Introduction and context

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a potential candidate country for entry to the European Union. A major challenge for the 3.2 million population, which is both ageing and declining numerically, partly through migration outflows, is the high unemployment rate, particularly long-term and among young people. Only 28.3% of 15 to 24 year-olds participate in the labour market, with a significant gender difference: for females 19.4%, for males 36.3%. Participation in higher education is increasing, but the country experiences serious ‘brain drain’, with highly skilled workers and graduates seeking work abroad (European Training Foundation, 2016).

Development of the eight-level qualifications framework started in 2006 and has been in process for several years. The framework for higher education, was developed in line with the Bologna process and with the support of the Council of Europe, and legislated in 2007. A vocational education and training (VET) development strategy for 2007-13 was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2007; the global education strategy (2008-15) followed in 2008. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Council of Ministers adopted the baseline qualifications framework (BOF) in March 2011; the decision carries the force of law (1). The Council of Ministers adopted an action plan to implement the BQF (2) in February 2015.

Education reform so far has largely been focused on legislation, which is a lengthy process with a complex structure. The following laws have been adopted at State level:
(a) the framework law on primary and secondary education (2003);
(b) the framework law on pre-primary education (2007);

(1) The Council of Ministers (national government) of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Framework for higher education qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the strategy for its implementation in December 2007. Both documents are published in the Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina No 13/08.

(c) the framework law on higher education (2007);
(d) the Law on the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education
   (all adopted in 2007);
(e) the framework law on VET (2008).
(f) two documents to regulate adult learning and develop lifelong learning, adopted in 2014 by the Council of Ministers:
   (i) *Principles and standards in the field of adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina;*
   (ii) *Strategic adult education development platform in the context of lifelong learning for the period 2014-20.*

**Policy objectives**

The BQF is intended as a tool for transparency, clarifying what qualifications in Bosnia-Herzegovina mean and how they are related and linked. It is seen as an instrument for promoting reform and modernisation of qualifications and quality assurance at all education levels, improving links between education and employment. Playing an important role in overcoming internal fragmentation, and supporting integration with the EU and neighbouring countries, the BQF is intended to support mobility and progression, also into higher education. Since many Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens work abroad it should support mobility so the BQF will be closely aligned with the European qualifications framework (EQF).

The BQF is seen not only as a technical tool, but also as an important element in the reform and development of education and training. For this reason it has been, or is being, considered in different strategic documents, such as the new strategy for VET 2015-20, currently being drafted, the strategic directions for the development of education with its implementation plan for 2008-15, and the strategic adult education development platform in the context of lifelong learning for 2014-20 (3).

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(3) In March 2016 a new EU project for supporting the development and implementation of the BQF in adult education and lifelong learning began; its mandate runs until mid-2018. One of its main purposes is to progress and implement the VET and adult education elements of the BQF.
Levels and use of learning outcomes

The eight-level qualifications framework is learning outcomes-based, with levels referring to the EQF levels, using the same knowledge, skills and competence domains; no sublevels have been included.

Learning outcomes have been introduced in new VET curricula since the late 1990s, as well as in higher education, but as yet there is no system-wide and system-deep use of learning outcomes.

The Council of Europe has also been cooperating with several universities in developing subject area descriptors for priority subjects (4) which set a clear frame for university degrees. A good practice guide has been produced for curriculum development in higher education with the support of the EU and the Council. Projects in the VET sector (5) support and contribute to achieving policy objectives.

Following this lead, more occupations have been addressed by working groups consisting of representatives from companies in the relevant area/sector, secondary schools teachers and/or representatives from ministries and pedagogical institutes, chambers of commerce and the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The 19-member Intersectoral Committee (ISC), established in 2013, is the current executive, policy-making body, during the framework development. It comprises six members for each of the three major population groups – Bosniak, Croat and Serb – plus one member for minorities such as Roma. The ISC is chaired by the Bosnia and Herzegovina-wide Ministry of Civil Affairs. However,

(4) A joint EU/Council of Europe project is developing and interlinking higher education qualifications with occupations in five prioritised fields. The project has been developing standards for selected qualifications and for corresponding occupations, supporting a more transparent and cohesive approach for higher education qualifications and curricula in the country, based on learning outcomes.

(5) The EU VET IV project developed vocational qualifications on the basis of occupational standards which were a new development for VET in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in spite of more than 10 years of VET curriculum reform. The VETIS Department from the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education (APOSO) has shown good understanding of the opportunities that these occupational standards offer in terms of more relevant qualifications and curricula.
the ISC is not yet operational; nomination of representatives has been delayed for political reasons. Its principal function is to oversee and ensure implementation of the action plan, with decisions on implementation made by unanimity vote.

BQF development is supported by the EU in a range of projects, both for higher education and VET (6). Together with the universities and nine pedagogical institutes in the country, existing agencies for pre-primary, primary and secondary education and for higher education are expected to play an important technical role in implementing the qualifications framework.

The involvement of sector representatives remains weak and the development of occupational standards is carried out mainly with the support of teachers. Employers and trades unions are represented on the BQF’s policy-making body, the ISC, though they are generally not strong across the country’s wider institutional set-up. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, with its responsibility for coordinating education and work and employment sectors at national level, EU projects, and the State agencies APOSO and Higher Education Academy (HEA) have sought to link education and training more closely to the labour market.

Education authorities generally play a decisive role, while the social partners have little institutional involvement. There is an intention to work more systematically with representatives from economic sectors.

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

Given the high rate of labour migration, validation is seen as an important opportunity in the new framework and forms part of the action plan, but there is no country-wide system. Individual providers offer it for access to programmes, while the German Association for International Cooperation (GIZ) developed, in

(6) The VET III project, funded by the EU, developed the proposal for the baseline qualifications framework with representatives from all ministries of education in the country, coordinated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. It has now entered into legislation. The VET IV project aims to support further practical work, developing vocational qualifications and core curricula based on occupational standards in pilot areas, in cooperation with national stakeholders and the VET department of the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education (APOSO).
several cities, a ‘competence passport’, intended to support the employability of adults by identifying and presenting outcomes from informal learning.

**NQF implementation**

Higher education reform, influenced by the Bologna process, is supported by the EU and the Council of Europe. The European credit transfer and accumulation system has been introduced in all new study programmes. Although the framework law on higher education was adopted in 2007, full implementation is pending. All entity and cantonal legislation has been harmonised with the state-level framework law on higher education.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is already participating, or preparing to participate, in EU education programmes and networks open to ‘third countries’. The country has signed a memorandum of understanding (June 2014) for partial participation in Erasmus+ programme. It also became the 38th country to join the EQF advisory group, opening up the way to reference the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EQF and providing impetus to its further implementation.

There is currently no register or database of qualifications (7) although APOSO maintains a general overview of VET qualifications, existing and new, in the country, as does the Higher Education Academy (HEA) with higher education qualifications. Creation of the BQF web-portal is foreseen in the near future within the EU-funded project in qualifications frameworks in VET and adult education.

Neither VET nor higher education yet has agreed criteria for validation of qualifications, which would support quality assurance and levelling of qualifications in the NQF.

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of BQF implementation have not yet been fully defined, but the ISC will have an important role in this. The BQF is not yet being used as a reference system or tool by learners, providers and workers.

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(7) The ETF is supporting the Ministry of Civil Affairs on developing an inventory and analysis of vocational qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina, expected to be completed in 2017, which could be a good starting point for a register or database of qualifications.
Referencing to the EQF

Joining the EQF advisory group has provided a strong stimulus for the implementation of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as has been the case in neighbouring countries: Croatia, Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro have already referenced their frameworks to the EQF. However, referencing is not foreseen in the action plan before 2018. It is expected that self-certification to the qualifications framework in the European higher education area and referencing to the EQF will go hand in hand; self-certification has not been completed for higher education and development of learning outcomes-based programmes is making slow progress.

Important lessons and future plans

The baseline qualifications framework (BQF) is seen as an important development in working towards more relevant qualifications for citizens. Work with an impact on learners, providers, responsible institutions and other stakeholders is expected to increase. EQF advisory group participation is also creating a new dimension for the development. However support is needed to re-establish the operational capacities of the Intersectoral Committee at the technical level, and to create a BQF Council at the political level.

The complex institutional arrangements with State institutions which have very limited mandates, and in some cases operate with overlapped and conflictual responsibilities, makes the overall pace of reform slower than might otherwise be the case.

Implementation of the action plan for the BQF is behind schedule. While EU projects will perform much of the technical work necessary to implement the action plan and will provide technical assistance to local beneficiaries, they have a limited timeframe and scope for intervention. There needs to be sustained follow-up of implementation of the NQF infrastructure and capacity building of institutions, with necessary allocation of financial resources from the Bosnia and Herzegovina public funds at all relevant levels of government.
Further source of information [URLs accessed 12.12.2016]

The Ministry of Civil Affairs is the EQF national coordination point (NCP); http://www.vijeceministara.gov.ba/ministarstva/civilni_poslovi/default.aspx?id=104&langTag=en-US

TEMPUS project: Bosnia and Herzegovina qualifications framework for higher education: http://www.bhqfhe.eu/en/

### Bosnia and Herzegovina qualifications framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Type of education and training</th>
<th>Qualifications titles (position in the labour market)</th>
<th>Award type (Diploma / certificate / education level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8     | Third cycle of higher education | Titles of qualifications and contents of diploma and diploma supplement for levels 6, 7 and 8 will include, at a later stage, relevant NQF/ EQF levels and will be further elaborated by the adoption of the Rulebook on use of academic titles and acquisition of scientific and professional titles(*) | • PhD  
• Doctorate diploma  
• Diploma supplement in English and local language |
| 7     | Second cycle of higher education | | • MA  
• Master level diploma  
• Diploma supplement in English and local language |
| 6     | First cycle of higher education | | • BA  
• Diploma issued by the institution of higher education  
• Diploma supplement in English and local language |

(*) Title of the bylaw is defined under Article 6 of the Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette No 59/07).
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5     | Postsecondary education, including master craftsman exams and similar exams | Highly skilled worker specialised for a certain occupation | Diploma/certificate of completed post-secondary education or passed master craftsman exam and/or similar exam for a certain occupation, with a supplement containing the following information:  
- level of qualifications;  
- duration of education;  
- major field of study or a type of exam passed, indicating specific knowledge, skills and competence acquired;  
- other types of knowledge, skills and competence acquired;  
- field of work a person is trained for. |
| 4     | Secondary general education | Generally skilled worker | Secondary school graduation diploma with a supplement containing the following information:  
- level of qualifications;  
- major field of study with specific knowledge, skills and competence acquired;  
- other knowledge, skills and competence acquired by a person. |
| 4     | Secondary technical education | Specialised skilled worker for technical and related occupation | Diploma/certificate of secondary graduation with a supplement which contains the following information:  
- level of qualifications;  
- field of major study, specific knowledge, skills and competence acquired;  
- field of work a person is trained for |
| 3     | Vocational education and training | Skilled worker for a certain occupation | Diploma/certificate of final examination (matriculation) with practical work, including a supplement which contains the following information:  
- level of qualifications;  
- knowledge, skills and competence acquired;  
- field of work a person is trained for |
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2     | Occupational training programmes | Low-skilled worker                                   | Certificate on completed programme or education for lower level occupational qualifications, which contains the following information:  
- duration of education;  
- knowledge, skills and competence acquired;  
- field of work a person is trained for. |
| 1     | Elementary education            | Unskilled worker                                     | Certificate on completed elementary education      |

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation (2016).

List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>adult education</td>
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<tr>
<td>APOSO</td>
<td>Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary education</td>
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<tr>
<td>BQF</td>
<td>baseline qualifications framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>EQF</td>
<td>European qualifications framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERASMUS+</td>
<td>EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETF</td>
<td>European Training Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GmbH (German Technical Assistance Agency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Instrument for pre-accession (EU support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISC</td>
<td>Intersectoral Committee</td>
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<td>NQF</td>
<td>national qualifications framework</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>vocational education and training</td>
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References

[URL accessed 12.12.2016]