

# SERBIA

## European inventory on NQF 2016

### Introduction and context

Serbia was granted EU candidate status in 2012. The country was seriously affected by the 2008 financial crisis and faces several economic and social challenges. It has a population which is both decreasing and aging, a trend of migration of educated people to more prosperous countries, and a high rate (20% in 2015) of young people aged 15-24 who are neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs). The youth unemployment rate is highest among those with only primary level education (40.7%), followed by tertiary level graduates (32.9%), and then by secondary-level graduates (29.9%). Vocational education and training (VET) is seen as a possible answer to early school leaving, as around 75% of upper secondary school students are enrolled in VET. However, the employability of VET graduates and skill mismatches are issues to be addressed (ETF, 2016).

A comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) is under construction, developments having been under way since 2005 when a green paper on the NQF was prepared. Concepts of learning outcomes, competences and a NQF were explicitly mentioned in the 2009 law on the foundations of the education system <sup>(1)</sup>. Development of the NQF is strongly supported by the *Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020* (The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2012), and is a point of focus in the EU financial assistance to support education and training reforms through the Instrument for pre-accession assistance II (IPA II) <sup>(2)</sup>.

Two separate qualifications frameworks were initially developed. The NQF for higher education, within the Bologna process, was endorsed by the National Council for Higher Education in 2012 and proposed to the Ministry of Education,

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<sup>(1)</sup> Official Gazette RS, No 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013, 35/2015 and 68/2015. The text of the Law on the foundations of the education system can be found at: [http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/ekspertske%20misije/protection\\_of\\_minories/the\\_law\\_on\\_education\\_system.pdf](http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/ekspertske%20misije/protection_of_minories/the_law_on_education_system.pdf)

<sup>(2)</sup> Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA): [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en)

following changes in the law on higher education <sup>(3)</sup>. It encompasses levels 6 to 8. A NQF for VET was prepared by the Institute for Improvement of Education in cooperation with a working group <sup>(4)</sup>. The final draft <sup>(5)</sup>, encompassing levels 1 to 5, was completed in late 2013, and presented to the public by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development.

A comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning, unifying the two existing frameworks, is being prepared by a working group established by the Minister for Education in 2014. A new law on the National Qualifications Framework is planned to regulate the comprehensive NQF in Serbia (NQFS). The NQF law is expected to be ready for adoption in 2017 and referencing to the European qualifications framework (EQF) is expected in 2018.

## Policy objectives

Apart from being a tool for transparency and communication, the NQFS is seen as important support for national reforms in education and training. As clearly stated in the *Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020* (The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2012), it is envisaged that the NQFS 'will determine the processes, the organisational bodies responsible for establishing qualifications, manners of acquisition, comparison, identification, quality assurance and standards'. In addition to its regulatory role, the framework is also expected to aid implementation of lifelong learning and to support labour force mobility.

Main policy objectives of the NQFS include:

- (a) ensuring clarity and transparency of qualifications and their interconnectedness;
- (b) development of qualification standards based on requirements of the economy and society;
- (c) enabling the orientation towards learning outcomes;

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<sup>(3)</sup> Official Gazette RS, No 76/2005, 100/2007, 97/2008, 44/2010, 93/2012, 89/2013, 99/2014, 45/2015 and 68/2015.

<sup>(4)</sup> The development of the NQF for VET (levels 1-5) was supported by the European Union, in particular the European Training Foundation, through various projects (e.g. CARDS II, IPA).

<sup>(5)</sup> The national qualifications framework for levels 1-5: <http://www.zuov.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NQFS.pdf>

- (d) improving access, flexibility of pathways and mobility within formal and non-formal education;
- (e) enabling the identification and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- (f) improving cooperation among stakeholders;
- (g) quality assurance in the development and acquisition of qualifications;
- (h) ensuring comparability and recognition of Serbian qualifications with qualifications obtained in other countries. <sup>(6)</sup>

## Levels and use of learning outcomes

The comprehensive NQFS is intended to integrate existing qualifications and qualification subsystems (formal primary, secondary and higher education, and non-formal adult education), and the two existing frameworks: the NQF for VET and the NQF for higher education. Only qualifications included in the NQFS are recognised at national level and entered into the national qualifications catalogue, which is part of the framework.

Three types of qualifications are defined and can be included in the NQFS, according to how they are acquired:

- (a) formal qualifications, obtained through formal education, after which a diploma or a certificate is issued as a public document;
- (b) qualifications gained through non-formal education, acquired through different forms of adult education, most commonly through vocational training, after which a certificate is issued as a public document;
- (c) qualifications obtained through recognition of prior learning, acquired by adults based on work or life experience, after which a certificate is issued as a public document.

The framework has eight qualification levels for general, VET and higher education qualifications. Levels 6, 7 and 8 have been each divided into two sublevels to accommodate existing ('old') higher education qualifications into the framework. The NQFS level descriptors are defined in terms of learning outcomes divided into three categories: knowledge (general and vocational knowledge necessary for performing a job or for further learning); skills

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<sup>(6)</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (2016). *National qualifications framework in Serbia* [draft document unpublished].

(cognitive, psychomotor and social skills); and attitude and ability (referring to levels of autonomy and responsibility).

The NQFS is based on qualification standards: learning outcomes are one of the elements used to define a standard. Other elements include name and code of qualification, level in the NQFS, qualification type and the sector to which it belongs, work description, prerequisites for acquisition of a qualification, progression possibilities, minimum duration of education or training, number of credits, type of examination, type of document issued, and reference data regarding the approval of the qualification (such as date and body responsible) (ETF, 2016). However, no information is currently available on the development and application of learning outcomes in the different education and training subsystems in Serbia.

The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been applied in higher education in Serbia, and the development of a credit system for VET was envisaged in the 2013 document outlining the NQF for VET <sup>(7)</sup>. According to draft NQFS document <sup>(8)</sup>, 'programme duration and the number of credits in formal education are regulated by law'.

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The NQF in Serbia is currently governed by two separate laws: the law on the foundations of the education system <sup>(9)</sup> for NQF levels 1 to 5, and the law on higher education <sup>(10)</sup> for NQF levels 6 to 8. A law that will regulate the comprehensive NQFS for lifelong learning and the institutional arrangements for NQFS implementation is foreseen for 2017.

The main body supervising development of the NQF for VET is the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education (CVAE), operational since 2011. The

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<sup>(7)</sup> The national qualifications framework for levels 1-5. <http://www.zuov.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NQFS.pdf>

<sup>(8)</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (2016). National Qualifications Framework in Serbia – Draft document (unpublished).

<sup>(9)</sup> Official Gazette RS, No 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013, 35/2015 and 68/2015. The text of the law on the foundations of the education system can be found at: [http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/ekspertske%20misije/protection\\_of\\_minorities/the\\_law\\_on\\_education\\_system.pdf](http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/ekspertske%20misije/protection_of_minorities/the_law_on_education_system.pdf)

<sup>(10)</sup> Official Gazette RS, No 76/2005, 100/2007, 97/2008, 44/2010, 93/2012, 89/2013, 99/2014, 45/2015 and 68/2015.

2013 draft NQF for VET (levels 1 to 5) was prepared by the Centre for VET within the Institute for Improvement of Education, in cooperation with a working group appointed by the Minister for Education. The working group consisted of 21 experts from a range of institutions such as ministries (education, labour), social partners and education and training providers. The National Council for Higher Education is responsible for the NQF for higher education.

An expert team with a mandate from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development was set up to prepare the comprehensive NQFS unifying the two existing frameworks. Members of this working group include experts of the Institute of Improvement of Education, National Employment Service and representatives from higher education. The establishment of a qualification agency is intended to close the existing gaps in the governance of the national qualifications system and of the NQF, but there are no concrete plans and no developments yet in this regard (ETF, 2016).

Sector councils are being established and piloted to define and develop occupational profiles and qualifications; however they are not yet operational. The law on adult education, adopted by parliament in June 2013, stipulates sector councils as permanent commissions of the CVAE. These councils include a wide range of stakeholders and will have an important advisory role in development and implementation of the unified NQF. Expert and technical support to sector councils is provided by the Centre for VET within the Institute for Improvement of Education.

Quality assurance of higher education qualifications is ensured by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) and the National Council for Higher Education, while the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Council for Vocational and Adult Education are responsible for quality assurance in vocational qualifications.

Limited financial resources for NQFS development are allocated from the national budget; additional financial support is available through the Instrument for pre-accession assistance II (IPA II).

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

Supporting lifelong learning through better connections between formal, non-formal and informal learning is a main policy objective of the NQFS. The development of a system for recognition of prior learning (RPL) is also one of the goals of the *Strategy for the development of education 2020* (The Ministry of

Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2012).

Possibilities to acquire qualifications at levels 1 to 5 through validation procedures (recognition of prior learning) are included in the draft NQF for VET<sup>(11)</sup> and in the draft NQFS document<sup>(12)</sup>. Such possibilities are provided especially in cases of retraining and additional training but there is no general rule. Validation of qualifications created for the needs of multinational companies or sectors of particular importance for development, such as information and communications technology, is also envisaged; however these qualifications are not currently part of the NQFS.

Recognition of prior learning is regulated through the law on adult education, but is yet to be operationalised through a bylaw. A public certificate is issued on successful completion of the RPL process; it is equivalent to a non-formal education certificate, and expected to be recognised in the labour market (ETF, 2016).

## NQF implementation

Building on previous work on the two separate frameworks – for VET and higher education – a unified comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning is currently being prepared<sup>(13)</sup>.

The framework is not yet operational. Development and implementation of the NQFS, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies involved, will be regulated by the future law on the NQF. The Law is also expected to define mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of NQFS implementation. Principles and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF have yet to be elaborated. A national register of qualifications, containing those that fulfil all the quality assurance criteria defined by the NQFS, is being developed. A database is also expected to be created, to include both existing qualifications and new ones in the register (ETF, 2016).

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<sup>(11)</sup> The national qualifications framework for levels 1-5. <http://www.zuov.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NQFS.pdf>

<sup>(12)</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (2016). National Qualifications Framework in Serbia – Draft document (unpublished).

<sup>(13)</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (2016). National Qualifications Framework in Serbia – Draft document (unpublished).

## Referencing to the EQF

The *Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020* (The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, 2012) underlines that the EQF referencing process is important for Serbia. The country participates in the EQF advisory group, where it is represented by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the University of Novi Sad. It is foreseen that referencing to the EQF will take place in 2018.

## Important lessons and future plans

An important step taken by Serbia in recent years was the creation of the working group for the development of the comprehensive NQFS and related legislation. While the NQF is seen as an instrument for reforming all aspects of education and training, establishing and managing the linkages between NQF development and the reform on provision (such as curriculum reform, development of work-based learning) may be challenging (ETF, 2016).

Steps for the NQFS to become operational include adoption of the law on the NQF, and establishment and capacity building of organisational structures with clear roles and responsibilities for NQF development and implementation. The sector councils are expected to become operational in the near future.

Remaining challenges include limited resources from the national budget, and insufficient human resources for the development, implementation and management of the NQFS.

## Serbian NQF (draft)

NQF levels	Qualification types	Anticipated EQF levels
8	Doctoral Studies (DS, 180 ECTS)	8
7	Specialist academic studies (SAS, 60 ECTS)	7.2
	Integrated academic studies (IAS, max. 360 ECTS) Master academic studies (MAS, 180 + 120 or 240 + 60 ECTS) Master vocational studies (MVS, 120 ECTS)	7.1
	Basic academic studies (BAS, 180 - 240 ECTS) Specialist vocational studies (SVS, 180 + 60 ECTS)	6.2
6	Basic academic studies (BAS, 180 - 240 ECTS) Basic vocational studies (BVS, 180 ECTS)	6.1
	Specialist and craftsman education	5
4	Four-year secondary education (vocational, artistic, general)	4
3	Three-year secondary vocational education Non-formal adult education (minimum 960 hours of training)	3
2	Vocational training (1 year) Education for work (2 years) Training (120 - 360 hours of training)	2
1	Primary education Elementary adult education	1

Source: Adapted from European Training Foundation, 2016.

### Further source of information

[URLs accessed 13.1.2016]

Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development:

<http://www.mpn.gov.rs/>

Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia:

<http://europa.rs/>

## List of abbreviations

CVAE	National Council for Vocational and Adult Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQFS	national qualifications framework of Serbia
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VET	vocational education and training

## References

[URLs accessed 22.2.2017]

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

[https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e\\_4ccf\\_8d94\\_a3256a255147/page/Serbia%20-%20NQF%20Inventory](https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Serbia%20-%20NQF%20Inventory)

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2012). *The strategy for education development in Serbia 2020*.

<http://erasmusplus.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Strategy-for-Education-Development-in-Serbia-2020.pdf>