

# SERBIA

## European inventory on NQF 2018

### 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 ageing (from 7.64 million in 2002 to 7.06 million in 2016), a trend of migration of educated people to more prosperous countries and a high rate (15.3% in 2017) of young people aged 15-24 who are neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs). After losing a lot of jobs between 2008 and 2014, the labour market built on strong performance in 2016, when employment increased among those with primary and secondary education completed. However, the number of employed with tertiary education fell, indicating various skills mismatch problems. There was an increased focus on the development of a national qualifications framework and dual education, showing an effort to match education and training skills supply with labour market demand (ETF, 2018).

Concepts of learning outcomes, competences and an NQF were explicitly mentioned in the 2009 law on the foundations of the education system <sup>(1)</sup>. Development of the NQF has been strongly supported by the Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020 <sup>(2)</sup> which has been 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>(3)</sup> as well as other strategies <sup>(4)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013, 35/2015 and 68/2015. The text of the law can be found at:

<http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2009/law-fundamentals-education-system-5205>

<sup>(2)</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (2012). *Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020*.

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

<sup>(3)</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)

<sup>(4)</sup> The Strategy for resolving the issues of refugees and internally displaced persons for the period 2015-20 (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 62/15, dated 14 July 2015) and the Strategy for the social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia

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, following changes in the law on higher education <sup>(5)</sup>. It encompasses levels 6 to 8. A NQF for VET was prepared by the Institute for Improvement of Education in cooperation <sup>(6)</sup>. The final draft <sup>(7)</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 (MoESTD).

In 2018, the law on a national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQFS) <sup>(8)</sup> was adopted. This law establishes a unified and integrated national qualifications framework that includes all levels and types of qualification, regardless of the way they are acquired (formal education, non-formal education, informal learning - life or work experience) and regardless of age at which qualifications are acquired.

## 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. According to the NQFS website <sup>(9)</sup>, the NQFS contributes to the improvement of the education system of the Republic Serbia and to the overall reform processes. As clearly stated in the Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020 <sup>(10)</sup>, it is envisaged that the NQFS will determine the processes, the organisational bodies responsible for establishing qualifications, manners of acquisition, comparison,

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2016-25. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 26/2016. The NQFS is part of Negotiating chapter 26 - education and culture.

<sup>(5)</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 76/2005, 100/2007, 97/2008, 44/2010, 93/2012, 89/2013, 99/2014, 45/2015 and 68/2015.

<sup>(6)</sup> The development of the NQF for VET (levels 1-5) was supported by the European Union, particularly the European Training Foundation, through various projects (e.g. CARDS II, IPA).

<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> Law on the national qualifications framework of Serbia, 2018. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 27/2018. <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ZAKON-NOKS-18.pdf>

<sup>(9)</sup> NQFS website: <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/>

<sup>(10)</sup> MoESTD, 2012.

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. In addition, an action plan <sup>(11)</sup> on the implementation of this strategy was adopted in 2015. A 2018 progress report <sup>(12)</sup> was written by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD), defining the adoption of the NQFS law as one of the most important measures for improvement of the relevance of education in Serbia (ETF, 2018) <sup>(13)</sup>.

The main policy objectives of the NQFS include (Law on the national qualifications framework of Serbia, 2018):

- (a) ensuring clarity, comprehensiveness 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;
- (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.

## 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

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<sup>(11)</sup> [http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Akcioni\\_plan.pdf](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Akcioni_plan.pdf)

<sup>(12)</sup> <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/AP-SROS-IZVESTAJ-15jun-Eng.pdf>

<sup>(13)</sup> Main goals of the national qualifications framework in Serbia are the development of qualification standards based on the needs of the labour market and society, as well as on learning outcomes (ETF, 2018).

recognised at national level and entered into the national qualifications catalogue, which is part of the framework.

The NQFS law defines the comprehensive nature of the NQFS that will include general (basic education and secondary education qualifications, vocational and adult education qualifications) as well as academic (higher education and vocational) higher education ones.

The framework has eight qualification levels for general, VET and higher education qualifications and two sublevels; levels 6 and 7 have been each divided into two sublevels to accommodate existing ('old') higher education qualifications into the framework. The need for sublevels comes from a communication purpose of the NQFS: to clarify that qualifications of different volumes are at the same NQF level.

The NQFS level descriptors <sup>(14)</sup> 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 (cognitive, psychomotor and social skills); and abilities and attitude (referring to levels of autonomy and responsibility). These terms are not further defined in the NQFS law.

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, 2018). The qualification standard is the basis for the development of education programmes for acquiring qualifications at all levels of education. The MoESTD is expected to adopt a methodology for the development of the qualification standards based on proposals by the Qualifications Agency (ETF, 2018). Preparatory work was carried out in cooperation with ETF on the development and application of learning outcomes in the different education and training subsystems in Serbia; an inventory of qualifications was developed in 2016; at that time the inventory included 68 reformed VET programmes at levels 3 and 4, based on learning outcomes <sup>(15)</sup>.

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<sup>(14)</sup> These level descriptors are included in the annex of the NQFS law.

<sup>(15)</sup> The report and annexes of the inventory of qualifications are accessible on the NQFS website.

The European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) has been applied in higher education in Serbia <sup>(16)</sup>, and the development of a credit system for VET was envisaged in the 2013 document outlining the NQF for VET <sup>(17)</sup>. The descriptions of the qualifications in the NQFS database <sup>(18)</sup> contain information on qualifications at levels 1 to 5 (in years or in hours) and in ECTS points for qualifications at levels 6 to 8 (for example level 6.1 is 180 ECTS) (ETF, 2018).

## Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

The NQF in Serbia has been governed by two separate laws: the law on the foundations of the education system <sup>(19)</sup> for NQF levels 1 to 5 and the law on higher education <sup>(20)</sup> for NQF levels 6 to 8. The law that regulated the comprehensive NQFS for lifelong learning and the institutional arrangements for NQFS implementation was adopted by the parliament in April 2018. This law stipulates termination of other regulations to ensure consistency with related legal acts and regulations (ETF, 2018).

Although the main body supervising development of the NQF for VET was the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education (CVAE), operational since 2011, the NQFS law foresees the establishment of an NQFS Council for strategic management of NQFS development and implementation. The Council will take the role of an advisory body giving recommendations on planning and development of human capital in accordance with public policies in lifelong learning, employment, career guidance and counselling <sup>(21)</sup>.

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<sup>(16)</sup> The NQFS law mentions credits in terms of ECTS points for higher education programmes only.

<sup>(17)</sup> The national qualifications framework for levels 1-5: <http://www.zuov.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NQFS.pdf>

<sup>(18)</sup> <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/qualifications-database/>

<sup>(19)</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 72/2009, 52/2011, 55/2013, 35/2015 and 68/2015. The text of the law 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>(20)</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 76/2005, 100/2007, 97/2008, 44/2010, 93/2012, 89/2013, 99/2014, 45/2015 and 68/2015.

<sup>(21)</sup> The Government of the Republic of Serbia has adopted the decision on the appointment of the members of the NQF Council (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 66/18), dated 28 August 2018.

The NQFS law also establishes a qualifications agency that will perform administrative and technical tasks and expert support for the Council <sup>(22)</sup>. The agency is now operational. Sector councils <sup>(23)</sup> will be established with the function of defining the need for qualifications in the Serbian labour market (ETF, 2018). These sector councils have been piloted to define and develop occupational profiles and qualifications <sup>(24)</sup> whereas the law on adult education, adopted by the parliament in June 2013, stipulated sector councils as permanent commissions of the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education (CVAE). Sector councils are based on the principle of social partnership <sup>(25)</sup>.

The National Council for Higher Education is responsible for the NQF for higher education, now part of the overarching NQFS.

The NQFS law describes quality assurance as ‘managing the process of developing qualifications based on standards and learning outcomes, as well as the quality system in the process of acquiring and evaluating qualifications’ (ETF, 2018). The Qualification Agency is the responsible body for quality assurance of NQF implementation. Quality assurance of higher education qualifications in the past was ensured by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) and the National Council for Higher Education. Since 2018 quality assurance of higher education qualifications is ensured by the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA) which is an

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<sup>(22)</sup> The decision on the establishment of the Qualifications Agency (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 68/18) was dated 7 September 2018. The decision on the appointment of the Chair and members of the Management Board of the Qualifications Agency (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No 74/18), was dated 5 October 2018.

<sup>(23)</sup> The NQF Council has adopted the proposal of the decision on the establishment of 12 sector skills councils in the Republic of Serbia and social partners are currently delegating their representatives (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

<sup>(24)</sup> Expert and technical support to sector councils is provided by the Centre for VET within the Institute for Improvement of Education. These councils include a wide range of stakeholders and will have an important advisory role in development and implementation of the unified NQF.

<sup>(25)</sup> The NQFS law stipulates that members of the sector councils represent: the Chamber of Commerce and representative associations of employers from the relevant sector; professional chambers or associations; Council for Vocational Education and Adult Education; University Conference and Conference of Academies and Higher Schools; National employment services; ministries responsible for education, employment and work activities and activities for which the sector council is established; communities of vocational schools; representative branch unions; Institute of Improvement of Education (ETF, 2018).

independent agency in Serbia. It was established by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2018, for the purpose of quality enhancement of higher education institutions and study programmes and is currently under ENQA Membership review.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) and the Council for Vocational and Adult Education are responsible institutions for the quality assurance of 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 <sup>(26)</sup>

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 <sup>(27)</sup>. The NQFS law defines recognition of prior learning (RPL) as one of the paths for acquisition of qualifications. The law foresees RPL procedures, based on the standard of qualifications, for qualifications at levels 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the NQFS, and exceptionally at level 4. The arrangements for recognition of foreign qualifications in Serbia are in transition due to new regulations in the 2018 NQFS law.

The procedures for the recognition of foreign school documents are regulated in the laws regulating primary and secondary education, while procedures for recognition of academic and professional recognition of higher education is regulated in the law of higher education. Once the NQFS law is implemented, ENIC-NARIC will become a department of the new Qualification Agency which will be established <sup>(28)</sup>.

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<sup>(26)</sup> Based on ETF, 2018.

<sup>(27)</sup> MoESTD, 2012.

<sup>(28)</sup> The ENIC-NARIC Centre Serbia is currently a unit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia. The NQFS law distinguishes between the recognition of foreign school documents and the professional recognition of foreign higher education; both procedures shall be conducted by the ENIC-NARIC centre, as a department of the Qualification Agency (ETF, 2018).

Possibilities to acquire qualifications at levels 1 to 5 through validation procedures (recognition of prior learning) have already been included in the draft NQF for VET <sup>(29)</sup> and in the NQFS document. Such possibilities are provided especially in cases of retraining and additional training but there is no general rule.

Recognition of prior learning is regulated through the Law on adult education, but is yet to be operationalised through a by-law which has not yet been defined.

## NQF implementation

Building on previous work on the two separate frameworks – for VET and higher education – a unified comprehensive NQF for lifelong learning has been adopted. The NQF Council and Qualifications Agency have been founded by Government Decree and sector councils are in the process of formation. Preparatory works for implementation are carried out in the country.

The framework is not yet operational. Development and implementation of the NQFS, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies involved, are regulated by the law on the NQF. The law defines mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of NQFS implementation. Principles and procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF have been elaborated in the law.

According to the NQFS law, development of an NQFS register is foreseen, which will consist of three sub-registers: a sub-register of national qualifications, a sub-register of qualification standards and a sub-register of publicly recognised adult education providers. The data from the register will be open to the public and accessible, in Serbian and English, through the official website of the Qualification Agency (ETF, 2018). There is an electronic qualifications database <sup>(30)</sup>, accessible via the NQFS website <sup>(31)</sup>, which will form the basis for the NQFS register. The inclusion of qualifications is evolving; by August 2018, 140 qualifications, 86 of which contain qualification standards, had been entered in the database. General qualifications, VET qualifications and HE qualifications have been included. Once the NQFS is referenced to the EQF, all new

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<sup>(29)</sup> The national qualifications framework for levels 1-5. <http://www.zuov.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NQFS.pdf>

<sup>(30)</sup> <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/qualifications-database/>

<sup>(31)</sup> <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/about-nqfs/>

certificates, diplomas, diploma supplements and Europass qualification documents will be linked to the respective EQF level <sup>(32)</sup> (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

An NQF/EQF communication strategy has not been developed. Adapting dissemination strategies to different target groups and evaluation of implemented strategies could be useful in improving NQF and EQF communication.

## Referencing to the EQF

The Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020 <sup>(33)</sup> underlines that the EQF referencing process is important for the country. Serbia 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 <sup>(34)</sup> will take place in 2019 (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

## Important lessons and future plans

The adoption of the NQF law in 2018 has been a long-expected step towards a more relevant qualification and education system in Serbia (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018). 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, 2018). Steps for the NQFS to become operational include capacity building and coordination 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 management of the NQFS and quality

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<sup>(32)</sup> In the case of recognition of a foreign school certificate of completion of secondary education, the equivalent document will contain the NQFS level of the recognised certificate (ETF, 2018).

<sup>(33)</sup> MoESTD, 2012.

<sup>(34)</sup> It is planned to reference the national qualifications framework with the European qualifications framework, i.e. with the European portal *Ploteus*:  
<http://noks.mpn.gov.rsA>

assurance in the implementation of the NQFS system. An online NQFS register will give access to useful data about qualifications and the qualification standards. Adoption of by-laws with a view to regulating certain issues from the law on NQFS remains another challenge.

Establishing and developing social partnerships between institutions and bodies from the world of education and the labour market, regarding the development of qualification standards based on labour market needs, is essential. This is because the development of qualification standards is in the competence of the ministry responsible for education, while the development of occupational standards is in the competence of the ministry responsible for employment. Involving stakeholders at national, regional and local levels can provide a continuous insight into obstacles and opportunities on the labour market and a solid basis for the sector councils, qualification agency and NQF council to act accordingly.

#### Main sources of information:

[URLs accessed 3.4.2019]

- The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is the EQF national coordination point: <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/>
- NQFS website: <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/about-nqfs/>
- NQFS database: <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/qualifications-database/>

## Serbian qualifications framework (NQFS)

NQFS levels		Qualification types
8		Doctoral Studies (DS, 180 ECTS)
7	7.2	Specialist academic studies (SAS, 60 ECTS)
	7.1	Integrated academic studies (IAS, max. 360 ECTS) Master academic studies (MAS, 180 + 120 or 240 + 60 ECTS) Master applied studies (MVS, 120 ECTS)
6	6.2	Undergraduate studies (BAS, 180 ECTS) Specialist applied studies of I degree (SAS, 180+60 ECTS, acquired in accordance with the law on higher education which entered into force on the 7th of October, 2017).

NQFS levels		Qualification types
	6.1	Undergraduate studies (BAS, 180 - 240 ECTS) Basic applied studies (BVS, 180 ECTS)
	5	Master craftsman and specialised education
	4	Four-year secondary education (vocational, artistic, general)
	3	Three-year secondary vocational education Non-formal adult education (minimum 960 hours of training)
	2	Vocational training (1 year) Training for work (2 years) Training (120 - 360 hours of training)
	1	Primary education Elementary adult education Elementary music/ballet education

Source: <http://noks.mpn.gov.rs/en/comparative-table-of-the-qualification-levels-and-types-of-education/>

## Abbreviations

CVAE	National Council for Vocational and Adult Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
IPA	instrument for pre-accession
MoESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQFS	national qualifications framework of Serbia
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VET	vocational education and training

## References

[URLs accessed 3.4.2019]

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

European Training Foundation (2018). *Inventory of NQF in 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). *Strategy for education development in Serbia 2020*.

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