KOSOVO
European inventory on NQF 2018

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. Labour force participation was 34.1% in 2016 with a significant gender gap in access to the labour market. The share of the young (15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET) was 30.1% in 2016 ([1]). 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 (Gjinovci, 2016).

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo ([3]) 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) ([4]) 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 inclusiveness. A new action plan has been developed for 2017-21 ([5]), focusing

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([1]) ILOSTAT:
https://www.ilo.org/ilostatcp/CPDesktop/?list=true&lang=en&country=GRD [accessed 15.3.2019].

([2]) OECD programme for international student assessment (PISA); the PISA test:
http://www.oecd.org/pisa/test/ [accessed 15.3.2019].

([3]) http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/news/news-files/20150430_saa.pdf [accessed 15.3.2019].

([4]) Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA): https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en [accessed 15.3.2019].

([5]) Republic of Kosovo (2016). *Action plan of Kosovo education strategic plan 2017-21*. https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/02/20161006-action-plan.pdf [accessed 18.4.2019].

on further implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning and the national qualifications framework (ETF, 2018a and 2018b).

Kosovo adopted its NQF law in November 2008 ([6]) and development of the framework has progressed well, supported by assistance from the EU and the ETF. Kosovo's qualifications framework (KQF) became operational 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. It is coordinated and managed by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA).

Policy objectives

Development of the KQF 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 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) to aid access and progression. The KQF was also conceived as a means to bring the country closer to EU standards: compatibility with the EQF was a guiding principle in KQF development and in its structure.

According to the NQF law, the objectives of the framework are to:

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

(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;

([6]) Republic of Kosovo (2008). Law 03/L-060 on national qualifications. http://www.gazetazyrtare.com/e-gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=288&lang=en [accessed 18.4.2019].

([7]) The NQF document was published in 2011 and is currently being updated. The 2011 version is available at: http://akk-ks.net/uploads/national_qualifications_framework.pdf [accessed 18.4.2019].

(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.

The purpose of the KQF has not changed up till now. Other laws have been harmonised with the law on the NQF: law on the vocational education and training, law on adult education and law on pre-university education (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

Kosovo's NQF is an eight-level comprehensive framework. It has level descriptors defined in terms of learning outcomes covering three domains: knowledge, skills, and wider competences. The KQF descriptors are similar to those in the EQF, but more broadly elaborated.

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.

There are six types of qualification: higher education, general education, national combined VET/general qualifications, national vocational qualifications, qualifications based on international standards, and tailored qualifications. Most qualifications in higher education and VET are developed as units or modules (Cedefop, 2018).

General compulsory education uses a modular approach, which was introduced with the adoption of the new core curriculum framework in 2011. Following pilots in a sample of schools, the full-scale implementation of the learning outcomes curricula in general education schools only started in 2017.

The KQF 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 points 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 88 occupational standards developed, verified and approved nationally; it is planned that all occupational standards for VET 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 the 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.

Transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes across institutions is possible and it is being practised for the qualifications and institutions that are part of the KQF. The transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes across sectors is still not happening on the ground (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The legal basis for the NQF and its governance is Law 03/L-060 on national qualifications, adopted in 2008. It established the NQA as the main public authority responsible for developing and 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 KQF is to design the framework, to define the levels and types of qualification included, to ensure compatibility between the KQF and the EQF, to establish the criteria and processes for the inclusion of qualifications, and to approve qualifications for inclusion in the KQF. 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 KQF to the EQF, and

the engagement of stakeholders in this process though several working groups and a public consultation.

Stakeholder involvement in KQF matters is ensured mainly through the governing board, comprising 13 members drawn from relevant ministries, universities, social partners, non-governmental organisations, and private sector providers approved by Parliament. While the NQA leads and coordinates, it shares responsibility for developing and implementing the NQF with the MEST, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency for Higher Education and the Council for VET. 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 adult education is a tripartite body responsible for advising on and approving occupational standards, which then have to be verified by the NQA (National Qualifications Authority, 2016).

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE), which began work in 2014, has extensive responsibilities in VET, including setting strategic priorities and curricula. Its relationship with the NQA and other actors and their respective remits needs to be clarified as the agency develops (ETF, 2018a).

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

Development of the validation of non-formal and informal learning arrangements is aiming at supporting professional mobility and enabling individuals to increase the visibility of their skills. Kosovo has already adopted the respective legal framework and has started to implement its system for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) on a pilot basis in three occupations and with four training providers. Nevertheless, the up-scaling of such arrangements to the system level is a challenge that should be tackled in the coming years (ETF, 2018b). The

MEST administrative instruction 31/2014 determines the general principles, responsibilities and procedures for the implementation of the RPL mechanisms in the Republic of Kosovo, within the scope of the NQF ([8]).

The NQA has also published a set of guidelines on RPL policies and procedures, which describe the possible routes and the main requirements for awarding credits, or for entry to a programme or course leading to the award of an NQA-approved qualification.

The NQA is also developing a communication strategy to promote the advantages of VNFIL/RPL routes and raise awareness about these mechanisms among different stakeholders and target-groups, such as employers and awarding bodies. The revised RPL policy and procedure documents were adopted officially by the NQA board in December 2017.

In 2018, the NQA elaborated a legal framework for the accreditation of RPL providers. This new administrative instruction is expected to be adopted soon by MEST, making the implementation of RPL at system level possible as of 2019. Cooperation with the National Employment Agency has led to the discussion on RPL/VNFIL as a potential active labour market measure, as a way of supporting the labour market integration of unemployed registered jobseekers in the State employment offices (ETF, 2018a).

NQF implementation

The Kosovo NQF has reached 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 the national qualifications framework.

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

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([8]) Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2014). Administrative instruction No 31/2014 for prior learning recognition.
http://akkks.rks-gov.net/uploads/ua_31-_2014_per_njohjen_e_mesimit_paraprak.pdf [accessed 18.3.2019].

have also been defined, and procedures and mechanisms for validating non-formal and informal learning are being prepared.

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 ([9]). Inclusion of higher education qualifications in the NQF is managed by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, membership of ENQA under review. 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; external assessment of programmes is also carried out. An electronic database containing records for all accredited study programmes is available on the agency website ([10]).

The KQF is known to education and training institutions and providers, and to some extent to labour market stakeholders, trade unions, employment services and recognition authorities and bodies. It is partly known to guidance and counselling practitioners. For end-users such as students and parents it is still in the initial recognition stage, while employers and job-seekers are more aware of the benefits and use of the NQF.

It is a major challenge to include all qualifications in the KQF. As is, the number of qualifications is still small, though increasing. Five types of general qualification and only a few IVET qualifications are levelled to KQF, but 60 VET public schools are undertaking an accreditation process for more than 140 qualifications. There are around 500 higher education qualifications included and around 40 qualifications from the non-formal and private sectors. Only a few qualifications with international standards are levelled.

KQF and EQF levels are indicated on all new certificates and diplomas and Europass supplements and also included in the qualifications database ([11]) or all qualifications that are included in the KQF (European Commission and Cedefop,

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([9]) http://akk-ks.net/en/nqf/registration-of-qualifications [accessed 18.3.2019].

([10]) The Kosovo Accreditation Agency: http://www.akreditimi-ks.org/new/index.php/en/# [accessed 18.3.2019].

([11]) National database of qualifications: https://akkks.rks-gov.net/en/nqf/registration-of-qualifications [accessed 18.3.2019].

2018). There has been no evaluation study yet, and there are no plans for the moment.

Referencing to the EQF

The referencing report of the KQF to the EQF was presented and endorsed in the EQF advisory group in December 2016 and is available on the NQA website ([12]).

Important lessons and future plans

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).

The role of the National Qualifications Authority is the backbone of the success. Principal tasks in the near future include further population of the framework with new qualifications. The number of VET qualifications placed in the NQF is now 66 and the number of occupational standard validated is 92. Full implementation in selected occupations and accredited providers is foreseen for 2019. Other challenges will be to engage a diverse range of stakeholders systematically, reach out to end-users and develop further and implement VNFIL/RPL mechanisms at the system level. Implementing fully the well-designed quality assurance mechanisms at all levels and types of qualifications is also still a challenge (ETF, 2018a).

([12]) The referencing report: https://akkks.rks-gov.net/uploads/kosovo_eqf_referencing_report_2016.pdf [accessed 18.3.2019].

Further sources of information

• The National Qualifications Authority is the EQF national coordination point:
http://akk-ks.net/en/
• KQF website: https://akkks.rks-gov.net/en/nqf/national-qualifications-framework
• National database of qualifications: https://akkks.rks-gov.net/en/nqf/registration-of-qualifications
• 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
• National Qualifications Authority (2016). *EQF referencing report of the Kosovo national qualifications framework.*   http://akk-ks.net/uploads/kosovo_eqf_referencing_report_2016.pdf

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
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).

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
KQF	Kosovo qualifications framework
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

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http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4163_en.pdf

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https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Kosovo%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

ETF (2018b). *Kosovo country strategy paper 2017-20: 2018 updates*.
https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/5F22DA270082E83FC1258220003857C6_CSP%202017-2020%20Kosovo_Updates%202018.pdf

European Commission; Cedefop (2018). *Survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF* [unpublished].

Gjinovci, R. (2016). Kosovo's education system amongst worst in the world. *Prishtina Insight, 6.12.2016.* http://prishtinainsight.com/kosovos-education-system-amongst-worst-world/

National Qualifications Authority (2016). *EQF referencing report of the Kosovo national qualifications framework*.
https://akkks.rks-gov.net/uploads/kosovo_eqf_referencing_report_2016.pdf