KOSOVO
European inventory on NQF 2016

Introduction and context

Kosovo is a potential candidate country for European Union (EU) membership, among others in the Western Balkans. It faces several economic, social and educational challenges, linked to its recent history. The country has the weakest employment record in Europe [1], a small private sector, a significant gender gap in access to the labour market, and limited foreign investment (ETF, 2016). In its first participation in the PISA test [2], in 2015, Kosovo scored among the bottom three of the 72 countries tested; however, the Government's decision to participate in PISA could be seen as a sign of commitment to increasing the quality of education [3].

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo [4] entered into force in April 2016, aiming to support the implementation of reforms in the country. Currently, EU assistance to Kosovo's education and training in the frame of the Instrument for pre-accession assistance II (IPA II) [5] is focusing on improving the functioning of the labour market, raising education standards, promoting skills development, and restructuring the social welfare system.

In recent years, the main strategy for education and training was the Kosovo education strategic plan 2011-16 (KESP), emphasising lifelong learning and

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[1] In 2015, Kosovo had the highest unemployment rate among enlargement countries, with 32.9% of the labour force being without work. (Eurostat, Enlargement countries - labour market statistics, available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Enlargement_countries_-_labour_market_statistics)

[2] OECD Programme for international student assessment (PISA). The PISA TEST:
http://www.oecd.org/pisa/test/

[3] Rron Gjinovci (2016), *Kosovo's education system amongst worst in the world*, article published at:
http://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-education-system-amongst-worst-world/

[4] http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/news/news-files/20150430_saa.pdf

[5] Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA):
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en

inclusiveness. A new action plan is being developed for 2017-21, based on recent evaluation of the KESP. The areas of focus in the current education reform are increasing the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET), better alignment of VET supply with the needs of the labour market, improving the teaching career, and implementation of the national qualifications framework (NQF) (ETF, 2016).

Kosovo adopted its NQF law in 2008 ([6]) and development of the framework has progressed well, supported by assistance from the EU and the ETF. The NQF was established in 2011 ([7]). Formally and legally, it is well integrated into the national education and training system, and is considered a major reform tool. It was referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in December 2016.

Policy objectives

Development of the NQF has been central to Kosovo's education and training reforms in recent years. Intended impacts on the system are wide-ranging, from curriculum and qualifications reform to stimulating institutional change. It has been expected to contribute to the implementation of the KESP by helping raise quality in education and training, promoting lifelong learning as the core principle of the education and training system, and creating links between the different education and training subsystems (in particular between VET and higher education) (ETF, 2016) to aid access and progression. The NQF was also conceived as a means to bring the country closer to EU standards: compatibility with the EQF was a guiding principle in NQF development and in its structure.

According to the NQF law ([8]), the objectives of the framework are to:

(a) provide a basis for cooperation and mutual recognition between NQF and EQF;

([6]) Law 03/L-060 on national qualifications, available at:
http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=288&lang=en

([7]) The NQF document was published in 2011 and is currently being updated. It is available at:
http://akk-ks.net/uploads/national_qualifications_framework.pdf

([8]) Law 03/L-060 on national qualifications, available at:
http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=288&lang=en

(b) increase transparency of qualifications and provide a basis for comparison of achievements from different parts of the education and training system;

(c) ensure the relevance of qualifications to learners, the economy and education and training institutions;

(d) stimulate development of lifelong learning;

(e) increase access to assessment and certification, encouraging flexible and individualised learning processes;

(f) establish a system for accumulation and transfer of credit;

(g) increase quality and relevance of education and training by stimulating the development of qualifications based on internationally comparable standards and supported by rigorous quality assurance;

(h) improve employability and learning opportunities for individuals by providing a basis for recognition and certification;

(i) support demand-led education and training system reforms.

Among the concrete challenges for the following period are development of occupational standards, development of new qualifications and their inclusion in the framework, implementation of the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning, and accreditation of VET schools and other providers (ETF, 2016).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

Kosovo's NQF is an eight-level comprehensive framework, closely following the structure and underlying principles of the EQF. It has level descriptors defined in terms of learning outcomes covering three domains: knowledge (theoretical and/or practical); skills (cognitive, creative or practical); and wider competences (autonomy and responsibility). The NQF descriptors are similar to those in the EQF, but more broadly elaborated, with minor differences at levels 4, 5, 7 and 8 (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

It is a lifelong learning framework, comprising qualifications, modules and qualification components obtained in all types of learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal) and offered by accredited institutions from all subsystems of education and training: general education, initial and continuing VET, higher education and adult education.

The framework currently includes six types of qualification, classified using criteria such as purpose, content, external requirements, achieved and assessed outcomes, level of difficulty, size, entry requirements, quality assurance arrangements, and legal status. The six types of qualification are higher

education qualifications, general educational qualifications, national combined qualifications, national vocational qualifications, qualifications based on international standards, and tailored qualifications.

The NQF is based on the learning outcomes principle. Learning-outcomes-based qualifications were introduced in general education in 2011, with the new Kosovo curriculum framework, which specifies six key competences: communication and expression; thinking; learning; life, work and environment-related competence; personal competence; and civic competence. Learning outcomes are the main element of assessment at the end of the grade, stage and relevant level of formal education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) has developed a roadmap for implementing the new learning outcomes-based curricula during 2016-21 (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

Modular curricula based on learning outcomes were introduced and piloted in VET from 2002; new VET qualifications must be aligned with this approach. The starting point for outcomes-based VET curricula and qualifications are occupational standards used to identify the modules to be included in each qualification and the learning outcomes to be achieved. Currently, there are 56 occupational standards developed, verified and approved nationally, and it is planned that all occupational standards for VET profiles provided by public VET schools will be developed by 2021 (National Qualifications Authority, 2016). Modules are the building blocks of qualifications and they are assigned credit value. A VET credit system based on ECVET recommendations has been developed by NQA.

In higher education, information about learning outcomes has to be provided by all institutions for each study programme. Most qualifications are developed on unit or modular structures, and ECTS credits are used.

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The legal basis for the NQF and its governance is Law 03/L-060 on national qualifications ([9]), adopted in 2008. It established the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) as the main public authority responsible for developing and

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([9]) http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=288&lang=en

maintaining the NQF in Kosovo. The NQA also has a policy-making role, developing policies and strategies for the establishment and implementation of the national qualifications system. Its function in relation to the NQF is to design the framework, to define the levels and types of qualification included, to ensure compatibility between the NQF and the EQF, to establish the criteria and processes for the inclusion of qualifications, and to approve qualifications for inclusion in the NQF. In 2015, Kosovo joined the EQF advisory group, and the NQA was appointed as EQF national coordination point (NCP). It coordinated the process of referencing the NQF to the EQF, and the engagement of stakeholders in this process though several working groups and a public consultation.

Stakeholder involvement in NQF matters is ensured mainly through the governing board of the NQA. This comprises 13 members representing the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, other relevant ministries, universities, social partners, education and training NGOs, private education and training providers, and learners with special needs. Specific expertise can be ensured through committees and working groups organised by the NQA. According to the ETF, apart from the key actors, stakeholder involvement in the NQF is quite limited, reflecting a society where civic institutions are still developing (ETF, 2016).

The operational management of the NQF is shared between three bodies: the NQA for VET qualifications; the MEST for general education qualifications; and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency for higher education qualifications. These validate qualifications, accredit institutions offering qualifications, and carry out quality assurance of assessment and certification, working along common principles and criteria (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

General education qualifications and VET curricula are developed by the MEST; non-formal qualifications are developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, VET providers and enterprises; and higher education qualifications are developed by higher education institutions. Social partners, cooperating with the relevant ministries and the NQA, are responsible for developing occupational standards. The Council for VET and for adults is a tripartite body responsible for advising on and approving occupational standards, which then have to be verified by the NQA. An Agency for Vocational Education and Training was established in 2014 to coordinate development of occupational standards but it is not yet operational (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

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

As a lifelong learning framework, the NQF has been developed with the aim to open up pathways between different education and training subsystems, and to aid learner progression and credit transfer and accumulation. Qualifications have been designed based on learning outcomes principles; most VET and higher education courses are structured on modular lines. Formal steps towards establishing a system for validating non-formal and informal learning have been taken but have only reached an early stage.

The 2008 law on national qualifications ([10]) refers to 'recognition of prior learning' (RPL) as a 'process of evaluating the knowledge, skills or wider competences which an individual has previously acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning. This knowledge shall be used to give possibility of advancement to a person or exemptions from part of a course or qualification or credit towards a qualification.' In 2014, the MEST developed and approved an administrative instruction on prior learning recognition ([11]), outlining general principles, responsibilities and procedures for validation. It also assigned responsibility to the NQA and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency to develop validation principles and criteria for accreditation of institutions carrying out validation of non-formal and informal learning.

As in many other countries, there are disparities between the different sectors. There are no arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning in general education and no credit system. In higher education, an administrative instruction was approved in 2014, laying down the foundations for validation based on European guidelines; however, there are no guidelines or policy yet for this (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

Greatest progress can be seen in VET, where the NQA has developed a policy and procedures for recognition of prior learning, setting out the principles and responsibilities for validation, and aiming to help organisations involved in RPL to develop or update their own polices and guidelines in line with the

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([10]) Law 03/L-060 on National Qualifications, available at:
http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=288&lang=en

([11]) Administrative Instruction No 31/2014 for prior learning recognition (MEST):
http://akk-ks.net/uploads/ua_31-_2014_per_njohjen_e_mesimit_paraprak.pdf

requirements of the NQA. One of the general criteria set by the NQA for assessment bodies is that they must ensure access and certification to candidates other than those following traditional courses and provide for validation of non-formal and informal learning. The NQA also has a communication strategy to promote the advantages of recognition and validation of prior learning among stakeholders such as employers and awarding bodies (ETF, 2016). With support from the ETF, the NQA has developed modules for training of trainers and capacity building of VET providers to help them implement RPL ([12]).

In practice, however, the direct linking of qualifications to particular types of programme is often a barrier to flexible access to qualifications. In higher education, credit transfer between universities or even across faculties at the same university can be difficult; some providers do not accept assessments by the learner's previous institution. Many existing programmes are designed for young people in full-time study, with traditional assessment methods such as formal written examinations. Some institutions and employers consider qualifications obtained through validation routes inferior to those acquired through the traditional, linear path (ETF, 2016).

NQF implementation

The Kosovo NQF has reached an early operational stage, has a solid legal basis for implementation, and clear institutional arrangements for its governance. To ensure coherence of the overall qualifications system, the entire education and training legislation (the law on general education, the law on VET, the law on adult education, and the law on higher education) has been harmonised with the law on national qualifications (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

The framework has a clear structure, with well-defined levels and learning outcomes-based descriptors. The inclusion of qualifications in the framework is underpinned by a quality assurance framework. Institutional roles and responsibilities for developing qualifications and putting the framework in place have also been defined, and procedures and mechanisms for validating non-formal and informal learning are being prepared.

([12]) The piloting of these modules is foreseen to take place in 2017 (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

General education qualifications are automatically part of the NQF, as they are awarded at the end of formal education and quality-assured by the MEST. VET qualifications are placed in the NQF through a mechanism developed and managed by the NQA. This body has developed transparent criteria and procedures for the validation and approval of qualifications to be included in the NQF, and for the accrediting providers to offer these qualifications. Approved qualifications are entered in the NQF register and are accessible via the NQA website ([13]). Inclusion of higher education qualifications in the NQF is managed by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. Quality assurance is carried out through a process of accreditation at the level of the higher education institutions and at the level of study programmes; an external assessment of programmes is also carried out. An electronic database containing records for all accredited study programmes is available on the agency website ([14]).

The NQF has not yet offered tangible impacts for end-users, and the number of qualifications included in the framework is small; 27 VET qualifications have been included so far. The NQF was referenced to the EQF in December 2016, and it is expected that the referencing process will lead to wider socioeconomic impacts of the NQF in the near future (ETF, 2016).

Certificates and diploma supplements in line with Europass are issued for vocational and higher education qualifications. They are expected to provide an indication of NQF and EQF levels in the future but it remains to be clarified if a reference to NQF and EQF levels will also be included on the certificates and diplomas themselves.

Referencing to the EQF

In 2013, the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) initiated the referencing process aiming to identify the links between the levels of the NQF and those of the EQF. At the end of 2015, Kosovo was invited to participate in the EQF advisory group, and a draft version of the referencing report was presented in February 2016. The referencing report was endorsed in December 2016 and is available on the NQA website ([15]). Certain clarifications regarding the types of

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([13]) More information is available at: http://akk-ks.net/en/nqf/registration-of-qualifications

([14]) The Kosovo Accreditation Agency: http://www.akreditimi-ks.org/new/index.php/en/#

([15]) The referencing report is available at:
http://akk-ks.net/uploads/kosovo_eqf_referencing_report_2016.pdf

qualifications, their characteristics and the relationship between them are expected to be included in a future updated version of the report, which is to be presented to the EQF AG within a year.

Important lessons and future plans

Kosovo is advanced in the development of its NQF compared to other countries from the region, especially given that much of the work was carried out from scratch as a new system was being developed. The NQF has been central to reforming the national qualifications system, and clear objectives have been defined for its development, based on national realities. A strong legal basis supports the development and implementation of the framework: the 2008 law on national qualifications (a reforming document) and a set of administrative instructions (secondary legislation). As one international expert commented on the referencing report, 'Kosovo has come a long way in rationalising the qualifications system and its governance' (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

A question was raised in the EQF advisory group regarding the high number of qualification types that can be acquired in VET: national combined qualifications; national vocational qualifications; qualifications based on international standards; and tailored qualifications. This can be potentially confusing. It is not yet clear to what extent different types of qualification can be combined and used to support accumulation of learning outcomes and lifelong learning progression, to what extent this diversity contributes to lifelong learning, or whether it could reduce transparency and create barriers to progression. This is expected to be addressed in an updated version of the referencing report, expected in 2017. According to the ETF, this is a critical challenge to be tackled in ensuring horizontal and vertical progression and promoting lifelong learning.

Outcomes-based approaches have been adopted in all education and training subsystems, albeit to different extents and applied in different ways. It remains to be understood to what extent these differences in interpretation and application of learning outcomes influence learning progression and transfer (National Qualifications Authority, 2016). While inclusion of qualifications in the framework is well supported by quality assurance arrangements, it is not yet clear how quality assurance of the certification process is carried out, and to what extent writing of learning outcomes and alignment of learning outcomes to teaching, learning and assessment are quality assured.

Progressing the validation system and its social recognition are necessary. The first steps have been taken towards elaborating procedures for validation of

non-formal and informal learning, and more concrete implementation actions are expected to follow. According to the ETF, there will be a pilot in selected sectors in the near future.

Other challenges for the following period are increasing the number of qualifications included in the NQF (only 27 VET qualifications have been included so far), the visibility of the framework, and the trust of end-users in the qualifications awarded. Achieving full engagement and active participation of all stakeholders is crucial to ensuring sustained implementation of the NQF in the long term (ETF, 2016).

Further source of information
[URLs accessed 19.12.2016]

The National Qualifications Authority (EQF National coordination point):
http://akk-ks.net/en/
The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (responsible for higher education qualifications):
http://www.akreditimi-ks.org/new/index.php/en/
The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology:
http://masht.rks-gov.net/en

Kosovo national qualifications framework

NQF levels	Qualification types	EQF levels
8	Doctorate (Bologna 3rd cycle)	8
7	Master degree (Bologna 2nd cycle)	7
6	Bachelor degree (Bologna 1st cycle)	6
5	Diploma from formal providers Certificate from non-formal providers	5
4	Matura certificate (general or vocational education) Vocational education diploma	4

NQF levels	Qualification types	EQF levels
3	Vocational education certificate (two years) Certificates from non-formal VET providers	3
2	Certificates from non-formal providers	2
1	Certificates from non-formal providers	1

Source: Adapted from National Qualifications Authority (2016).

List of abbreviations

ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EQF AG	European qualifications framework advisory group
ETF	European training foundation
EU	European Union
IPA II	Instrument for pre-accession assistance II
KESP	Kosovo education strategic plan
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
NQF	national qualifications framework
PISA	programme for international student assessment
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VET	vocational education and training

References

[URLs accessed 19.12.2016]

National Qualifications Authority (2016). *EQF referencing report of the Kosovo national qualifications framework*:
http://akk-ks.net/uploads/kosovo_eqf_referencing_report_2016.pdf

European Training Foundation (2016). *Inventory of NQF recent developments in ETF partner countries: Republic of Kosovo*.
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