. Implementation of the AQF remains a national policy priority - it features in the work plan in the current development of the forthcoming National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2023-30.

The AQF plays an important role in ensuring that qualifications are up to date and relevant to the labour market and to learners. Notably, it serves to support fulfilment of transversal national goals in equipping people with modern green and digital skills, through stipulating criteria that development of new qualifications should incorporate relevant outcomes.

Before the start of 2020, labour market data had shown marked improvement in outcomes since 2013.

The employment rate for people aged 15-64 in Albania grew from 50% in 2013 to 59.5% in 2018, one of the highest in the Western Balkans. Employment rates have improved, notably for women, from 40% in 2013 to 52.4% in 2018. While women's employment rates are 15% lower than men's, Albania

nonetheless records the highest employment levels among women in the Western Balkans.

There had been fears that COVID would drastically reverse the generally positive trends mentioned above, but its impact on jobs proved less harmful than anticipated. In the last quarter of 2020, 1.23 million people were in employment, 43,400 fewer than in 2019. Youth employment, which had already lagged the general adult population, stood at 41.2%, unchanged from 2019 levels.

2.2   NQF legal basis

Law no 10 247 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was adopted by parliament on 4 March 2010 ([1]). A revision of this Law (23/2018) was adopted on 18 May 2018 ([2]). It describes the main characteristics of the AQF such as its structure, scope, objectives, and functions, as well as arrangements for governance, institutional management, implementation, quality assurance and financing.

Law No 15/2017 ([3]) on vocational education and training defines the AQF as a national classification system of qualifications.

The following by-laws, adopted by the Council of Ministers, implement specific features of the AQF:

(a)   Instruction of the Minister No. 26, dated 30.7.2018 on the national catalogue of professional qualifications;

(b)   Decision of Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 426, June 2019 on organization and functioning of the Sector Committees and the criteria for their selection;

(c)   DCM No. 427, June 2019 on approval of criteria and procedures for including the qualifications received through lifelong learning into the AQF levels for VET;

(d)   DCM No. 428, June 2019 on detailed level descriptors of the AQF level;

(e)   DCM No 756 dated 13.12. 2021 on the system of recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning;

([1])   Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2010). *Ligj No 10 247, datë 4.3.2010 përkornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve* [Law No 10 247 of 4 March 2010 on the Albanian Qualifications Framework]. [in Albanian].

([2])   Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2018). *Ligj Nr. 23/2018 Për disa ndryshime dhe shtesa në ligjin nr. 10 247, datë 4.3.2010 'Për kornizën shqiptare të kualifikimeve'.* [Law No 23/2018 of 10.5.2018 on the revised Albanian qualifications framework].

([3])   Assembly of the Republic of Albania (2017). *Ligj Nr. 15/2017 Për arsimin dhe forminin profesional në republikën e shqipërisë datë 16.2.2017* [Law No 15/2017 of 16.2.2017 on VET in the Republic of Albania].

(f) Joint Order No. 64 dated 30.03.2020 on the establishment and composition of the sectoral committee of information and communication technology;

(g) Order of the Minister No 99, dated 25.5.2021, on approval of National Catalogue for Vocational Qualifications;

(h) Joint Order No 163 dated 30.06.2022, on the establishment and composition of the sectoral committee of hospitality and tourism.

3. NQF objectives and functions

3.1 NQF objectives

The aims of the AQF are to classify and link qualifications, ensure qualifications are relevant to learners and employers, and to raise the quality of qualifications. Additionally, the AQF, as most international equivalents, acts as an identifiable entry point for foreign qualifications to the country's education system and employment market.

Like their counterparts in the region, Albania's education and employment actors and stakeholders view the AQF as one of a set of tools to reform and govern the labour market and qualifications system. The AQF will contribute to achieving NESS' Strategic Objectives B, on VET provision, and D, which concerns governing the labour market and the qualifications system.

Strategic Objective B on the quality offer of VET for youth and adults includes actions to:

(a) diversify VET provision;

(b) develop post-secondary VET qualifications; and assess provision of post-secondary VET;

(c) in recognition of prior learning (RPL), complete the legal framework to move it towards implementation; and pilot RPL in two occupations;

(d) in quality assurance, implement accreditation of public and private VET providers;

(e) develop a first model of a teacher training qualification.

Objective D includes measures to:

(a) implement the AQF, including via updating and maintaining the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications;

(b) completing the AQF's legal framework ;

(c) introducing mechanisms to include non-formal qualifications in the AQF;

(d) revise professional qualifications based on labour market needs;

(e) introduce a VET credit system aligned with ECVET;

(f)   complete regulations for sectoral committees; and pilot a Committee in a chosen sector;

(g)   strengthen the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ) via e.g. staff training and formalisation in law of its functions.

3.2 NQF functions

NESS aims to raise the quality of VET, and, by extension, its attractiveness. There are signs this strategy is bearing fruit - enrolments for VET programmes at secondary level increased from 17% of all secondary programmes in 2014 to 20.6% in 2018. Most other countries in the region still have higher VET enrolment levels than Albania, as VET has traditionally been an unattractive option compared to academic education.

Vocational schools offer formal initial vocational education. Both general education (gymnasium) and four-year vocational education programmes lead to the State Matura exams. Successful completion of this stage allows access to higher education and/or post-secondary education. Vocational education offers exit points after two, three or four years, depending on the programme. On completion, graduates receive a Vocational State Matura diploma (ISCED/Albanian Qualification Framework level 4), as well as a final certificate for the vocational education programme they will have attended (usually ISCED 3/AQF level 4).

The Vocational Training Centres offer short vocational training courses. NAVETQ has recently developed 35 curricula for such courses.

Authorities plan to merge the two separate VET provider systems, vocational schools, and vocational training centres, into one system of VET multifunctional centres, to maximise efficiency and quality. The Integrated Policy Management Group, or IPMG, the forum of national and donor actors which coordinates human capital development policies, consulted on this merger proposal in 2020. A technical working group established by the Minister responsible for VET is undertaking the necessary institutional preparatory work, including identifying the required legislative changes and implications for providers.

During 2020, as in other countries, the education and training systems was hit by COVID. There was a rapid transfer to online teaching, albeit hampered by incomplete broadband coverage, as some areas could not access fast internet services. Television delivered extensive general education content, although the passive learner experience of watching TV means that it is only partially effective in supporting learning aims.

4.   Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1   NQF structure and level descriptors

Inspired by the EQF, the AQF consists of eight levels, whose descriptors are written in learning outcomes organised in the three domains of knowledge, skills, and competence. A single set of descriptors is used in the AQF, applied for all types of qualification, whether they are from general education, VET or HE.

Originally, the descriptors were simply a language translation of the (rather generic) EQF level descriptors, but a ministerial decree of June 2019 replaced them with more detailed descriptors. These draw on the taxonomy in the EQF descriptors but expand to cover many more elements e.g., Level 4 Knowledge includes 'Exercise self-management within work context guidelines', or Level 3 Skills includes 'Work independently in variable conditions etc.'

4.2   NQF scope and coverage

The AQF is open to all types of qualifications. There are three main categories of qualifications identified in the AQF handbook and 2018 Law: (i) general and higher education qualifications; (ii) professional or VET qualifications; and (iii) lifelong learning qualifications catering to adults and people undertaking specialised courses for professional development (Cedefop, 2020).

The term 'qualifications for LLL' in the AQF Laws is used to distinguish between the formal qualifications that are automatically included in the AQF, based on existing legislation (e.g. VET Law, HE Law) and all other qualifications.

ETF's inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications in Albania in 2017 identified 85 qualifications that are not part of the formal education subsectors. 80 of these are vocational training courses developed for Vocational Training Centres or by private schools. Five are courses designed for managers or higher technicians developed by private universities, at AQF level 5. Although their numbers in the AQF remain small for now, there is progress in developing new Level 5 qualifications.

Qualifications and associated programmes in Fashion Design and Diagnostics-management in auto services are now available in vocational schools.

In June 2019, the Council of Ministers adopted a bylaw on inclusion of lifelong learning qualifications in the AQF. It stipulates criteria and procedures to place such qualifications on the AQF levels. This regulation should open the way for applications for qualifications obtained outside the formal subsystems to be levelled in the AQF and so should lead to, among other gains, inclusion of AQF Level 5 qualifications.

Table 1.   **Albanian qualifications framework (AQF) (4)**

AQF level	Qualifications from initial education		Lifelong learning qualifications	EQF level
	General/traditional qualifications	Vocational/professional qualifications		
8	Doctorate Graduate school study in advanced studies	Executive master/second level master/postmaster Long term specialisation	Study programmes for continuous education	8
7	Master of science Master of arts/ Master of Fine Arts/programme level II study Integrated study programme of the second cycle 4-year study programme (pre-Bologna programmes)	Professional master/first level master	Study programmes for continuous education	7
6	Bachelor Study programme first level			6
5		Post-secondary study programme of professional type Professional non-university study programme after secondary education Vocational certificate	Bridging courses (certificate) Specialisation courses based on professional requirements	5
4	State *matura* diploma (Upper secondary general education)	State vocational *matura* diploma issued upon completion of the vocational high school programme Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the four-year study programme for middle technicians/middle managers Vocational certificate issued	Bridging courses Vocational training courses Specialisation courses based on professional requirements	4

(4) The AQF differentiates between general, vocational and lifelong learning qualifications.

AQF level	Qualifications from initial education		Lifelong learning qualifications	EQF level
	General/traditional qualifications	Vocational/professional qualifications		
		at the conclusion of the two-year programme for technicians/ middle managers		
		Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of the one-year programme for technicians/ middle managers		
		Vocational certificate issued at the conclusion of an apprenticeship programme		
3		Vocational certificate issued at the end of a three-year programme for skilled workers		3
		Vocational certificate issued at the end of a one-year programme for skilled workers		
		Vocational Certificate issued at the end of an apprenticeship programme		
2		Vocational certificate issued at the completion of the two-year programme for semi-skilled workers		2
1	Final school report after completion of the compulsory nine-year education		Minimum entry requirements to work or social life	2

NB: EQF level 1 has no equivalency in the AQF
Source: Albanian Ministry of Education and Sport.

4.3   Use of learning outcomes

All new VET qualifications developed since 2009 are defined in learning outcomes and have a clear division between knowledge, skills, and broader competences. Outcomes for individual qualifications are developed to match the AQF level descriptors. Learning outcomes for individual qualifications are of course more detailed in terms of knowledge, skills and broader competences compared to the more generic AQF level descriptors.

VET qualifications derive from occupational descriptions contained in the National List of Occupations. The NLO contains 10 major occupational groups, 43 major subgroups, 133 minor groups, 480 unit groups and 5 489 job titles[5]. NAVETQ draws on the National List of Occupations, and then uses the AQF descriptors as occupational standards to develop VET qualifications. Currently, the template for occupational standards is being improved and will include performance criteria, tools, and equipment, etc. All future standards will be developed against this new template.

The vocational part of the National Frame Curricula is modularized. Vocational theory modules/subjects are organized in outcomes and themes with respective teaching hours. The modularized curricula are crucial in supporting a flexible delivery of qualifications and in offering several different pathways between different qualifications and between different learning contexts.

NESS provides for certification of partial qualifications or units of qualifications, though none have yet been developed or awarded.

NAVETQ issues guidelines for writing outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and broader competences. Additionally, to support the sustainable implementation of outcomes approaches, 90% of all VET teachers and instructors are trained in the "Basics of Didactics in VET", which helps equip them to write outcomes and enables them to acquire the skills to apply outcomes in teaching and learning, and in assessing students.

Higher education qualifications are not yet based on learning outcomes. Instead, Albania refers to students' workload for allocation of credits. A working group is working on new legislation, which will introduce outcomes in the higher education system.

4.4   Quality assurance arrangements

The AQF Law stipulates that all qualifications in the AQF shall be quality assured. There is not yet a coherent, national system of external quality assurance of development, provision, assessment, and certification of vocational qualifications. In VET, QA has hitherto mainly been internal.

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[5]   VET Credit System in Albania: context and potential usefulness, ETF, 2020

All public VET schools in the country have now completed a self-assessment exercise. NAVETQ is now working to develop the accreditation model to be implemented in VET schools. This measure addresses both providers and the qualifications themselves.

VET providers are responsible for internal assessment and certification of vocational qualifications at AQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. NAVETQ provides guidelines on both formative assessment and for summative assessment to achieve the certification. The framework curricula include recommendations on verifying if learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes in the qualification. NAVETQ also produces guidelines for VET teachers and providers, containing assessment methods and assessment tools e.g., tests, projects, checklist, etc.

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQAHE) manages quality assurance for this sector. It requires higher education institutions and their programmes to be accredited before they can issue degrees or other qualifications.

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

5.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

Ministries, rather than a dedicated NQF authority, are responsible for the AQF. Broadly, the concerned ministries manage qualifications in the AQF, which correspond to the educational subsystem the respective ministry coordinates. Therefore, the Ministry of Education covers qualifications in elementary, lower and upper secondary general education, and higher education and lifelong learning, while the Ministry of Finance and Economy leads on VET qualifications.

The AQF laws define three implementing institutions:

(a) the National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ);

(b) higher education institutions in cooperation with institutions, which carry out periodic labour market assessments and employment surveys of graduates;

(c) the ministries responsible for education and their associated agencies in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable legal framework (ETF, 2018b).

Implementation is coordinated by a dedicated AQF taskforce co-chaired by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Its tasks include development of an AQF handbook for users, revision

of the AQF law, and managing the relationship between the AQF and the EQF. Its current mandate runs to end 2022.

DCM No. 673, 16.10.2019, designates NAVETQ as the implementing institution for the AQF in VET. Within NAVETQ, a dedicated department composed of 2 units is responsible for development of occupational descriptions and standards, and vocational qualifications. This department has expanded from three employees in 2019 to its current eight. Budgets have been doubled during the past five years to enable NAVETQ to further implement the AQF and develop the country's quality assurance system.

5.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders

Sector Committees can now be established, following the June 2019 bylaw adopted by the Council of Ministers. This is an important step in delivering objectives within NESS to revise existing, and develop new, professional qualifications based on labour market needs. The Committees' functions will include identifying qualifications needed based on studies; proposing new qualifications to NAVETQ; working with NAVETQ to draft the occupational standards and vocational qualifications standards to be included in the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications; and broader support to the AQF's implementation.

The Committees will be organized by technical groups for each sector, up to a maximum of 10 national committees, each of fewer than 10 persons to facilitate decision-making. Members will be drawn from the different ministries responsible for the AQF; ministries responsible for the respective Committee's economic sector; employers' associations; trades unions; VET institutions; an HR specialist from the sector; and an independent expert with experience of developing and implementing the AQF.

A regulation on the functions of the Committees' supporting Technical Secretariat was adopted on 2021 and a roadmap to operationalise the Committees is now being developed. The selected priority sectors are ICT and hospitality and tourism - the ICT sectorial committee is already established and operational, while that for hospitality and tourism is expected to begin its tasks in late 2022.

Committees will expand to further sectors during 2023 and thereafter.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the priority measures in NESS and provided for in both the VET and AQF laws. Implementation so far has been confined to pilots and has not yet been applied country wide.

NESS outlines a national system for validation. Actions to be taken include:

(a) selecting bodies and putting in place procedures for the validation of qualifications, skills assessments, certification, and the validation/recognition of prior learning

(b) appointment of special bodies and establishment of procedures for the validation of qualifications, assessments of knowledge, skills, and competences; certification; and validation of prior learning

(c) establishment of a national system to recognise qualifications, work experience, skills obtained/received abroad

(d) consolidating the legal framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

(e) defining roles of implementing institutions in managing RPL

(f) identifying priority sectors for RPL and pilot in two occupations.

The Decision of the Council of Ministers on the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning was adopted in December 2021. Further regulation will complete the required RPL legal framework.

6.2 Recognition of foreign qualifications

The AQF Law stipulates that the AQF should facilitate accumulation and transfer of credits. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credit system in Higher Education is operational.

However, for VET there is no credit system yet. Authorities have written a concept paper examining how a credit system in VET could be established. Aims would include improving quality assurance and supporting learner progression. Qualifications for lifelong learning are generally not expressed in credits.

6.3 Promoting lifelong learning

The AQF is lifelong learning in its scope.

NESS provides for certification of partial qualifications or units of qualifications.

Modularized curricula are crucial in supporting a flexible delivery of qualifications and in offering several different pathways between different qualifications and between different learning contexts.

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1 Stage of implementation

While the framework is not fully operational, the responsible Ministries and national VET agency have sought to adapt and update it - most notable recent improvements are the introduction of sectoral committees, criteria to include a wider range of qualifications in the Framework and reinforcement of the AQF's level descriptors.

Albania has reached the activation stage.

The adoption of the revised, 2018, AQF law steers the AQF development process towards achieving more relevant qualifications, including through establishment of sector councils comprising social partners and other stakeholders. Pilot committees will provide feedback to inform orientations in reforming existing or designing new qualifications.

Accreditation of VET providers has already started, progressing towards the set milestones. Revision of study programmes in HE for full implementation of LO approach is underway.

7.2 Indicating EQF/NQF levels

AQF levels are included on new certificates and diplomas, Europass supplement documents and diploma supplements, and indicated in the national catalogue for VET qualifications. Indication of respective EQF levels is planned

7.3 NQF dissemination

Development of a communication strategy for the framework is a component within the AQF Task Force's implementation plan. One current initiative is an interactive video, aimed at relevant stakeholders, on the AQF's role and its benefits, recently released and disseminated on and via social media.

7.4 Qualifications databases and registers

The National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) developed by NAVETQ is de facto the country's vocational qualifications register and is approved by the Minister in charge of VET ([6]).

Within the Catalogue, the National List of Vocational Qualifications (NLVQ) includes 122 vocational qualifications, all based on learning outcomes. These qualifications span AQF levels 2 to 5. At levels 2, 3 and 4, they are available through the 2+1+1, 2+2 and 4-years formal educational structure. Level 5

([6]) VET Law 2017.Article17.2 and order of the Minister No 99, dated on 25.5.2021 'On approval of National Catalogue for Vocational Qualifications'.

qualifications are also recorded in the register. The List is now available online in the National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in the form of a public, interactive, searchable web portal/database on qualifications, curricula and training offers by VET providers.

The National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications includes learning outcomes descriptions. The outcomes statements are developed by dedicated working groups following the specified methodological guidance. These outcomes statements are also used in the Vocational Certificate supplement.

There is not yet a digital tool to support the search, presentation, analysis, and comparison of qualifications available or planned.

National authorities plan to connect the national register to the Europass platform via the Qualifications Dataset Register soon. The data model used for publishing information in the national register is not yet interoperable with the European Learning Model ([7]).

The Catalogue is currently available only in Albanian.

NLVQ is linked to the National Classification of Occupations, which is also developed by NAVETQ, and to the careers portal run by the careers guidance centre of the Tirana city authority.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth is meanwhile creating a national register of higher education programmes. Each programme will be coded according to the field of study. The required legal framework is under development.

The National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications demonstrates close adherence to Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation, which proposes data fields for the electronic publication of information on qualifications with an EQF level. The database includes the following information on individual qualifications:

(a) title of the qualification;
(b) NQF level;
(c) description of the qualifications, in knowledge skills and competences;
(d) awarding body/competent authority;
(e) credit points allocated;
(f) internal quality assurance procedures;
(g) external quality assurance/regulatory body;
(h) entry requirements;
(i) relationship to occupations.

([7]) The European Learning Model, or ELM, provides a single vocabulary for learning and employment data in Europe and is used for the Europass platform

7.5   Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications

Information about recognition of foreign qualifications in Albania on the ENIC-NARIC website is limited. The national information centre is the Technical Secretariat for the Recognition of Foreign Diplomas under the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth.

Currently, Albania has procedures in place for the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas at levels 5 to 8 of the AQF, issued by foreign higher education institutions. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications is under development.

An instruction of the Minister of Finance and Economy on the procedures for recognition of qualifications at levels 2 to 5 was adopted in 2018.

7.6   Career guidance and counselling

Careers advisers are generally aware of the AQF and use it in counselling clients. Qualifications placed in the AQF feature in career portals.

7.7   Awareness and use of NQF

Bodies exercising functions relevant to NQF implementation such as QA bodies and those regulating occupations or making recognition decisions are generally well-informed about the AQF. Likewise, education and training provider, who are institutional stakeholders. Learners who hold qualifications with the AQF levels indicated clearly have some exposure to the framework.

But those already established in the labour market, or those possessing older qualifications, usually have less awareness of the AQF. Stakeholders from the labour market side such as such as employers and trades unions, notwithstanding efforts by the AQF Task Force, have proven harder to reach

7.8   Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

No comprehensive evaluation has been conducted yet. However, the AQF Task Force monitors progress and impact.

7.9   Impact of the NQF

Legislation on the AQF requires that new VET qualifications be written in learning outcomes.

The AQF has influenced VET curricula, so that it is increasingly modularized. New qualifications can be designed in units.

VET qualifications are more accessible through use and promotion of the catalogue.

8.   Referencing to the EQF

8.1   Referencing to the EQF

Albania participates as a full member in both the EU's EQF process inside the EQF Advisory Group, and the Council of Europe-chaired Bologna process in higher education. Albania referenced or linked, its AQF to the EQF and self-certified against the Qualifications Framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in one report, submitted to the EQF Advisory Group, in October 2021.

Referencing an NQF to the EQF raises the profile or visibility of a country's education and qualification systems among the other countries in the EQF process and is intended to increase their trust in that country's qualifications. It also entitles the country, here Albania, to indicate EQF levels on its certificates, diplomas etc. which should in turn support their recognition abroad and so facilitate learner and worker mobility.

The table below illustrates the relationship, level to level, between the EQF and the AQF, as determined by the AQF Task Force which prepared the country's referencing report, and which was agreed with the EQF Advisory Group.

From AQF Level 3 to AQF Level 8, there is a straight level to level correspondence to the EQF, so that AQF Level 3 maps to EQF Level 3, AQF Level 4 maps to EQF Level 4, and so on up to both frameworks' respective Level 8.

However, the Task Force, with the agreement of the international experts who advised it, identified a variable mapping of AQF Levels 1 and 2 to the EQF. They found no equivalent level in the AQF of EQF Level 1, as no qualifications exist at that level in Albania. Instead, the Task Force found that qualifications available in Albania at both Levels 1 and 2 of the AQF correspond to EQF Level 2.

Table 2.   **Links between the AQF and**

AQF Levels	EQF Levels
Level 8	Level 8
Level 7	Level 7
Level 6	Level 6
Level 5	Level 5

Level 4	Level 4
Level 3	Level 3
Level 1	Level 2
Level 2	Level 2
No equivalence in AQF	Level 1

Albania will update its referencing report once significant further progress in the framework's implementation has been made.

8.2   International cooperation

As an EU candidate country, Albania receives financial assistance from the EU via IPA (Instrument for pre-Accession). The government has prioritized skills mismatch as the country prepares for the next round of EU support through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance 2021-2027.

EU assistance focuses on democratic development and good governance, regulatory reform and administrative capacity building and infrastructure development. EU funding for projects in Albania is provided in the form of grants, contracts, and increasingly budget support.

The current education, social policy and employment portfolio is worth 30 million euros and is mainly rolled out through a Budget Support programme that is currently being adapted to the COVID context.

The next programme, titled 'EU for Social Inclusion' has been under preparation during 2020, and provides 50M Euro, much of it addressing VET and employment. It replicates in many ways for Albania the EU 2020 programmes, providing support for transitioning to the knowledge economy and adopting the European social model. It will support implementation of NESS, the Strategy for Development of pre-university education 2014-2020 (PUE) and the National Strategy for Decentralisation and local Government 2015-20.

As an EU candidate country, Albania implements actions consistent with the RIGA 2015 conclusions on new medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020 (Riga is a follow-up of the Bruges process). MTD 3 is related to the NQF: Enhance access to VET and qualifications for all, through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

9. Reflections and plans

Key factors enabling development to date of the AQF include close coordination by the Task Force, an enabling legal framework, and mobilisation of relevant stakeholders.

Current priorities specified in the AQF Taskforce implementation plan include inclusion of new qualifications in the framework, development of a national VNFIL system, operationalising sector committees, accreditation of VET providers and the extension of outcomes approaches to HE programmes and qualifications and developing a communication strategy.

Application of learning outcomes in higher education would more closely align Albania's higher education sector to those in other countries in the European Higher Education Area.

For new qualifications, legislation to allow the placing of lifelong learning qualifications, including micro credentials, in the framework, and the promotion of benefits to users of these qualifications, are necessary measures.

In VNFIL, required actions are: completion of the required legislation; consolidation of institutional arrangements; development of a database on VNFIL; training for teachers, assessors and other professionals; development of methodologies and quality assurance systems and tools; and the engagement of stakeholders, especially employer bodies and trade unions in the design and implementation process. These measures would contribute to the development of lifelong learning opportunities and improve adult participation in the labour market.

Acronyms

AQAHE	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
NAVETQ	National Agency of Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
NESS	National Employment and Skills Strategy
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NCVQ	National Catalogue of Vocational Qualifications
NLVQ	National List of Vocational Qualifications
NLO	National List of Occupations

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