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1. Introduction

Cedefop's work on qualifications frameworks dates back to 2003. The Centre has contributed to the conceptual development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and has supported its further implementation, working alongside national authorities and stakeholders to introduce and develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). This report is part of the European inventory of NQFs, which systematically maps and analyses NQF developments in countries participating in the EQF process. The inventory is updated biennially in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. The report provides a detailed description of the structure of the Italian NQF (QNQ) and its institutional arrangements. It also examines the framework's implementation and its impact on broader policy areas, focusing on key developments since 2022.

The Italian NQF (Quadro Nazionale delle Qualificazioni, QNQ) is structured in eight levels, covering qualifications from general, technical and vocational education, higher education, adult education, VET qualifications administered at regional level and qualifications of regulated professions. The framework is at the activation stage. It was initially referenced to the EQF in 2013; in 2022, an updated referencing report was presented to the EQF advisory group. A qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2012.

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In 2022, public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product slightly decreased to 4.1%, compared to 4.3% that was in 2020, and it was below the EU average of 4.7% ⁽¹⁾. In 2023, the percentage of tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) was 30.6%, well below the EU-27 average of 43.1% for the same year ⁽²⁾. In contrast, participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) in 2022 was 51.8%, above the EU average of 49.0% ⁽³⁾. The employment rate of VET graduates in 2023 was 62.2%, well below the EU of 81% for the same year (European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport & Culture, 2024). Participation in early childhood education in 2022 was 92.7%, close

⁽¹⁾ More information at Eurostat [[gov_10a_exp](#)], accessed 10 March 2025.

⁽²⁾ More information at Eurostat [[edat_ifs_9912](#)], accessed 10 March 2025.

⁽³⁾ More information at Eurostat [[educ_uoe_enra13](#)], accessed 10 March 2025.

to the EU average of 93.1% ⁽⁴⁾. In 2023, the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18–24) was 10.5%, slightly higher than the EU average of 9.5% ⁽⁵⁾. Finally, adult participation in learning increased in 2023 to 11.6% (from 9.6% in 2022), but remained below the EU average of 12.8% for 2023 ⁽⁶⁾.

2.2. NQF legal basis

The QNQ was adopted through the [inter-ministerial decree No 20/2018](#). The decree established the structure of the framework and regulates the procedures, the bodies involved and the criteria for levelling qualifications to the QNQ. In 2023, the [updated referencing report](#) was adopted by an [inter-ministerial decree](#). This was a significant step towards making the QNQ operational, as it ensures that all national and regional qualifications are seamlessly referenced to both the QNQ and the EQF, creating a clear and structured pathway that is easy to understand for learners, workers, and employers. Further, the decree sets out the criteria for the procedure for including individual qualifications in the QNQ (see Section 7.2). This procedure will feed the QNQ Register which is interconnected with the Atlas of Work and Qualifications. (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The national strategy on lifelong learning has set up the National System for Certification of Competences (NSCC) (the QNQ includes NSCC qualifications) and a National repository of education, training and vocational (see Section 7.5) (learning-outcomes-based) qualifications awarded at national and regional levels ⁽⁷⁾. The [inter-ministerial decree](#) ⁽⁸⁾ adopting the national guidelines for the interoperability of the competent authorities ⁽⁹⁾ of the NSCC states that certificates issued at the conclusion of a validation process are transferable in the different

⁽⁴⁾ More information at Eurostat [[educ_uoe_enra21](#)], accessed 11 March 2025.

⁽⁵⁾ More information at Eurostat [[edat_ifse_14](#)], accessed 11 March 2025.

⁽⁶⁾ More information at Eurostat [[sdg_04_60](#)], accessed 11 March 2025.

⁽⁷⁾ Only levelled qualifications to the QNQ can be included in the national repository. To be included, Developments towards the creation of a National System for Certification of Competences were legislated through the [National Law No 92/2012](#) on the reform of the labour market, the [Decree No 13/2013](#) on the national certification of competences and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the Decree No 166/2015 on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills.

⁽⁸⁾ Interministerial Decree on 5 January 2021 for the adoption of the National Guidelines for the interoperability of the National Competent Authorities of the NSCC.

⁽⁹⁾ The term ‘competent authorities’ refers to public administration authorities, operating at national and regional levels, responsible for the identification, validation and certification of competences (i.e. relevant ministries and the regions and the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano). The term ‘body’ refers to public or private entities, including chambers, authorised or accredited by a competent authority, or delegated according to State or regional law, along with educational institutions, universities and institutions of higher education in Arts and Music, to provide all or part of services for the identification and validation and certification of competences (ANPAL, 2022).

sectors of the NSCC, and recognisable at European and international level, as they are levelled to the QNQ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). In the [Decree](#) adopting the national plan for new skills, the QNQ is used as a reference point to define essential quality levels for upskilling and reskilling activities.

An important development was the adoption of the 2024 [Decree of the Minister for Labour](#), which establishes the regulatory framework for the identification, validation, and certification of competences related to non-formal qualifications under the responsibility of the labour ministry (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

3. NQF objectives

The objectives of the QNQ include:

- (a) improving access, transparency and permeability of the qualifications system;
- (b) promoting transferability of qualifications at national and European level and professional mobility;
- (c) promoting validation and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and those acquired through work-based learning;
- (d) contributing to improving the quality of education (ANPAL, 2022).

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The structure of the [QNQ](#) aligns with the EQF, maintaining coherence and continuity within a shared reference framework consisting of eight levels. These levels are defined by learning outcomes that reflect increasing degrees of expertise and complexity. Each QNQ level corresponds directly to the equivalent level in the EQF and is defined by level descriptors covering three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy (ANPAL, 2022).

To ensure all qualifications are included, sub-levels (sub-articulations) have also been developed. QNQ levels can be divided into six sub-levels, providing additional qualitative information on whether general qualifications allow direct access to next-level learning pathways or not (sub-levels 1-2), whether specialisation qualifications provide access to next-level learning pathways or not (sub-levels 3-4), if they are a micro-qualification composed of one or more competences of a broader qualification (sub-level 0), and if they are international qualifications not included in the national repository (sub-level 5) (ANPAL, 2022).

Further, the National framework of regional qualifications, developed under Decree 30 June 2015, serves as the reference for regional qualifications, aligning

them with EQF standards. It classifies qualifications into 23 economic-professional sectors plus a common area and ensures their recognition at national and European levels. Each region maintains its own repository and system for validation and certification of competences (Musso, 2024).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

The framework covers formal qualifications awarded within the NSCC, including formal education and training (primary, secondary and tertiary education), VET (regional training systems and apprenticeships), adult education, and qualifications of regulated professions.

The QNQ is open to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training. In July 2024 (see Section 6.1), a framework was provided for the identification, validation, and certification of competences linked to non-formal qualifications under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and offered through non-formal learning pathways, such as apprenticeships, internships, volunteering, workforce reskilling, digital upskilling and social inclusion initiatives, as well as corporate training and third-party certifications. The strong integration between the NQF implementation and the adoption of the Italian legislative framework on validation of non-formal and informal learning, started in 2012 with the establishment of the NSCC, followed in 2021 by the adoption of the national guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) and in 2024 by the new Decree of the Ministry of Labour No115/2024, will allow the inclusion of the above-mentioned non formal qualifications in the QNQ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The QNQ currently includes micro-qualifications (microcredentials). Micro-qualifications always consist of one or more competences that form part of broader qualifications and can be separately validated. These short-term, modular and flexible learning pathways are issued within the NSCC and are included in regional and national repositories. They can be referenced at QNQ levels 2 to 7 through the referencing procedure of individual qualifications. The procedure can assign to micro-qualifications a QNQ/EQF level different from the main qualification they belong to (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The QNQ is also open to international qualifications but does not yet include them. Plans exist to reference such qualifications based on criteria ensuring their stability, transparency, and alignment with EQF and NSCC standards. Although these qualifications will not be included in the national repository, they will be listed in a separate section of the Atlas of Work and Qualifications and the Italian register of qualifications referenced to the QNQ (see Section 7.5) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Overall, while Italy's NQF remains structured around formal qualifications, it is evolving to incorporate microcredentials and international qualifications while maintaining strict referencing and quality assurance measures.

Table 1. **Italian qualifications framework (QNQ)**

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
8	Research doctorate – <i>Dottorato di ricerca</i> Research training academic diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di formazione alla ricerca (AFAM)*</i> Specialisation diploma – <i>Diploma di specializzazione</i> Second level university master – <i>Master universitario di secondo livello</i> Second level Academic specialisation diploma - <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione di secondo livello (AFAM)</i> Higher specialisation diploma or Second level post degree - <i>Diploma di corso di perfezionamento o Master di secondo livello (AFAM)</i>	8
7	Single-cycle Master Degree - <i>Laurea Magistrale/Specialistica a ciclo unico</i> Single-cycle second level academic diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello (AFAM)</i> Master Degree - <i>Laurea Magistrale/Specialistica</i> First level university master – <i>Master universitario di primo livello</i> Second level academic diploma - <i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello (AFAM)</i> First level academic specialisation diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione di primo livello (AFAM)</i> Higher specialisation diploma - <i>Diploma di corso di perfezionamento</i> Higher specialisation diploma or first level master – <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master di primo livello</i>	7
6	Bachelor degree – <i>Laurea</i> First level academic diploma – <i>Diploma accademico di primo livello (AFAM)</i> Applied technologies higher specialisation diploma (three-year course) - <i>Diploma di specializzazione superiore per le tecnologie applicate di durata triennale</i> Regional higher vocational training qualification - <i>Qualificazione di alta formazione professionale regionale</i>	6

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
5	Applied technologies specialisation Diploma (two-year course) - <i>Diploma di specializzazione per le tecnologie applicate di durata biennale</i> Regional vocational training qualification for technical area - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area tecnica</i>	5
4	Upper secondary education diploma – <i>Diploma liceale</i> Upper secondary education diploma (technical or vocational) – <i>Diploma di istruzione tecnica or professionale</i> Initial education and vocational training diploma - <i>Diploma professionale di Istruzione e Formazione Professionale (leFP)</i> Regional vocational training qualification for technical area - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area tecnica</i> Higher technical specialisation certificate – <i>Certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore (IFTS)</i> Certification for admission to the third teaching period of second level (Adult education) - <i>Certificazione per l'ammissione al terzo periodo didattico (IDA) del secondo livello</i> Technical, vocational or artistic upper secondary level diploma (Adult education) - <i>Diploma di Istruzione secondaria di secondo grado degli istituti tecnici o professionali (IDA)</i>	4
3	Initial education and vocational training certificate - <i>Qualifica professionale di Istruzione e Formazione Professionale (leFP)</i> Regional vocational training qualification for professional operator - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area operativa</i>	3
2	Compulsory education certificate - <i>Certificazione delle competenze dell'obbligo di istruzione</i> Compulsory education certificate (leFP) - <i>Certificazione delle competenze dell'obbligo di istruzione (leFP)</i> Regional vocational training qualification for professional operator - <i>Qualificazione di formazione professionale di area operativa</i> Certification attesting the acquisition of basic competences corresponding to the compulsory education (Adult education) - <i>Certificazione attestante l'acquisizione delle competenze di base connesse all'obbligo di istruzione (IDA)</i> Certification for admission to the second teaching period of second level (Adult Education) - <i>Certificazione per l'ammissione al secondo periodo didattico (IDA) del secondo livello</i>	2

NQF level	Italian formal qualifications	EQF level
1	Final diploma of the first cycle of education - <i>Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione</i> Certificate attesting the achievement of a level of knowledge of the Italian language at level A2 of the CEFR - <i>Titolo attestante il raggiungimento di un livello di conoscenza della lingua italiana di livello A2 del QCER (IDA)</i> Final diploma of the first cycle of education (Adult education) - <i>Titolo conclusivo del primo ciclo di istruzione (IDA)</i> Certification of competences at the end of primary school	1

(*) Higher education for the fine arts, music and dance (AFAM)

NB: Micro qualifications are not included in the table (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Source: European Commission & Cedefop (2024).

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

The QNQ has significantly influenced the use of learning outcomes at each level, as it adopts an outcome-based approach. This ensures that qualifications at all levels are described using knowledge, skills, and autonomy/responsibility, enhancing consistency and comparability across different education and training systems (ANPAL, 2022).

Italy's first cycle of education (eight years) is structured around learning outcomes to ensure progressive skill development. Primary school (ages 6-11) concludes with a competence certification, while lower secondary school (ages 11-14) strengthens independent learning and ends with a State exam. Both stages align with QNQ level 1, ensuring transparency and recognition across formal and alternative education paths (ANPAL, 2022).

At upper secondary level (QNQ level 4), general (*licei*), technical and vocational education qualifications and regional qualifications awarded within the State-Regions agreement are described in learning outcomes according to a 2010 [Presidential decree](#) on general education reform.

In vocational training administered at regional level, there is a focus on competences, defined as the smallest units for certification. These are collected into codified lists based on the relevant EQF level and on a clear explanation of learning outcomes (Italian technical working group, 2012). The apprenticeship system has been reformed in recent years to integrate training and employment within a dual system (see Section 7.6).

In the higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway (*istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore* – IFTS and *istruzione tecnica superiore* – ITS, QNQ/EQF levels 4 and 5), a national standard system based on competences (coherent with the learning outcomes approach) is used.

In higher education, Dublin descriptors ⁽¹⁰⁾ are used nationally for the cycles of higher education agreed within the Bologna process. Higher education is divided into three cycles, each defined by specific learning outcomes that cover knowledge, application, critical thinking, communication, and lifelong learning skills. All qualifications are described through learning outcomes, which define what students must achieve at each level, ensuring clarity and comparability. These outcomes are directly linked to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Universities and higher education institutions use this system to structure programmes, facilitate student mobility, and support the recognition of prior learning (ANPAL, 2022).

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University and Research and in agreement with the regions, autonomous provinces and social partners, has led the QNQ development at a strategic level.

Since 2022, the coordination and implementation of the QNQ have changed. The government ordered the closure of ANPAL (effective by February 2024), and the EQF (national coordination point) NCP team was transferred to INAPP to ensure continuity (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The EQF NCP is responsible for QNQ operational implementation, including the referencing procedure of Italian qualifications to the EQF, monitoring, evaluation and maintenance of the framework, and for updating the referencing report, overseeing qualification referencing procedures, managing the Italian Register, and reporting to the labour ministry (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

There are also inter-agency bodies responsible for discussing QNQ-related topics and supervising and coordinating its implementation. The Certification of competences working group provides technical and methodological advice. The National technical committee has guiding, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating functions. It is composed of representatives of all the competent authorities issuing qualifications within the NSCC at national and regional level. The State-Regions Conference is responsible for approving the updated referencing report (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

⁽¹⁰⁾ The Dublin descriptors used: knowledge and understanding; applying knowledge and understanding; making judgements; communication skills; learning skills.

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

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

The validation system, defined by Decree No 13/2013, is national and comprehensive and covers competences related to qualifications included in the National repository of education, training and vocational qualifications (Perulli, 2019).

Under the 2024 decree (see Section 2.2), the labour ministry, acting as a public competent authority within the NSCC, can, through its public entitled bodies, formally identify, validate, and certify non-formal qualifications and micro-qualifications under its responsibility. These processes adhere to national standards and the 2021 VNFIL Guidelines to ensure consistency and quality (ReferNet Italy & Cedefop, 2025).

Further, the inter-ministerial decree on the national guidelines for the interoperability of the competent authorities of the National System for Certification of Competences (NSCC) confirms the strong links between the QNQ and the NSCC. These guidelines make the NSCC operational by allowing public competent authorities to identify, validate, and certify credits and competences acquired through prior learning. QNQ qualifications issued after validation are portable across different education sectors within the NSCC (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

Currently, there are validation arrangements in place at all QNQ levels. More specifically, at all QNQ levels and qualification types, there are validation arrangements that give access to programmes leading to a qualification. At QNQ levels 5 to 8, for all qualification types, there are validation arrangements that give access to programmes leading to a qualification. The same validation arrangements exist for almost all qualification types at QNQ level 4 (apart from the certification for admission to the third teaching period of second level, i.e. adult education); for the 'regional vocational training qualification for professional operator' at QNQ level 3; whereas this kind of validation arrangements at levels 1 and 2 exist only for the 'regional vocational training qualification for professional operator' at level 2 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The Italian NQF is at the activation stage. Implementation structures are in place,

and the roles of different stakeholders have been formally defined. With the adoption of the updated referencing report in 2023, the QNQ has moved towards the operational stage.

7.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

With the adoption of the updated QNQ referencing report, the public competent authorities should follow a specific process of referencing individual qualifications to the QNQ (Figure1).

- (a) Start-up phase: the public competent authority submits a referencing request to the EQF NCP, following specific requirements in alignment with national legislation of the NSCC.
- (b) Preliminary phase: EQF NCP reviews the referencing requests for qualification to the QNQ, checking the correctness of the request both in terms of the EQF/NQF level assigned and of the qualification's description in terms of learning outcomes.
- (c) Independent evaluation phase: INAPP also evaluates the referencing request.
- (d) Follow-up phase: the EQF NCP suggests revisions, if needed, to the public competent authority to ensure consistency with EQF standards and national regulations.
- (e) Approval and publication phase: the EQF NCP approves the referencing and publishes the qualification in the NQF register.

The referencing procedure focuses on ensuring that qualifications are correctly levelled based on learning outcomes and are accessible and comparable across European and national contexts. The process promotes continuous improvement in the description and quality of qualifications. Public competent authorities may delegate the process to other bodies or follow simplified procedures when needed.

When public competent authorities submit a referencing request for a qualification under their responsibility, they may also include proposals for referencing each individual competence within the qualification (micro-qualifications). This allows them to indicate the EQF/QNQ level for each specific competence in the certifications, as required by the national guidelines for the interoperability of public competent authorities (ANPAL, 2022).

The QNQ is also open to international qualifications but does not yet include them (see Section 4.2). They can be referenced within the NSCC, though this does not give them the legal status of public qualifications. To qualify for referencing, they must meet several key conditions: they need to fit the official definition of an international qualification, demonstrate stable and widespread availability, and be formally adopted and valid. Additionally, these qualifications must be described in competence-based language and aligned with the QNQ/EQF and the NSCC's

legal standards. They must also be backed by robust quality assurance, either through NSCC-defined standards or internationally recognised ones, with transparent and public mechanisms. Once accepted, these qualifications are not included in the national repository but are listed in the Atlas of Work and Qualifications and in a special section of the Italian register of qualifications Referenced to the NQF. The referencing process for these qualifications will be further developed based on ongoing discussions within the EQF Advisory Group (ANPAL, 2022).

The 2024 decree (see Section 2.2) sets the minimum criteria for the identification, validation, and certification of competences related to non-formal qualifications pathways under the responsibility of the labour ministry. The resulting certificate must be issued in an open digital format, digitally signed, stored electronically by the authorised issuing entities, and recorded in the worker's electronic file. It must also display the logo and name of the labour ministry, the issuing entity, and, where applicable, the delegated entity ⁽¹¹⁾. These non-formal qualifications pathways included in the NSCC are:

- (a) continuous training for workers;
- (b) chambers of Commerce training;
- (c) training policies and programs promoted by labour ministry;
- (d) volunteering and collective utility projects and Universal civil service;
- (e) professional apprenticeships;
- (f) internships;
- (g) entrepreneurship training.

7.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

According to the decree that set up the QNQ, all certificates issued under the NSCC should indicate the QNQ/EQF level. The QNQ/EQF level will be indicated following specific coding criteria, ensuring transparency and comparability for administrations, organisations, stakeholders, learners, and employers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.4. NQF dissemination

Since 2022, Italy has actively engaged in communication and dissemination efforts to promote awareness and understanding of the QNQ, despite the absence of an official communication strategy document. The EQF NCP has organised various

⁽¹¹⁾ Internal communication with INAPP.

events, meetings, and initiatives at both national and European levels to share progress, best practices, and key developments.

In March 2022, the updated referencing report was introduced to social partners, ensuring their involvement in the ongoing dialogue about qualifications and transparency. It was officially presented through a [national conference](#) in October 2023 (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

To further extend outreach, the EQF NCP has implemented a coordinated multi-channel communication strategy, including joint webinars and training sessions aimed at education professionals, vocational training providers, and public employment service (PES) guidance counsellors. The EQF NCPs project (GA 2021-2023) aimed to increase awareness and use of the QNQ through targeted activities, including webinars, job fairs, and the distribution of publications and promotional materials. These initiatives were designed for various target groups such as policy makers, practitioners, end users (learners, workers, jobseekers), and the general public. Further, the EQF NCP team has been highly engaged in a series of important national and international events, aiming to increase awareness and share valuable insights on the QNQ/EQF framework and the VNFIL. One significant event was the '[Making all skills visible: The validation of transversal skills](#)', which supported cross-boarder cooperation. Additionally, the Italian referencing report was presented during an open online seminar in December 2022. The EQF NCP participated in the [Job&Orienta Fair](#) in Verona in November 2022. The team also took part in the '[Biennale of identification, validation, and certification of skills](#)' held in Rome in October 2022. Moreover, the team contributed to the [monitoring of VNFIL practices](#) carried out by INAPP. Additionally, they played an essential role in developing the first draft of a [one-off Report on VNFIL](#), aligning it with Italy's updated referencing to the EQF.

A comprehensive record of all national and international events involving the EQF NCP is available on the [SkillON portal](#), a joint information platform managed by Italy's three national coordination points (Europass, Euroguidance and EQF), aiming to reach the main target audiences, including end users, through online communication tools ([website](#), [Facebook](#), [X platform](#) and [videos](#)) and onsite communication products and activities (publications, [promotional material](#), etc.) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). The jointly branded website, with dedicated sections for each Contact Point, has steadily grown since its monitoring began in April 2022. Additionally, coordinated communication efforts – including a bi-monthly newsletter that achieved around 7 000 downloads, three editions of the annual EG Magazine, and 14 issues of the online 'SkillONews' – have significantly enhanced outreach and engagement with stakeholders across national and European levels (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.5. Qualifications databases and registers

Since 2023, the QNQ register has been under development. The register will complement the information infrastructure of the National repository of education and vocational training qualifications, already implemented with the Atlas of Work and Qualifications, and will be interoperable with national databases and with the European Europass portal as required by the Europass Decision ⁽¹²⁾. It will be populated in parallel with the levelling procedure of individual qualifications to the QNQ (see Section 7.2). The register will provide, for all included qualifications, a common set of information covering the data fields of Annex VI of the 2017 EQF recommendation. It will have a double function:

- (a) a back-office function, for managing the levelling procedure;
- (b) a front-office function, which will make QNQ qualifications transparent and comparable at national and international level.

Due to governance changes, the testing phase with public competent authorities was delayed, and internal testing took place instead. The next steps include improving interoperability with European databases and involving stakeholders to ensure the register's usability and effectiveness (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Currently, the QNQ qualifications are published in different databases and registers, which are not interconnected. The portal of the education ministry ([La scuola in chiaro](#)) includes the qualifications of the first and second cycle of general and vocational education and training, targeting teachers, learners, and their families. [UniversItaly](#) is the web portal of the Ministry of University and Research, including all university qualifications, diplomas of academies of fine arts or music conservatories, and higher technical education institutions diplomas. It targets high schools and universities along with Italian and international students, graduates and their families, providing information in Italian and English.

INAPP has developed the [Atlas of Work and Qualifications](#): a classification and information tool, aiming to systematise information on qualifications and correlate it with the needs of the labour market and economic sectors. It supports stakeholders involved in lifelong learning and active employment policies, providing standardised references for skills needs analysis, skill gap analysis and supporting the services for the identification, validation and certification of competences, qualification design and guidance. The Atlas hosts the [National repository of education, training and vocational qualifications](#), which includes 116 qualifications from the second cycle of education, 4 738 higher education qualifications and 5 074 regional vocational training and IFTS qualifications ⁽¹³⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ Internal communication with INAPP.

⁽¹³⁾ Accessed on 1 April 2025.

7.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

Awareness of the QNQ/EQF varies across different target groups. Learners and students, as well as workers and jobseekers, show moderate awareness of the framework, as do employers. The trade unions, along with the employment services, guidance and counselling practitioners, and quality assurance bodies, exhibit a high level of awareness. The education and training providers, as well as recognition authorities and bodies, stand out with very high awareness (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). The EQF NCP's project for increasing awareness (see Section 7.4), has successfully enhanced the understanding of the QNQ/EQF as a transparency tool, with notable improvements in knowledge among stakeholders, including education and training providers, guidance experts, and employment services (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). The public consultation that took place during the updating of the referencing report showed that lifelong learning stakeholders (general, vocational and higher education institutions, along with central and regional administrations and public bodies and agencies) have a medium to high level of awareness and usage of the QNQ/EQF (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

Learners and students have a moderate level of use, as do workers and jobseekers, due to its high level of complexity. Similarly, employers and employment services use the framework moderately, whereas the guidance and counselling practitioners, as well as quality assurance bodies, use the QNQ to a high extent in their work. Recognition authorities and bodies make extensive use of the QNQ/EQF. Bodies and authorities responsible for the design, review and renewal of qualifications also show high use (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). Labour market stakeholders (employers and trade unions) use it in collective bargaining, specifically the national collective agreement of metalworkers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

The QNQ is also used in the implementation of policy measures. The [Guaranteed employability of workers](#) programme aims to help individuals obtaining a QNQ-levelled qualification (or part of it), included in the national repository, thus increasing education and training attainment in the country (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

7.7. Impact of the NQF

The QNQ implementation, through the adoption of the updated referencing report aligning qualifications to the EQF, has significantly improved transparency, comparability, and governance of the qualifications system. It has also ensured better coordination between education, training, and employment policies. By bringing together all public competent authorities and stakeholders responsible for the regional and national qualifications systems, the adoption of the new referencing report has promoted a shared and cohesive model of governance of

education and training systems. This model is capable of responding to the dynamic and evolving nature of qualifications and competences, driven by the green, technological and digital transitions and the changing labour markets. It also helps to ensure a better link between formal, non-formal and informal learning. The report defines common criteria for transparency and readability of qualifications, aiming to facilitate comparability and financial processes, while also enhancing the identity of individual qualifications systems. The entire process is carried out in harmony with the work and governance structures of the National System for Certification of Competences, with active involvement and cooperation from the public competent authorities. In particular, the referencing process was based on three approaches:

- (a) the *cooperative approach* between the administrations involved, aimed at ensuring a shared and participatory application of the referencing process in order to safeguard mutual trust and the collective and coordinated growth of qualification systems;
- (b) the *progressive approach*, which maximises the value of established experiences, allowing for gradual adaptation of legal systems and limiting the introduction of new elements to what is strictly necessary;
- (c) the *substantial approach*, which prioritises sustainability, timeliness and cost-effectiveness of the referencing procedures, thus ensuring the use of existing information assets and, where possible, the adoption of mechanisms to simplify procedures according to proportionality criteria.

The QNQ decree has introduced common criteria for describing and levelling national and regional individual qualifications. The levelling procedure is fully consistent with the EQF quality assurance requirements, thus contributing to the improvement of qualification quality. The decree also promotes the use of learning outcomes in qualification design. The levelling of regional VET qualifications to the QNQ has established progression routes to higher levels of the framework and different qualification types. It also aligns qualifications with labour market needs, promotes work-based learning and improves employability. The QNQ is the reference point for the identification, validation and certification of competences acquired through prior learning. The QNQ aims to support the recognition of qualifications for professional and learning purposes, but it does not automatically confer legal equivalence with national or foreign qualifications at the same level. The framework has also fostered cooperation among education and training stakeholders and between them and labour market representatives (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

Overall, the QNQ has had an impact, at the individual level, by empowering users and influencing their educational and career decisions. At the organisational

level, service providers are now better equipped to address client needs, leading to the modernisation of skills development, validation, and recognition processes. At the system level (institutions), improvements in transparency and governance have facilitated referencing processes and enhanced the attractiveness of international education and training (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

8. Referencing to the EQF

The first Italian referencing report was adopted in 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013. Following the implementation of the NSCC and the legal adoption of the QNQ in 2018, an updated referencing report was presented to the EQF Advisory Group in 2022 and formally adopted by the Italian government in 2023.

9. Reflections and plans

The official adoption of the updated referencing report in 2023 is a milestone in the QNQ implementation, as it enables the launch of the levelling procedure for individual qualifications and, through this, the progressive implementation of the QNQ register. The inclusive nature of the framework, legally embedded by the 2018 QNQ decree, is considered a key factor in increasing transparency and comparability of qualifications, as well as learning and professional mobility both within the country and at European level. The creation of the national repository and the creation of the Atlas of Work and Qualifications have been important steps in the QNQ implementation process (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

Feedback from the events aimed at disseminating information on the use of the QNQ and EQF indicates that awareness of the QNQ has become more widespread and consolidated among various stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and end users such as teachers, learners, recent graduates, and jobseekers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

One of the main challenges in establishing and implementing the QNQ has been the high number of stakeholders involved and the complexity of the education, training and qualification system. Other challenges include the high degree of fragmentation of the qualification system, with different repositories managed by different awarding bodies, and the difficulty of harmonising qualifications issued at regional level. Although work on the QNQ has led to the adoption of a learning outcomes orientation in several legislative acts, further promoting the learning-outcomes approach in qualification design remains a challenge. Further, some target groups (e.g. final users) consider the QNQ/EQF

function to be complex and often confuse transparency with recognition of qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

The next steps are to develop the QNQ register and an IT platform to manage and store levelled qualifications from the competent authorities. Initially, a pilot phase of the levelling procedure will be carried out in collaboration with the competent authorities, aiming to optimise the process and address possible challenges (ANPAL, 2022).

Acronyms

ANPAL	National Agency for Active Labour Policies
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	EQF national coordination point
IFTS	higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway [<i>Istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore</i>]
INAPP	National Institute for Public Policies Analysis [<i>Istituto nazionale per l'analisi delle politiche pubbliche</i>]
ITS	higher technical education [<i>istruzione tecnica superiore</i>]
NSCC	National System for Certification of Competences
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
NQF	national qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training

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Webpages and databases

[URLs accessed: 18/3/2025]

[Atlas of Work and Qualifications](#).

[National repository of education, training and vocational qualifications](#).

[QNQ – EQF webpage](#).