



# EUROPEAN INVENTORY OF NQFs 2024

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

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For additional information please visit Cedefop's [NQF online tool](#) and ETF's [qualifications and qualifications system section](#).

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## 1. Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers adopted the Baseline Qualifications Framework (BQF) in 2011.

The BQF has eight levels and is open to all types and levels of qualifications.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) coordinates qualifications framework development and implementation in cooperation with the country's various sub-state authorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the EQF process as a member of the EQF Advisory Group and is a member of the Bologna Process in Higher Education. It has not yet referenced to the European Qualification Framework, nor self-certified to the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Area (QF-EHEA), commonly known as the Bologna Framework.

Though Bosnia and Herzegovina has developed standards and some outcomes-based curricula, qualifications development, and the inclusion of qualifications in the framework, is slow. The planned system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is not operational.

The BQF is at the activation stage.

## 2. National context

### 2.1 Policy context

In 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a candidate country for European Union (EU) membership. Economic, political, labour market and educational reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been affected by the complexity of decision-making processes, slowing down progress in reforms.

The country comprises two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which contains 10 cantons with their own autonomous administrations, and the Republika Srpska, plus, a third, separate, administrative unit, Brčko District. At the state level, there is the Council of Ministers and a presidency which rotates among the three main communities. Population groups are the Bosniaks, who account for 50.1 % of the population; the Croats, who constitute 15.4 %; and the Serbs, at 30.8 %, and Others, at 3.7 %.

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina's population was estimated at 3.21 million, down from 3.23 million the previous year <sup>(1)</sup>. The country faces significant socio-economic challenges due to a shrinking workforce, youth emigration, and a declining population. Despite GDP growth of 42.8 % between 2010 and 2022, economic progress slowed in 2023, with real GDP growth at 1.9 %. According to the Labour Force Survey, in 2024 the labour force in Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of 1 413 million persons, a 3.3 % increase on the previous year. However, the employment rate (42,9 %) remains modest, and half of the population is inactive (50,9 %). The pool of labour is contracting, as people migrate or age. Employers in the country face increasing skill shortages.

Circa 75 % of secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina are enrolled in VET programmes.

### **Education and training system reform**

There are fourteen institutions responsible for overseeing education developments – thirteen ministries and a state-level education agency. The Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) have an education ministry each. The Federation further comprises 10 cantons, each with an education ministry. Education in Brčko District is overseen by its own, dedicated, education department.

At the state level, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) initiates proposals, often taking its lead from EU policies.

In 2021, MoCA published a document titled, 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Light of the EU Riga Conclusions, 2021-2030'.

This document, developed in collaboration with Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) and international experts, focuses on enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of vocational education and training in the country between 2021 and 2030 <sup>(2)</sup>, and includes application of the BQF for VET reform.

Moreover, in 2023, UNESCO and UNICEF in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in partnership with the EU, the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#) and the [Council of Europe](#), agreed the Education Sector Action Plan in Bosnia and Herzegovina – consisting of a 10-year EU-assisted roadmap for education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The plan proposes a series of

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(1) Cited in European Training Foundation (ETF), *Key policy developments in education, training and employment – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024*.

(2) Cited in European Training Foundation (ETF), *Key policy developments in education, training and employment – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024*.

complementary measures at policy, grassroots, and regional levels to improve the quality of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina <sup>(3)</sup>.

The BQF's guiding Action Plan is now outdated, its legal mandate having expired.

As the development of the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the main priority actions highlighted in the EU Progress Report of 2023, a working group has been established with representatives from all administrative units, including the Ministry of Education and cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brcko District, Republika Srpska, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, to develop a concept for the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This concept includes specifications on the quality assurance of qualifications, a register, validation of non-formal and informal learning, links to the EQF and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), and implementation arrangements involving all administrative units and existing agencies.

The EU Technical Assistance for VET project in Bosnia and Herzegovina supports the working group. The concept aims to ensure that qualifications are comparable, based on learning outcomes quality-assured, and registered in a common register. It also includes the development and implementation of validation for non-formal and informal learning, recognition of validation results, and the establishment of implementation mechanisms.

## 2.2 NQF legal basis

There are two main legal acts, which respectively adopt, and provide for the operationalisation of, the NQF:

- (a) the Council of Ministers' Decision on the Adoption of the Baseline Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 31/11, 39/12), March 2011 <sup>(4)</sup>.
- (b) the Council of Ministers' Decision on Adoption of the Action Plan for the Establishment and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Period 2014-2020 (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 28/15), in 2015.

The Action Plan is a comprehensive document with clear actions but, as indicated above, is no longer valid as it has expired.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Cited in European Training Foundation (ETF), *Key policy developments in education, training and employment – Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024*.

<sup>(4)</sup> All [legal acts related to the NQF](#) are available in English or local languages.

Related legal acts adopted at state level are:

- (a) the framework law on primary and secondary education, adopted in 2003.
- (b) the framework law on pre-primary education, from 2007.
- (c) the framework law on higher education, from 2007.
- (d) the Law on the Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education, adopted in 2007.
- (e) the framework law on VET, from 2008.

The Framework for higher education qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted in December 2007 via a Decision of the Council of Ministers. It is fully integrated with the wider NQF.

### 3. NQF objectives and functions

The BQF is intended as a tool for transparency and reform. It seeks to structure and classify qualifications, and to link education and the labour market.

The framework aims to increase access to education and social inclusion, including through supporting mechanisms for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and to enable comparability of qualifications to support progression within the country and mobility abroad.

The QF aims to enhance trust in and understanding of qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

for citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the QF can support them in finding employment at home and abroad, reskill and upskill, and access lifelong learning.

for society and the economy, the QF provides a tool to bridge decentralised approaches to skills development by focussing on the capacities of those who hold qualifications and on results rather than on how education and training is organised.

Specific functions of the QF include:

- (a) making understandable the different types of qualifications and their inter-relationships.
- (b) communicating learners' achievements to employers, providers and parents.
- (c) guiding individuals in their selection of education and career paths.
- (d) facilitating mobility and enabling access to education throughout life.
- (e) facilitating identification and recognition of national qualifications abroad and of foreign qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- (f) creating the conditions for a quality assurance system for qualifications.

- (g) creating the conditions for the development of a system of evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
- (h) improvement of co-operation with all social partners.

## 4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

### 4.1 NQF structure and level descriptors

The BQF comprises eight levels, designed for 1-to-1 referencing to the EQF levels. It does not have the sub-levels commonly found in other countries in the region. Three domains of learning outcomes are used: knowledge, skills, and competences (responsibility and autonomy). According to the Action Plan the level descriptors may be further developed to better represent the country context, and to serve the EQF referencing process. No decision has been taken yet to adapt the level descriptors.

### 4.2 NQF scope and coverage

The NQF is a comprehensive framework, which includes all types of qualifications from general education, VET, and higher education. As indicated at Section 2.2, a QF in HE was integrated by law into the BQF.

According to the 'Action Plan for the Development and Implementation of the Qualifications Framework', a qualification is defined as 'a formal title of the result of a process of assessment and validation obtained once a competent body determines that an individual has achieved the learning outcomes as per the defined standards'. In practice, however, the distinction between curriculum and qualifications is not always clear.

Different types of qualifications distinguished are:

- (a) general education qualifications.
- (b) VET qualifications.
- (c) higher education qualifications.

Qualifications awarded outside formal education and training can be included, but criteria and procedures for inclusion and levelling these are yet to be defined. A methodology for such allocation was developed as part of the EU project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'.

ETF conducted an inventory of vocational qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2017, covering qualifications from Levels 2 to 5. It revealed that of the 1 155 qualifications reviewed, most were not based on learning outcomes. Moreover, more than half were developed in 1995 and 1996, and required revision.

Based on this analysis, the decision was made to include only newly-developed and learning outcomes-based VET and higher education qualifications in the Qualifications Framework.

The process of populating the qualifications framework with qualifications is currently too slow to ensure that the qualifications framework adequately encompasses all quality-assured and outcomes-based qualifications in the country.

Level	Type of education and training	Qualification titles (position in the labour market)	Award type (diploma / certificate / education level)
8	Third cycle of higher education	Titles of qualifications and contents of diploma and diploma supplement for levels 6, 7 and 8 will, at a later stage, include 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 and Diploma supplement
7	Second cycle of higher education		Master diploma (MA) Master level diploma and Diploma supplement
6	First cycle of higher education		Bachelor diploma (BA) Diploma issued by the institution of higher education Diploma supplement
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
4	Secondary general education	Generally skilled worker	Secondary School graduation diploma with a supplement
	Secondary technical education	Specialised skilled worker for technical and related occupation	Diploma/Certificate of secondary graduation with a supplement
3	Vocational education and training	Skilled worker for a certain occupation	Diploma/certificate of final examination (matriculation) with practical work, including a supplement
2	Occupational training programmes	Low-skilled worker	Certificate on completed programme or education for lower level occupational qualifications
1	Elementary education	Unskilled worker	Certificate on completed elementary education (nine years)

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation, 2016.

### **4.3 Use and renewal of learning outcomes and standards General Education**

Learning outcomes are central to secondary education reforms. The EU-funded project for the Development of the Qualifications Framework for General Education 2014-2017 developed guidelines for teaching and learning but did not manage to develop an external Matura diploma at the end of secondary education for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The OECD Education Review of 2022 showed that significant numbers of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies and there are signs of inequities in the learning outcomes.

The [Common Core Curriculum \(CCC\)](#) for cross-cultural and intersubject areas, based on learning outcomes and Life Skills was adopted in 2018. The CCC is based on the EU key lifelong learning competences (2018) and two additional competences for creativity/productivity and for physical/health competences. The State Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education, APOSO, has also been working on achievement standards for all subjects and grade levels in cooperation with educational authorities and pedagogical institutes. Principles for assessing key competences have been defined by specifying these in more detailed learning outcomes that can be assessed accurately and meaningfully. Standardised questions and assessment topics have been defined that can be used.

Unfortunately, the CCC is not yet adopted by all entities, although adoption is progressing gradually. Sarajevo Canton adopted pedagogical standards and norms in 2022 that integrate the principles, outlined above, but today there are still only a few examples of standardized external assessments. This lack of consistent implementation across the country limits people's progression opportunities and reduces their chances of achieving positive outcomes.

### **Vocational Education and Training**

The inventory of VET qualifications, already mentioned above, carried out in 2017 with ETF's support identified 1,155 vocational qualifications of which 836 were formal and 310 for lifelong learning programmes. 43 % were based on learning outcomes.

The EU-funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning' developed a Manual for the Enhancement of Vocational Qualifications intended for all institutions and bodies involved in developing the basic elements of the qualifications framework such as occupational standards, qualification standards, curricula and programmes and use of learning outcomes. The project also developed a manual for quality assurance in VET which includes guidelines,

including standards and criteria, for external evaluation and self-assessment based on best European practice and models. However, its take-up and use by authorities and providers has been partial.

The new VET strategic document, 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of VET in Bosnia in the light of the Riga conclusions 2021-2030', outlines many relevant developments for the use of learning outcomes. The document recommends the establishment of sector-specific partner committees. It states that occupational standards that have been developed with relevant partners are the basis for qualification standards, learning outcomes and curricula. APOSO coordinates the current development of occupational standards.

A common template for occupational standards has been adopted for vocational education and for higher education which provides consistency and helps occupational standards be easily understood by different users, employers, HR managers, teachers, and students. It includes a description of key tasks and required knowledge, skills, and competence.

Better monitoring of VET graduates and student performance is necessary to collect feedback on the relevance and feasibility of learning outcomes of current qualifications and programmes. Pedagogical institutes should establish procedures for occupational standards and qualification standards development. They also play an important role in supporting employers and providers in developing occupational standards, qualification standards and curricula. Curricula need to be adapted to students with special needs, supporting gradual acquisition of qualifications. For this, it is important to group learning outcomes into units and breakdown qualifications into units.

Many VET graduates in Bosnia and Herzegovina lack key competences and perform more poorly than their peers from general education. All the ministries of education (including the department of education at Brcko District) have agreed that key competences descriptions in subject and modular curricula should be connected to learning outcomes and contextualised, taking into account the specific tasks and occupations as defined in related occupational standards and qualification standards.

### **Higher Education**

With support of the EU-funded project, 'Strategic Development of Higher Education and Qualification Standards (2013-2015)', qualifications standards in five different subject disciplines and occupational standard for two disciplines were developed as well as a manual for further development and use of qualifications and occupational standards for higher education, and a curriculum development good practice guide. The project also trained a core group of national experts from higher

education in the development of occupational standards and qualification standards.

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance issued in 2009 the Instruction on the Form and Content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement Issued by Accredited Higher Education Institutions (Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 86/09). This Instruction is obligatory for all competent education authorities and accredited higher education institutions. In 2023, a revision of Instruction on the Form and Content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement was published in the Official

Gazette following a process in 2022 led by the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance. Learning outcomes, the ECTS credit value, and level of the qualifications are part of the instruction. Each higher education programme needs to be designed for the labour market and for further learning.

### **Adult Education**

The document '[Principles and Standards in the Field of Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina \(2014\)](#)' was drafted in the framework of the EU project 'Strengthening the Capacity for Human Resources Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina'. It outlines the basic principles on which adult education is based, considering international agreements and best practice. It distinguishes between different approaches for formal and non-formal programmes. For formal programmes, it describes the process of certification based on assessment and validation of learning outcomes and refers as well to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The principles are gradually integrated in legislation at entity level i.e. the Cantons, Brcko District and Republika Srpska. In 2022 the government of Herceg-Nova Canton adopted a rulebook on standards and norms for adult education programmes.

#### **4.4 Quality assurance arrangements**

Quality assurance in qualifications is underdeveloped in the country, so undermining trust in qualifications. Systematic monitoring of the quality of provision and of the achievement of learning outcomes does not take place at state level, while there is no real coordination between entities to ensure comparability. The only countrywide instruments are international comparative studies such as the [Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#) and the [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study \(TIMMS\)](#).

In higher education, the institutional lead lies with the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA). In recent years, it has

conducted accreditation of higher education institutions, private and public, of which a few offer short-cycle, level 5 qualifications, which are VET-oriented. To date, this has involved accreditation of providers and accreditation of programmes, but not validation of individual qualifications. The Agency has also been updating quality assurance procedures in higher education, to meet the Bologna Process' European Standards and Guidelines. However, the EU progress report 2023 stresses that a fully functional system of accreditation of higher education institutions and, in particular, study programmes, is still lacking.

In VET, quality assurance arrangements between the various entities are unconnected. Significant challenges in quality assurance of VET qualifications are lack of comparable education or occupational standards, absence of agreed criteria for development and validation of qualifications, minimal external assessment, and fragmented functions among the many actors.

## 5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

### 5.1 Governance and institutional arrangements for the NQF

MOCA's Sector for Education coordinates QF development and implementation, and acts as its secretariat. It brings together representatives of the Republika Srpska, the 10 cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Brcko District.

The educational authorities of these various entities are responsible for legislating and implementing education policies.

The Council of Ministers established by legal act (a Decision) an Inter-sectoral Commission (ISC) in 2013 as an interim executive policy-making structure, to steer development of the BQF, but intending eventually to hand over its functions to a permanent governing body foreseen in the Action Plan, the QF Council. The Council would be a decision-making body, chaired by MoCA and advised by the ISC and various technical expert groups, and cooperating with the entities and cantons.

For the period 2015-2023, the ISC did not meet for wider political reasons. Since then it has reconvened and met frequently, but the QF Council has not been established yet. For now, then, it is the ISC that is still in charge.

MoCA chairs the ISC. It comprises nineteen members in total. There are six members for each of the three major population groups – Bosniak, Croat and Serb - plus one member for minorities such as Roma. These nineteen people variously represent education and training, the academic community, labour and

employment, statistics institutions, and other social partners <sup>(5)</sup>. Its decisions are made by majority vote, requiring a minimum of two thirds of votes from the representatives of each constituent community.

The ISC is supported and advised by the technical expert groups, which include sectoral councils, tasked to develop qualifications in specified industrial sectors. In the absence of a permanent QF Council, the sectoral councils currently operate on an ad-hoc basis, advising on request APOSO or bilateral donors/projects when these latter are developing new vocational qualifications.

Similarly, pending formal establishment of the QF Council, EQF referencing is steered by the Conference of Education Ministers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and an ad-hoc 'Referencing working group'.

## **5.2 Roles and functions of actors and stakeholders**

Since 2003, MoCA has been responsible for coordination of activities, harmonisation of plans of entity authorities and defining strategies at the international level and in the education field (Article 15 of the Law on Ministries and Other Bodies of Administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina No. 5/03').

MoCA is responsible for educational policy at state level, in liaison with the international community and has a coordinating role in QF implementation. As indicated above, it also chairs the ISC and is designated to chair the planned QF Council.

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA) is the lead institution for quality in higher education. It is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). It accredits public and private higher education institutions and updates quality assurance procedures to meet European standards and guidelines.

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<sup>(5)</sup> Members of the Inter-sectoral Commission include: five representatives of education sector (Ministry of Civil Affairs; two canton representatives; Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska; Education Department of the Government of the Brcko District); three representatives of the Rectors Conference; three representatives of education agencies (Agency for pre-school, primary and secondary education; Agency for the development of higher education and quality assurance and the Centre for information and recognition of documents in higher education); three representatives of the statistics sector (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federal Institute for Statistics, Institute for Statistics of Republika Srpska); three representatives of labour and employment (Ministry of Civil Affairs, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Labour and Protection of Veterans and Disabled Persons of Republika Srpska); one representative from the Association of Employers and one representative of the Confederation of Labour Unions.

The Agency for Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary Education (APOSO) has overall responsibility for quality in pre-university education. In cooperation with all responsible education authorities, it develops education and occupational standards and guides curriculum development. Development of occupational standards is carried out mainly with the support of pedagogic institutes, companies and schools, and often with significant donor or project support.

## 6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

The NQF allows for the acquisition of learning outcomes formally, non-formally and informally. There is currently no state-wide system of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). But, given the high rate of labour migration, authorities see validation as offering special value given the country's circumstances – outward migration is very high, and those migrants who do return could especially benefit from having the skills that they acquired while in an EU country validated with formal qualifications on their return home.

Establishing validation processes is one of the policy objectives for QF implementation and among the outputs specified outlined in the Action Plan

Apart from the Baseline Qualifications Framework, two strategic documents were adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2014 as a basis for development of lifelong learning and for regulating adult learning: 'Principles and standards in the field of adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina', and 'Strategic adult education development platform in the context of lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020'. Many entities have adopted adult education laws that incorporate the principles for validation, but education authorities have not yet developed appropriate models to enable implementation.

The first concepts for establishing country-wide VNFIL arrangements were developed in 2018, by a working group within the EU-funded project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'. Two concepts exist for VNFIL in VET and HE respectively, based on the European Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2012.

Implementation of VNFIL is more advanced in HE than in VET. The EU project, Education4Employment, developed a model rulebook for RPL in higher education with a guide for students that have been introduced e.g., in the University of Mostar. In VET there are only a few ad-hoc activities, which mainly belong to adult education programmes.

The new EU-funded project VET project IPA 2019 provides for VNFIL piloting, expected in 2025 and 2026.

The new VET strategic document, 'Improvement of Quality and Relevance of Vocational Education and Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021 – 2030, in line with the Riga conclusions', makes several recommendations to support the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning, these to be achieved and in place by 2030. They include developing unit-based VET qualifications that allow for smaller assessments, and training for professionals, including assessors.

## **6.2 Credit systems**

Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Bologna process in 2003. In 2006, all public universities began the process of implementing first and second-cycle study programmes and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS has since been introduced in all higher education programmes.

A credit system is not described in detail for other levels in the Baseline for the Qualifications Framework document and the Action Plan, but the principle is acknowledged. ECVET is used for new VET qualifications as mentioned in the Manual for enhancement of VET qualifications developed as part of the EU project 'Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'. However, implementation is limited. All qualification standards that are published on the website [EQF.ba](http://EQF.ba) have a credit value.

## **6.3 Promoting lifelong learning**

As outlined above, principles and standards in the field of adult education in Bosnia and Herzegovina are adopted as umbrella documents at the state level, which serve as a reference framework for further harmonization of legislation and policies at lower levels. The concept of lifelong education is emphasized at all levels of education. Adult education is seen as part of a comprehensive education system. It assumes the openness and flexibility of the system in learning and advancement as well as intersectoral activity. All social actors involved in the development of adult education must work on a partnership basis, and ultimately adults are responsible for their own development.

The main objectives of the strategic platform for development of adult education in the context of lifelong learning are:

- (a) improving legislation for adult education in the context of lifelong learning and alignment with the EQF.
- (b) establishing effective ways to involve relevant social partners in the process of adult education in the context of lifelong learning.
- (c) developing programmes and increasing the accessibility of adult education.

(d) raising and ensuring the quality of adult education.

Currently, vocational secondary schools carry the main responsibility for adult and continuing education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They offer training programs for adults mostly on the same lines as the programmes of formal vocational secondary education. The aim of these programmes is to enable adults to upgrade their skills and acquire qualifications in order to improve their employment prospects.

## 7. NQF implementation and impact

### 7.1 Stage of implementation

The BQF is at the activation stage.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has formally adopted an NQF. Use of outcomes in standards, qualifications and programmes have become accepted principles.

### 7.2 Indicating RQF/NQF levels

The diploma supplement for higher education qualifications mentions the level of the qualification. There is no reference to EQF levels yet as the qualifications framework has not been referenced to the EQF yet. Qualification standards that are published on the webpage [EQF.ba](http://EQF.ba) have a QF level.

### 7.3 NQF dissemination

Communication about the qualifications framework has so far been aimed at stakeholders directly involved in its development. These include policymakers in education and employment, teachers, students, education and employment agencies, and employers. The main channels used are the websites of different ministries, social media, leaflets, conferences and workshops. A website has been developed for further communication of the QF in relation to the EQF, [EQF.ba](http://EQF.ba).

### 7.4 Qualifications databases and registers

The web portal for the qualifications framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina includes [occupational and qualification standards for VET and higher education](#). There are 24 occupational standards for VET and 2 occupational standards for higher education; and 23 qualification standards for VET and 5 qualification standards for higher education.

The repository of standards on the website is not a register that can be searched but rather a list of files. There are no links to other databases, or direct links between the data of occupational standards and qualification standards.

Learning outcomes are described but there are no specific criteria on how they should be represented.

For all diplomas in higher education, Europass diploma supplements should be issued, but these are not part of a database. Current data are not yet interoperable. EQF levels are not indicated yet. It is important to establish a proper database of qualifications in line with the European Learning Model Version 3 and populate it with more qualifications.

### **7.5 Use of NQF in recognition of foreign qualifications**

The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education represents the country in [the ENIC/NARIC network](#).

Procedures for recognition of higher education qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina are regulated primarily by the [Lisbon Recognition Convention \(LRC\)](#) and are prescribed by laws on recognition and laws on higher education.

In 2014, [Recommendations](#) were adopted on the use of qualifications frameworks in the process of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications taking into account five key elements of the recognition process: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile. That said, there are differences between the Cantons in legislation and implementation.

There is also a Balkan regional dimension in recognition processes, linked with the Berlin Process and the ambition of establishing a Common Regional Market. In November 2022, the leaders of the Western Balkan economies signed three regional mobility agreements, deepening the intra-regional economic integration. The agreements comprise travel with identity cards within the region, recognition of higher education qualifications, and recognition of professional qualifications for doctors, dentists and architects.

### **7.6 Career guidance and counselling**

Both the ETF and the EU4Employment project have carried out reviews of career guidance in Bosnia and Herzegovina <sup>(6)</sup>. Career guidance is very much decentralised and fragmented. Career counselling in education is mainly organized in secondary vocational schools and provided by psychologists and pedagogists.

The public employment services offer career counselling.

Awareness of the BQF and VNFIL opportunities, and their value in informing people's career, programme and qualifications choices, is limited across the country.

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<sup>(6)</sup> European Training Foundation (ETF), Career Development Support System Review – Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022).

### **7.7 Awareness and use of the NQF**

Outside those experts and officials in the ministries and various sub-state level administrations, who are charged with developing the BQF, awareness of the qualifications framework is low.

### **7.8 Monitoring and evaluating the NQF**

As the QF is only at an early stage of implementation, no evaluation studies have been carried out to assess its impact.

### **7.9 Impact**

QF implementation has introduced use of learning outcomes, in qualifications and standards, and the review, renewal and quality assurance of qualifications. The QF has helped formalise cooperation between stakeholders across education sub-sectors and with bodies representing the labour market.

## **8. Referencing to the EQF**

### **8.1 Referencing to the EQF**

On 15 December 2022, the European Council officially granted candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the Commission's 2023 progress report was critical of the slow speed of reform of the qualification system.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a full member of the EQF Advisory Group since 2015 and referencing the BQF to the EQF is considered a state-wide priority. Although a draft referencing report was developed and a state of play report presented to the EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG) in June 2019, MoCA has not subsequently presented a full draft to the EQF AG.

The current EU-funded project, 'Technical Assistance for VET education in Bosnia and Herzegovina', supports finalisation of the Referencing report to the EQF and the self-certification to the QF-EHEA.

### **8.2 International cooperation**

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance is an affiliated member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Full membership has not been granted yet.

The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education represents Bosnia and Herzegovina in the ENIC/NARIC network.

Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the Bologna Process and in the European Education Area, including the VET initiatives, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, Europass, Eurydice, and the

Erasmus+ programme. Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The country participates in several regional bodies and processes, such as the Berlin Process, the Regional Cooperation Council and ERISEE, the education reform initiative for South-Eastern Europe.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also involved in bilateral cooperation on education and employment, notably with Swiss, Austrian and German organisations.

The EU has been the most important international donor in the area of qualifications reforms. In addition to the BQF, EU projects have variously supported:

- (a) development of methodologies for occupational standards and curricula.
- (b) qualification standards and curricula, and a proposal for an externally-assessed high school leaving qualification, the Matura.
- (c) development of new VET curricula based on learning outcomes.
- (d) quality assurance in HE.
- (e) capacity-building for the Agency for Primary, Pre-primary and Secondary Education (APOSO).
- (f) validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- (g) implementation of the Lisbon Recognition convention.
- (h) EQF referencing.
- (i) career guidance.
- (j) teacher training.

The ongoing EU4Education project aims to improve responsiveness of education to labour market needs. It includes the development of 17 occupational standards and 9 qualification standards, the development and mainstreaming of programmes on entrepreneurial competences in VET schools, and the development of VET teachers' digital competences. These components aim at strengthening institutional capacities of educational authorities and VET schools and to promote wider application and sustainability of project outputs at the end of the project.

## 9. Reflections and plans

EU projects, the country's candidate status, and its membership of various EU technical or governance groups, including the EQF Advisory Group, have moved it towards assimilation of the EU agenda in education and training. Likewise, Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership of the Qualifications Framework for the

European Higher Education Area and Lisbon Recognition Convention expose it to necessary international influences.

However, these enabling forces are outweighed by the country's political divisions, which slow and hinder the BQF's implementation.

An institutional priority is to establish the QF Council as the permanent NQF structure.

The Action Plan for the development and implementation of the Qualifications Frameworks has expired and needs updating. A new Action Plan needs to be agreed and legislated that focuses on the necessary steps to make the Qualifications Framework fully functional, including:

- (a) a modern qualifications register that is populated with qualifications for general education, vocational education, higher education and adult learning, and using ELM Version 3.
- (b) a functioning validation of non-formal and informal learning system.
- (c) use of occupational standards and qualifications standards in education and training.

Completing the referencing to the EQF is a necessary step to link qualifications from Bosnia and Herzegovina to those of other European countries.

## Acronyms

<b>APOSO</b>	Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education
<b>CCC</b>	Common Core Curriculum for cross-cultural and intersubject area, based on learning outcomes and Life Skills
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer System for Higher Education
<b>ECVET</b>	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
<b>ENIC NARIC Centres</b>	National Information Centres on Academic Recognition of Qualifications
<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
<b>APOSO</b>	Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education
<b>CCC</b>	Common Core Curriculum for cross-cultural and intersubject area, based on learning outcomes and Life Skills
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<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
<b>EQF AG</b>	EQF Advisory Group
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HEA</b>	Agency for development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession
<b>ISC</b>	Inter-Sectoral Commission
<b>LRC</b>	Lisbon Recognition Convention
<b>MoCA</b>	Ministry of Civil Affairs
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>PISA</b>	OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>QF</b>	Qualifications Framework
<b>QF EHEA</b>	Qualifications Framework for the European Area for Higher Education
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>TIMMS</b>	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study of the IEA
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>VNFIL</b>	Validation of non-formal and informal learning

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