

ITALY

European inventory on NQF 2018

Introduction and context

The Italian education system has seen improvements in several key indicators of education and training in recent years. There has been a steady decrease in the rate of early school leaving, which has fallen to 13.8%, and adult participation in lifelong learning has been increasing, reaching 8.3% in 2016. The proportion of students in vocational education and training (VET) is above the EU average (55.8% in 2016, compared to 47.3%). However, the employment rate of recent VET graduates is among the lowest in the EU. VET reforms, including a diversification of study pathways and support for the dual system, are expected to address this issue. Student performance in basic skills in the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed large regional differences between the north-east and the south, and between Italian and migrant pupils, while the overall percentages of underachievers in reading, maths and science are above EU averages. The percentage of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is the highest in the EU (24.3% for the 15-29 age group in 2016, compared to the EU average of 14.2%). School reform is expected to improve education outcomes; student testing has been extended, mainly through formative assessment at primary and secondary level, and work-based learning is a requirement for the final three years of upper secondary school. The rate of attainment in tertiary education is the second lowest in the EU, at 26.2% in 2016, compared to the EU average of 39.1%, and is being addressed with measures to increase student financial aid. While the take-up of higher education graduates on the labour market is slower compared to other EU countries, the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates has started to recover (European Commission, 2017).

The reforms carried out since 2003 across education and training (upper secondary general education, VET and higher education), – motivated by a need to bridge education and labour market needs – anticipated the principles of a learning-outcomes-based NQF. Given the complex model of governance in the country and the fragmentation of the education and training system ⁽¹⁾, one of the

⁽¹⁾ There are 21 regions and two autonomous provinces in Italy. With the modification of the V Title of the Constitution in December 2001, the regions increased their competence in education, maintained their competence in the vocational training field

challenges has been to achieve effective inter-regional coordination to encourage recognition of the regional qualification systems and inter-regional mobility ⁽²⁾.

Initial EQF referencing was carried out between 2009 and 2012 linking national formal qualifications, as well as those awarded by regions within the framework of the State-Regions agreement, directly to the eight EQF levels. The first Italian referencing report was adopted in December 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013 (Italian technical working group, 2012).

The Italian qualifications framework for higher education (*Quadro dei titoli Italiani dell'istruzione superiore* - QTI) ⁽³⁾ was published in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, University and Research. Self-certification to the qualifications framework for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) was completed in 2012 ⁽⁴⁾ and decisions made about higher education qualifications were taken up in the initial EQF referencing.

Following the first referencing process (2012), a national strategy on lifelong learning was defined, which led to the adoption of Law No 92/2012 on labour market reform ⁽⁵⁾ and Legislative Decree No 13/2013 ⁽⁶⁾; this established a national system for certification of competences and a national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications awarded at national and regional levels and described in terms of learning outcomes. To enable the setting up of the national repository, stakeholder agreement was reached in 2015 on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications

and in the definition of professional profiles and qualifications. As a result, there is a greater need for coordination between regions.

- ⁽²⁾ Cedefop (2014). *The common European tools reaching European citizens - Country studies: Italy* [unpublished].
- ⁽³⁾ The Italian qualifications framework for higher education is available at: <http://www.quadrodeititoli.it/index.aspx?IDL=2>
- ⁽⁴⁾ National report regarding the Bologna process implementation 2012-15 – Italy, 2015. <http://www.ehea.info/pid34250-cid101267/italy.html>
- ⁽⁵⁾ Italian Government (2012). Law No 92/2012 on labour market reform. *Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie generale, No 153, 3.7.2012*. <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2012/07/03/153/so/136/sg/pdf>
- ⁽⁶⁾ Italian Government (2013). Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on the definition of general rules and basic level of performance for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and minimum service standards of the national system of competences certification. *Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie generale, No 13, 15.2.2013*. http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/02/15/13G00043/sg;jsessionid=QtVQDnVhW+1EjOvvz7I8GA__.ntc-as1-guri2b

and related skills – the national framework of regional qualifications – followed by an inter-ministerial decree ⁽⁷⁾.

These developments were also preconditions for, and served as steps towards, putting in place a comprehensive NQF through dialogue with all national stakeholders. The Italian NQF was adopted through an inter-ministerial decree in January 2018 ⁽⁸⁾. It is structured on eight levels described in learning outcomes in the three domains of the EQF (knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy). Sub-descriptors have also been developed by extending the EQF level descriptors to cover all qualifications available nationally. The framework covers qualifications from general education, higher education and VET qualifications administered at regional level. Professional and private qualifications are to be included in the future.

Policy objectives

Italy has faced the challenge of integrating different levels of lifelong learning systems into a coherent national qualification system. The context for designing and awarding qualifications is complex: it is governed by multiple legislative acts under different regional and national authorities. The comprehensive NQF adopted in January 2018 represents the main tool for the description and classification of qualifications awarded within the national and regional system and for referencing Italian qualifications to the EQF.

An increasing focus on lifelong learning as a strategic lever for economic growth, social cohesion and quality of education, training and employment services was influenced by EU-level developments: the 2008 recommendation on the establishment of the EQF for lifelong learning; the 2009 Council conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020); the 2012 recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal

⁽⁷⁾ Italian Government (2015a). Decree of 30 June 2015 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Education, University and Research on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills. *Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie generale, No 166, 20.7.2015*.
<http://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/normative/Documents/2015/Decreto-Interministeriale-30-giugno-2015.pdf>

⁽⁸⁾ Italian Government (2018). Inter-ministerial decree of 8 January 2018 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and of the Ministry of Education, University and Research on the establishment of the national qualifications framework. *Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie generale, No 20, 25.1.2018*.
<http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/01/25/18A00411/sg>

learning; and, more recently, the *New skills agenda for Europe* and the 2017 recommendation on the EQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). In this context, the NQF aims to help coordinate and strengthen the national lifelong learning systems and the services for the validation and certification of competences.

Inspired by the principles of the EQF, the objectives of the Italian national framework include (Italian Government, 2018):

- (a) to improve access, transparency and permeability of the qualifications system;
- (b) to promote the currency of qualifications at national and European level, including in terms of geographical and professional mobility;
- (c) to promote the centrality of the person and the value of individual experiences, including through validation and certification of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and those acquired through work-based learning;
- (d) to contribute to the quality of education and competences acquired by individuals for personal, civic, social and professional growth .

Adoption of the NQF is also expected to make referencing to the EQF easier and to help represent the Italian education and qualifications system and its relation to the labour market.

Given its aim to increase citizens' knowledge, skills and abilities in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts in line with the general rules and minimum standards set out by the Legislative Decree No 13/2013 setting up the national system for certification of competences ⁽⁹⁾, the NQF is expected to be used as a 'multitasking tool' in a variety of contexts (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- (a) in general education, VET and higher education for strengthening links between subsystems to reduce barriers to progression and to increase permeability of subsystems;
- (b) in the validation process for the identification, assessment and certification of skills acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts;
- (c) in public employment services and guidance centres for skill profiling and in developing career pathways;
- (d) in the labour market for recruitment, workforce development, planning of work-based learning, and for certifying skills and competences acquired in work contexts;

⁽⁹⁾ Italian Government (2013).

- (e) in institutional contexts for developing actions and measures to support vulnerable groups (e.g. NEETs) or to support specific programmes (e.g. upskilling).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

The Italian education and training system has introduced the learning outcomes approach at national and regional levels, with each subsystem having its own characteristics. The debate on using learning outcomes in the country started about a decade ago and continues, along with gradual reform of the entire education and training system. A main forum for this debate was the public consultation that preceded the adoption of the first EQF referencing report in 2012.

The eight EQF levels and level descriptors were used directly in the first Italian referencing process to link all national qualifications from formal education and training to the EQF. The starting point of the referencing process was to analyse both learning processes and learning outcomes in relation to the EQF levels, including a critical analysis of the EQF level descriptors: knowledge, skills and competence. The 'knowledge' and 'skills' descriptors of the EQF were deemed clear enough to allow correlation with Italian qualifications, while the 'competence' descriptor was divided into three dimensions: work/study context; type of tasks, problems and problem-solving approaches; and autonomy and responsibility.

The comprehensive NQF, adopted in January 2018 ⁽¹⁰⁾, was developed using the learning outcomes approach in close alignment to the structure of the EQF. It consists of eight qualification levels defined by level descriptors covering three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy. To ensure all national qualifications are included, sub-descriptors have also been developed, extending the EQF level descriptors. The explicit and implicit dimensions embedded in the EQF descriptors were analysed by a national technical-methodological working group, resulting in the adoption of the explicit dimensions and in making the implicit dimensions more explicit. In some cases, in particular for the 'knowledge' and 'responsibility and autonomy' descriptors, the explicit and implicit dimensions were adjusted to the national context; in other cases, especially for the 'skills' descriptors, additional elements were adopted to make the NQF descriptors more inclusive.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Italian Government (2018).

The framework covers qualifications from general education, higher education and VET qualifications administered at regional level, while professional and private qualifications are to be included in the future. In the current, continuing process of allocating qualifications to NQF levels, specific attention will be given to NQF level 5, which marks the transition between secondary and tertiary education, and – from a labour market perspective – between the production and delivery of goods and services (levels 2 to 5) and the managerial levels (levels 6 to 7) (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

One significant area of work in recent years has been on regional qualifications (numbering about 4 000) to enable their inclusion in the national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications. This work has been carried out through the *Atlas of work and qualifications* ⁽¹¹⁾, a methodological tool for the rationalisation of the high number of regional VET qualifications with different content and awarding criteria. This is based on a classification of 24 economic-professional sectors using the classification codes adopted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics concerning economic activities – ATECO 2007 ⁽¹²⁾ – and professions – CP 2011 ⁽¹³⁾. The atlas is expected to be extended to all national qualifications in the future. Regions are responsible for the redesign of regional qualifications using learning outcomes and this work is continuing.

In terms of take-up of the learning outcomes approach in the different subsystems, in general education, qualifications awarded by upper secondary schools and regional qualifications awarded within the State-Regions agreement are described in learning outcomes according to a 2010 Presidential decree on general education reform. There are three main pathways at upper secondary level: general (*licei*), technical and vocational education. Each pathway lasts five years, leading to a diploma, and learning outcomes are linked to the EQF level 4.

In vocational training, where the regions have principal responsibility, there is a focus on competences, which are described in terms of learning outcomes. There are two different options for vocational training: a three-year or a four-year pathway. Both lead to a diploma and a qualification acknowledged at national level. The four-year course can open up higher education options, provided the student takes an additional year and sits a State exam. The apprenticeship system has been reformed in recent years to integrate training and employment

⁽¹¹⁾ The *Atlas of work and qualifications* based on the decree of 30 June 2015 is available in Italian at: <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org>

⁽¹²⁾ ATECO 2007: <https://www.istat.it/en/archive/17959>

⁽¹³⁾ CP 2011: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/18132>

within a dual system ⁽¹⁴⁾. The 2011 State-Regions agreement on VET learning pathways describes 21 vocational profiles using learning outcomes. Competences are defined as the smallest units for certification defining a vocational profile, collected into codified lists based on the relevant EQF level and on a clear explanation of learning outcomes (Italian technical working group, 2012).

The higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway (*istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore* – IFTS) used a national standard system based on competences dating from 2000; since 2008 the standards have been updated to make them more coherent with the learning outcomes approach. Following this 2008 amendment, IFTS was reorganised and a higher technical education pathway (*istruzione tecnica superiore* – ITS) was set up ⁽¹⁵⁾. IFTS courses run for one year; ITS courses for two years. Both types of curricula are made up of units consistent with the learning outcomes approach. They are linked to EQF levels.

In academic education (universities), policy-makers reinforced the need to align diplomas and certificates with the commitments of the Bologna process. In the existing framework for higher education (QTI), Dublin descriptors ⁽¹⁶⁾ are used nationally for the cycles of higher education agreed within the Bologna process. More specific descriptors are being defined for each programme by universities but clear evidence of applying the learning outcomes approach is still missing (Cedefop, 2016). Higher education is still under reform, aiming to move the system closer to the European standards designed by the Bologna process.

However, despite the move towards a learning outcomes approach ⁽¹⁷⁾, a gap still exists between theory and practice. While the benefits of the learning

⁽¹⁴⁾ Italian Government (2015b). Legislative Decree No 81/2015 on the reform of employment contracts which integrates training and employment in a dual system. *Gazzetta Ufficiale, Serie generale, No 144, 24.6.2015*.
<http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2015/06/24/144/so/34/sg/pdf>

This legislative decree was set up by the ministerial decree of 12 October 2015 on the definition of vocational standards for apprenticeship and general criteria for the implementation of apprenticeship learning pathways, putting the dual system into effect.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Higher technical education and training courses organised by higher technical institutes with qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The Dublin descriptors used are: knowledge and understanding; applying knowledge and understanding; making judgements; communication skills; learning skills.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Other legislative developments that take into consideration the learning outcomes orientation include: the State-Regions agreement of 24 September 2015 on the dual system in VET, which introduces the principle of learning by working and the

outcomes orientation and its potential to change teaching and learning are recognised, in practice teachers continue to use a more traditional input-oriented approach. Learning outcomes implementation is mainly part of pilot projects. It is not yet possible to assess the extent to which the approach is applied or its impact on the ground.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

One of the main challenges in establishing and implementing a comprehensive NQF in Italy has been the high number of stakeholders involved and the complexity of the national education and training system, with diverse qualification repositories at national and regional level managed autonomously by the awarding bodies. The Ministry of Education, University and Research is responsible for qualifications awarded in general and higher education, while the regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano are responsible for VET qualifications. The Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies have been leading developments in EQF-related processes, in agreement with the regions, autonomous provinces and social partners, as laid down in several agreements.

The first Italian referencing report, linking qualifications recognised at national level directly to the EQF, was adopted in the State-Regions conference, following public consultation in 2012. A total of 150 stakeholder organisations took part in the consultation, along with universities, regions and enterprises.

A preliminary step towards developing an NQF that includes all Italian qualifications has been the complex task of rationalising and recognising at national level the diverse range of regional qualifications. This work was grounded in the National Law No 92/2012 on the reform of the labour market ⁽¹⁸⁾ and the Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on the national certification of competences and validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽¹⁹⁾. Article 8 of this decree provides for the creation of a national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications and the definition of a minimum standard framework

development of work-based learning policies; the new guidelines on internships (25 May 2017), managed by the regions and aimed at (re)inclusion on the labour market, which introduce the construction of a competence-based curriculum and the validation of competences in internships programmes (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

⁽¹⁸⁾ Italian Government (2012).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Italian Government (2013).

of services for certification of competences. For the implementation of the national repository, an agreement was reached on the operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills, adopted by the two ministries (education and labour) through the decree of 30 June 2015 ⁽²⁰⁾.

At technical level, this work has been supported by a technical committee, composed of representatives of those authorities responsible for qualifications ⁽²¹⁾. Its role is to establish partnerships and exchange technical solutions and practices with all the main institutional stakeholders involved. Its responsibilities include (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- (a) setting up, implementing and maintaining the national repository of qualifications;
- (b) the description and monitoring of the minimum standards for validation and certification of competences;
- (c) the description of technical provisions to develop and implement the information system for the interoperability of the authorities responsible for the certification of competences.

In 2015, the EQF national coordination point (NCP), hosted at that time by the National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training (ISFOL – now INAPP), was mandated to prepare a technical proposal for the comprehensive framework. This proposal, which also benefited from the contribution of the national methodological working group, was finalised and adopted through the inter-ministerial decree of January 2018 ⁽²²⁾. The decree regulates the procedures and criteria for allocating qualifications to NQF levels. The EQF NCP is responsible for implementing the comprehensive NQF, for the coordination of the allocation process, and for updating the referencing report.

Since 2017, the EQF NCP has been part of the new National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (ANPAL), as a result of the 2015 Jobs Act ⁽²³⁾;

⁽²⁰⁾ Italian Government (2015a).

⁽²¹⁾ The technical committee is composed of representatives of the following national authorities: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, the Department for European policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (for qualifications of regulated professions), the Ministry of Economic Development and social partners.

⁽²²⁾ Italian Government (2018).

⁽²³⁾ The Jobs Act represents a major labour market reform undertaken in Italy in 2014-15, which aimed to reform employment services through active labour market policies (ALMPs), and to promote employment and employability-oriented initiatives.

ANPAL is the main institution implementing active labour market policies. ANPAL's mission is to reduce unemployment and improve skills and employability. Its main tasks are to coordinate all the actors delivering employment services at local level (such as public employment centres, private providers, and other actors within the network of employment services) and to support developing skills and qualifications for entry to the labour market and for further learning. The agency has also been designated the national Europass centre and the national coordination point for Euroguidance, and is responsible for promoting all EU tools designed to contribute to employability and mobility, to support young people's transition to the labour market, and to connect jobseekers with employers. In this respect, ANPAL develops training and information actions on the use of EU tools for intermediary bodies (PES operators, schools and training centres, universities, enterprises) and for end users (students and workers). The activities of the EQF NCP are included in, and coherent with, ANPAL's broader mission, such as (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018):

- (a) implementing skill profiling tools: use of the OECD *Education and skills online* tool in the PESs;
- (b) implementing the unique information system: a web-portal whose aim is to provide information to both jobseekers and employers on vacancies and skills available in the labour market;
- (c) adopting the EURES Regulation as a tool for the co-operation network between the European Commission and the public employment services of member States;
- (d) participating in national upskilling policies and the implementation of national skills strategies (such as the OECD *Skills strategy*).

Another body involved in work on qualifications has been the National Institute for Public Policies Analysis (INAPP) – formerly ISFOL – which is currently involved as an independent evaluator in implementing and maintaining the national repository, in the allocation of qualifications to NQF levels, and in referencing the NQF to the EQF.

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ⁽²⁴⁾

A national legal framework on validation has been progressively developed in Italy since 2012. Law No 92/2012 ⁽²⁵⁾, for reform of the labour market, paved the way for creating a national system of competence certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning as key elements of lifelong learning. The law fixed rules and regulatory requirements (standards) concerning the characteristics of validation/certification services and the parties involved, with the aim of ensuring transparency, usability and broad accessibility. Law No 92/2012 led to the adoption of different provisions, including Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on national certification of competences and validation of non-formal and informal learning ⁽²⁶⁾. Article 3 of the decree defined some important principles and features of the validation system:

- (a) the focus is on the competences acquired by an individual in formal, non-formal or informal contexts;
- (b) a whole qualification or parts of it can be obtained through validation;
- (c) the system is designed to serve the individual, assuring simplicity, accessibility, transparency, accuracy, confidentiality and fairness;
- (d) documents and certificates issued in the validation process are public;
- (e) quality assurance for the reliability of national competence certification is based on a shared and progressive system of indicators, tools and quality standards applied at national level.

The validation system defined by Decree No 13/2013 is national and comprehensive as it covers all qualifications from general and higher education (under the authority of the Ministry of Education) and VET (under the authority of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano). It also includes professional and regulated qualifications (under the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Economic Development). Qualifications obtained through validation are the same as those obtained in the formal system. The decree defines three types of standards for validation and certification services: process standards (outlining the main steps of identification, assessment and attestation (Article 5)); attestation standards (outlining what kind of certificate must be awarded and what

⁽²⁴⁾ This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning* (European Commission et al. (forthcoming)).

⁽²⁵⁾ Italian Government (2012).

⁽²⁶⁾ Italian Government (2013).

kind of information must be registered (Article 6)); and system standards (outlining the roles and responsibilities of actors involved (Article 7)). The standards used for VNFIL are the same as in the formal system and depend on the sector: education standards for school and higher education qualifications; occupational standards related to qualification learning outcomes for VET; and occupational standards for regulated or unregulated professional qualifications. The decree also established the national repository of education, training and professional qualifications ⁽²⁷⁾, a collection of existing national, regional and sectoral repertoires of qualifications referenced to the EQF, which is the single framework for the certification of competences. Over time, it is expected that progressive work of descriptive standardisation will allow greater permeability between subsystems and recognition of credits. The institutional authority in charge of setting up the validation system is the national technical committee led by the Ministry of Labour and by the Ministry of Education and comprising all qualification authorities (entitling bodies). The committee took office on 28 January 2014 and it is responsible for defining the national guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of competences. This task, which represents the final step for setting up the validation system, is yet to be completed.

Agreement on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills was reached in 2015, followed by an inter-ministerial decree signed by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education ⁽²⁸⁾. This operational framework establishes a mechanism of mutual recognition for regional qualifications, and standard procedures for the process, attestation and system for validation services.

Progress in implementing this policy at regional level is currently at various stages. One significant application was in the third sector, in the *National programme of competence validation for volunteers in the civil service* under the Youth Guarantee 2015/17 ⁽²⁹⁾. It aimed to validate the competences of over 5 000 volunteers in the civil service, in 11 regions, following the standards outlined in the decree on the national framework of regional qualifications.

Currently the regions are the only operational entitling validation body. The main challenge for the future will be to extend the new validation services to other target groups to ensure reliability and sustainability. Further development and

⁽²⁷⁾ *Repertorio nazionale dei titoli di istruzione e formazione e delle qualificazioni professionali*: http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/atlante_repertori.php

⁽²⁸⁾ Italian Government (2015a).

⁽²⁹⁾ Data and outcomes of this project are not yet available.

implementation of the validation system nationally is expected once the national guidelines on VNFIL and certification of competences are defined by the national technical committee in 2019.

NQF implementation

Prior to the adoption of a comprehensive NQF, Italy referenced its formal qualifications recognised at national level directly to the eight levels of the EQF. The qualifications described in the first referencing report are used by almost 85% of people involved in education and training in Italy. One important aspect not covered in this early stage regarded the qualifications awarded by regional authorities, their importance, the methodologies used for developing them and their recognition beyond the regions.

A major milestone was reached in January 2018, when the comprehensive Italian NQF was adopted through an inter-ministerial decree ⁽³⁰⁾. The decree regulates the procedures and criteria for allocating qualifications to NQF levels, a process coordinated by the National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL) and carried out in cooperation with the National Institute of Public Policies Analysis (INAPP), which acts as an independent evaluator for levelling and referencing. The adoption decree conceptualises the NQF as a component of the technical infrastructure of the national repository of education, training and vocational qualifications, that had been established through Decree No 13/2013 ⁽³¹⁾ as the single framework for certifying competences. The comprehensive NQF is seen as supporting the link between the national repository and the EQF. Thus, NQF implementation in Italy is part of wider education and labour market reform and current efforts are focused on implementing both decrees mentioned above.

The national repository is envisaged as a comprehensive collection of existing national, regional and sectoral repertoires, under the responsibility of the competent authorities or 'entitling bodies'. Once set up, it will serve as a comprehensive database of qualifications from the following subsystems: higher education (universities); secondary education; vocational education and training; national framework of regional qualifications; apprenticeships; the regulated professions. For each title, it is necessary to identify standard features: competent certification bodies, definition of qualifications, including the relevant competences, and correlation with the national statistical code of standard

⁽³⁰⁾ Italian Government (2018).

⁽³¹⁾ Italian Government (2013).

classifications of industries and occupations. To be included in the national repository, qualifications must be levelled to the NQF and referenced to the EQF. To enable referencing of regional qualifications and their inclusion in the national repository, stakeholder agreement was reached in 2015 on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills – the national framework of regional qualifications ⁽³²⁾. The *Atlas of work and qualifications*, which is the technological infrastructure of the national repository ⁽³³⁾, has been developed by INAPP as a methodological tool for the rationalisation of the high number and diversity of qualifications characterised by their different content and awarding criteria. So far, 4 000 VET regional qualifications have been classified and included in the *Atlas of work and qualifications*. Re-description of qualifications using learning outcomes, for inclusion in the national repository, is the responsibility of the Regions. This work is currently in progress.

Given its recent adoption, the comprehensive NQF is not yet operational and it is premature to discuss its impact on the qualification system. The main tasks of the EQF NCP to support NQF implementation in the following period include:

- (a) the *Guidelines for levelling and inclusion of qualifications to the national qualifications framework*, which are intended to provide the methodology and the operational procedure for the definition and levelling of qualifications to the NQF and referencing to the EQF; the guidelines are expected to be developed and ready to use in 2019;
- (b) updating of the first national referencing report to the EQF.

In addition, challenges for the future include:

- (a) developing procedures for the inclusion of private, sectoral and international qualifications in the NQF.
- (b) implementing, maintaining and updating the NQF and its impact evaluation at national level.

To support implementation, the EQF NCP has started a dissemination campaign aimed at raising awareness of the framework among stakeholders responsible for the management of qualification repositories and for allocating qualifications to NQF levels: public authorities, social partners, public employment services, education providers, quality assurance and awarding bodies. It is intended to stimulate debate on the implementation of the NQF/EQF,

⁽³²⁾ Italian Government (2015a).

⁽³³⁾ The *Atlas of work and qualifications* based on the decree of 30 June 2015 is available at: <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org>

and on issues related to referencing, levelling, learning outcomes, validation of competences, quality assurance, etc. by a range of communication methods. So far, the NQF is well known by stakeholders involved in its development, while guidance and education and training providers have shown interest in NQF-related topics in relation to its use in guidance and counselling, matching demand and offer of work, designing learning pathways and validation of competences. The general public is considered a difficult target group to reach at the moment, given the complexity of this topic and because of a fragmented vision of the logic and aims of the NQF by all the actors directly involved in its implementation (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

In 2017, the communication and dissemination actions of the EQF NCP included moving the existing EQF NCP page from the INAPP website to the ANPAL website ⁽³⁴⁾ and updating its contents in accordance with the new 2017 EQF recommendation. A dedicated mailbox and a help desk service ⁽³⁵⁾ were also set up to address questions on EQF and NQF from practitioners and end users. Cooperation with the Euroguidance NCP and with the national Europass centre was also initiated by participation in joint seminars and in the national job and career fair and exhibition. It is believed that this cooperation played an important role in increasing awareness about, and visibility of, the European tools for transparency of skills and qualifications. It has been reinforced by the submission of a joint grant agreement for the new EQF NCP communication strategy ⁽³⁶⁾, informed by a 'convergence-driven model', based on co-designed and joint activities of the three NCPs, aiming to maximise the impact as well as the benefits for all main target groups at political and operational/technical level. A national public conference was organised in December 2018 ⁽³⁷⁾ to present the

⁽³⁴⁾ <http://www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/default.aspx>

⁽³⁵⁾ Mailbox: EQF_Italia@anpal.gov.it and Call Centre: 800.00.00.39.

⁽³⁶⁾ Grant agreement VS/2018/0254 - 2018/2020. The new communication strategy includes: a new common homepage for the three NCPs with content specific areas for each NCP; a common smartphone application with downloadable documents on the EQF/Euroguidance/Europass; joint social media accounts for the three NCPs; a common brochure targeting practitioners and experts; and several promotional gadgets to be distributed at conferences and events.

⁽³⁷⁾ About 300 representatives of the national and regional institutions, European Commission, research institutes, education and VET systems, public employment centres, counselling and mobility network, professional organisations and associations, social partners and other national and local stakeholders took part in the event. More information is available at: <http://www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/Documentazione.aspx>

NQF inter-ministerial decree and its future implementation. A national public event for the presentation of the updated version of the national referencing report and the national guidelines for referencing qualifications to the NQF/EQF is planned for 2019.

Starting with the school year 2015/16, it has been compulsory to indicate the EQF level on Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements. However, no information is available at present on which types of qualification documents indicate the NQF/EQF level. Over the next three years the EQF NCP will carry out a monitoring activity of the NQF/EQF implementation. Data will be gathered on the use and level of awareness of the NQF/EQF within the national education system. It will use a variety of research methods, such as online and face-to-face interviews, focus groups, study visits and analysis of administrative datasets.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing of Italian qualifications to the EQF started in 2008; the first report was adopted in 2012 and presented to the EQF advisory group in May 2013. National qualification descriptors were analysed in terms of learning outcomes and mapped directly to EQF level descriptors. At this stage, all formal qualifications awarded by public authorities and recognized nationally (general education, higher education and initial VET qualifications awarded in the framework of State-Regions agreements) were referenced to EQF levels.

Following the adoption of the comprehensive NQF in 2018, the EQF NCP aims to present an updated referencing report in 2019. For this, the following lines of work will need to be undertaken, in dialogue with stakeholders:

- (a) the levelling and inclusion of regional qualifications in the NQF and referencing to the EQF;
- (b) the inclusion in the NQF of all qualifications referenced in the first national referencing report.

The country is preparing a national qualifications repository and all qualifications included in it will indicate the EQF level.

Important lessons and future plans

Italy has been carrying out reforms consistent with EQF principles and the learning outcomes approach in various subsystems of education and training. In recent years, legislative initiatives as part of the reform of the labour market have

led to important steps forward: setting important priorities in defining national qualifications standards based on learning outcomes; developing a national public certification system; and setting out principles for developing a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The main challenge has been the complexity of the education and training system, 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. Steps to tackle these aspects included the establishment of the national repository of education, training and professional qualifications; an agreement on an operational common framework for national recognition of regional qualifications and related skills; and the creation of the *Atlas of work and qualifications* as a methodological tool for rationalising the high number and diversity of existing qualifications. Around 4 000 regional VET qualifications have been classified so far and included in the atlas, facilitating their referencing to the NQF/EQF and inclusion in the national repository.

A major milestone was reached in 2018 with the adoption of the comprehensive NQF, including all qualifications awarded nationally and in the regions. The framework is not yet operational and it is premature to discuss its impact on the qualification system. However, work toward its development has fostered dialogue and cooperation among different institutional stakeholders, primarily through the national technical committee and through efforts of the EQF NCP. This work has also resulted in the adoption of a learning outcomes orientation in a number of legislative acts ⁽³⁸⁾, and further implementation of the learning outcomes approach is expected to have an impact on teaching and learning. However, the gap between formal regulations and practical implementation of learning outcomes remains a challenge. For example, curricula in VET and higher education are still influenced by the subject-based approach, despite the requisite regulations being in place. According to Cedefop (2016), more tools and incentives should be provided to teachers and a cultural change from an input to an output orientation is necessary.

NQF implementation work that is to be undertaken in the near future includes: raising awareness about the framework among stakeholders responsible for the management of qualification repositories and for allocating

⁽³⁸⁾ For example: the 2010 decree of the Ministry of Education on the reform of general education; Legislative Decree No 13/2013 on the setting up of the National repository of qualifications; Law No 107/2015 on school-work alternation in upper secondary schools; the State-Regions agreement of 24 September 2015 on the dual system in VET; Legislative Decree No 81/2015 on the reform of employment contracts; and the 2017 guidelines on internships.

qualifications to NQF levels; the continuing work of levelling and inclusion of qualifications in the NQF and referencing to the EQF; setting up operational guidelines for describing and levelling new qualifications that are expected to be ready for use in 2019; updating the EQF referencing report; and developing procedures for the inclusion of private, sectoral and international qualifications in the NQF. Monitoring of the NQF/EQF implementation is also planned by the EQF NCP to take place over the following three years, focusing on both qualifications referenced to the EQF in the first stage (2012) and regional qualifications that are currently being referenced.

Main sources of information

- The National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (ANPAL) hosts the EQF NCP (as of 2017): <http://www.anpal.gov.it/europa/European-Qualifications-Framework/Pagine/default.aspx>
- The *Atlas of work and qualifications* is available at: <http://atlantelavoro.inapp.org>
- Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research: <http://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/home>
- Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies: <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/Pagine/default.aspx>
- Italian Ministry of Labour; ISFOL (2012). *First Italian referencing report to the European qualifications framework*. <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/referencing-reports-and-contacts>

Italian qualifications referenced to the EQF

EQF levels	Italian formal qualifications
8	Research doctorate <i>Dottorato di ricerca</i> Academic diploma for research training <i>Diploma accademico di formazione alla ricerca</i> Specialisation diploma <i>Diploma di specializzazione</i> Second level university master <i>Master universitario di secondo livello</i> Academic specialisation diploma (II) <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione (II)</i> Higher specialisation diploma or master (II) <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (II)</i>

EQF levels	Italian formal qualifications
7	Master degree <i>Laurea magistrale</i> Second level academic diploma <i>Diploma accademico di secondo livello</i> First level university master <i>Master universitario di primo livello</i> Academic specialisation diploma (I) <i>Diploma accademico di specializzazione</i> Higher specialisation diploma or master (I) <i>Diploma di perfezionamento o Master (I)</i>
6	Bachelor degree <i>Laurea</i> First level academic diploma <i>Diploma accademico di primo livello</i>
5	Higher technical education diploma <i>Diploma di tecnico superiore</i>
4	Professional technician diploma <i>Diploma professionale di tecnico (*)</i> Upper secondary education diploma <i>Licei diploma liceale</i> Upper secondary education diploma – technical schools <i>Diploma di istruzione tecnica</i> Upper secondary education diploma – vocational schools <i>Diploma di istruzione professionale</i> Higher technical specialisation certificate <i>Certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore</i>
3	Professional operator certificate <i>Attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale (*)</i>
2	Compulsory education certificate <i>Certificato delle competenze di base acquisite in esito all'assolvimento dell'obbligo di istruzione (**)</i>
1	Lower secondary school-leaving diploma <i>Diploma di licenza conclusiva del primo ciclo di istruzione</i>

(*) Competent authority: regions.

(**) Competent authority: Ministry of Education, University and Research or regions, according to type of education pathway.

Source: Adapted from Italian Ministry of Labour; ISFOL (2012).

Abbreviations

ANPAL	National Agency for Active Labour Policies
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF NCP	national coordination point for EQF
IFTS	higher (non-academic) technical education and training pathway [<i>Istruzione e formazione tecnica superior</i>]
INAPP	National Institute for Public Policies Analysis
ISFOL	National Institute for the Development of Vocational Training
ITS	higher technical education [<i>istruzione tecnica superiore</i>]
NEETs	people not in employment, education or training
NCP	national coordination point
NQF	national qualifications framework
PES	public employment service
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework for the European higher education area
QTI	Italian qualifications framework for higher education [<i>quadro dei titoli italiani dell'istruzione superiore</i>]
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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