TURKEY
European inventory on NQF 2018

Introduction and context

Turkey continues to experience positive developments against the EU 2020 targets. Its education and training system is expanding to provide access for its growing population, while at the same time raising attainment levels. However, measures do not yet match the magnitude of challenges. Turkey has a high percentage of underachievers in reading (40%), mathematics (51.4%) and science (44.5%) according to the 2015 programme for international student assessment (PISA) results. The rate of early school leaving is 32.5%, three times the EU average of 10.6% in 2017; however it has decreased by 1.8% since 2016. The gender gap, unlike in the other European countries, is higher for females than for males (34% for females and 31% for males). The share of 30 to 34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment is 27.3% compared to the EU average of 39.9%; the gender gap is also different here from the EU average. In Turkey, more men than women attend tertiary education: 28.6% males and 26% women, compared to EU averages 34.9% males and 44.9% women. Like many EU countries, Turkey is far from achieving the benchmark (15%) stipulated for adults' participation in lifelong learning, with 5.8% compared to the EU average of 10.8%. The employment rate of recent graduates is 61.2% compared to the EU average of 80.2, and far from the benchmark of 82% (European Commission, 2018).

Turkey has developed and is implementing a comprehensive national qualifications framework (Turkish qualifications framework, TQF). The TQF has eight levels and includes all types and levels of qualifications and certificates. Level descriptors are outcomes-based and titled knowledge, skills and competence.

The regulation on the procedures and principles of its implementation (TQF Regulation) and the description of the Turkish qualifications framework (TQF document) ([1]) were adopted by a Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Labour

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([1]) This regulation entered into force via Decision 2015/8213 of the Council of Ministers and publication in the Official Journal dated 19.11.2015 and numbered 29537: TQF Regulation: http://myk.gov.tr/TRR/File9.pdf ;
TQF document: http://myk.gov.tr/TRR/File6.pdf

and Social Security in 2015 and published in the Official Journal in November 2015 and January 2016 respectively. In March 2018, the regulation on the quality assurance of qualifications was adopted ([2]).

Following the adoption of TQF, the framework was referenced to the European qualifications framework and self-certified to the framework of qualifications for the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in 2017.

Turkey's overall political aims for its qualifications framework include improving the relevance of qualifications, linking education to employment, and contributing to wider productivity of the country's workforce. The framework brings together a national vocational qualification system (NVQS), led by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), a qualifications framework for higher education, developed in the Bologna process ([3]), and integrates them with the qualifications awarded by the Ministry of national education ([4]). The framework will be open for all quality-assured qualifications.

Passing the VQA law (Law No 5544, 2006) ([5]) was the first important step in developing a national vocational qualifications system (NVQS) of labour market oriented qualifications. Through the law amendment (November 2011), the framework became more broadly defined as 'principles of qualification designed in compliance with the EQF and gained through vocational, general and academic education and training programmes including primary, secondary and higher education as well as other learning routes'.

Policy objectives

The overall objectives of the TQF are to integrate qualifications available in Turkey in an overarching framework, improve the quality of qualifications, promote and provide systematic support to lifelong learning, maximise national and international transparency and recognition, and provide opportunities to all individuals in the community (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

([2]) The regulation on the quality assurance of qualifications to be included in the TQF, adopted by a decision of the TQF Coordination Council and published in the Official Journal in March 2018: http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2018/03/20180325.pdf

([3]) The qualifications framework for higher education was developed and adopted in January 2010 by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

([4]) The Ministry of National Education conducts education activities from preschool to the end of secondary education.

([5]) Law 5544 was published in the Official Journal No 26312.

Since the adoption of the TQF, the links between the TQF regulation and the relevant legislation in the different parts of education and training, labour market and other policy areas are strengthening, through references made to the TQF.

Improving access to both VET and tertiary education is a key policy target for Turkey. Many education policies have been implemented, based on strategies such as the Lifelong learning strategy paper (2014-18), The Lifelong learning action plan 2014-18 ([6]), the Vocational education and training strategy (2014-18), the Higher education strategy of Turkey (2007-25) and the Employment strategy (2014-23) ([7]). Turkey's lifelong learning strategy and action plan pays particular attention to improving access to lifelong learning beyond the formal education system and promotes validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). The employment strategy attributes a core role to the TQF, aimed at strengthening the link between education and employment and the quality of the VET system. The VET strategy focuses on broadening access to VET, with improved VET system capacity and better employment outcomes for graduates. The latter is also the goal for the higher education strategy, where the learning outcomes approach is an essential part of the implementation of the national qualifications framework for higher education. However, current arrangements inhibit the validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education (ETF, 2018).

The policy objectives are defined in the TQF (VQA, 2016); as:

(a) provide a clear and consistent means of describing, classifying and comparing qualifications;

(b) provide one integrated framework including all quality-assured qualifications, (achieved in general, vocational and academic education and training programmes and in other learning environments);

(c) improve qualifications continuously so that the system can provide appropriate recognition of qualifications achieved in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts;

(d) contribute to training individuals who are employable and equipped with defined and measurable qualifications, and so help reduce unemployment;

(e) strengthen institutional cooperation among all parties, primarily awarding bodies, industry and social partners;

([6]) http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/str/files/LLL_ACTION_PLAN.pdf

([7]) http://www.uis.gov.tr/Media/Books/UIS-en.pdf

(f) provide a benchmark for recognition in Turkey of foreign qualifications and for recognition of Turkish qualifications abroad, and serve as an instrument of comparison.

The original purposes of the TQF have not changed since adoption. However, maintenance of the quality assurance of qualifications has been considered as the number one purpose of the TQF by the stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Levels and use of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are the backbone of the TQF, which comprises the eight levels defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence and includes all types and levels of qualification and certification. Knowledge is defined as theoretical and/or factual, involving the comprehension of facts, principles, theories and practice. Skill is defined as utilisation of knowledge and problem-solving, which requires the ability to use logical, intuitive and creative thinking and dexterity, method, material, tools and instruments. Competence is defined as utilisation of knowledge and skills in an area of work and/or learning by taking responsibility and/or displaying autonomy, determination and satisfaction in learning requirements, consideration of social and moral issues, and responsibilities.

The TQF levels are defined without reference to any particular field of learning. All national qualifications developed by VQA ([8]) are based on learning outcomes. Modules of the VET training programmes of the Ministry of National Education are all defined by learning outcomes, though these VET programmes have no separate qualification specifications defined by learning outcomes ([9]). General education qualifications of the Ministry of National Education are not yet fully defined by learning outcomes. In higher education, some universities have identified the qualifications they offer by learning outcomes.

In addition to levels, the TQF uses qualification types and qualification categories. Qualification types are the main instrument through which

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([8]) VQA is responsible for national vocational qualifications based on occupational standards developed in parallel to existing formal education under the Ministry of National Education.

([9]) The modular system in VET is planned to be improved to include contributions from the enterprises better.

qualifications will be allocated to the TQF levels, enabling the categorisation of different qualifications at the same level. Qualification types distinguish among qualifications that are at the same level but differ significantly in terms of their functions, learning outcomes, volume and/or orientations. Examples of qualification types are associate degree (academic or vocational) and level 5 vocational qualification certificate; vocational and technical high school diploma and skilled worker certificate, at level 4 (ETF, 2018).

Qualification type specifications define the common characteristics of qualifications within a given qualification type. They will become standard requirement for responsible bodies to describe their existing qualifications based on learning outcomes, and will form the basis for the design of new qualifications. Apart from qualification types presented in Annex 7 to the Turkish referencing report, it is anticipated that other qualification types will be developed over time to recognise achievements of learning in the workplace which are likely to be categorised as supplemental or for special purpose. To this end, the following qualification categories are specified for the TQF: principal qualifications, supplemental qualifications, unit qualifications and special purpose qualifications ([10]) (TQF document).

Vocational education and training (VET) is undergoing major reform, with substantial EU support. Since 1992, Turkey has worked on developing occupational standards to identify the needs of the labour market. These are being used as a basis for development of national vocational qualifications and for validating non-formal learning through accredited and authorised certification bodies. Occupational standards are used to define journeyman and master craftsman certificates issued by the Ministry of National Education (non-formal education) and for developing modules for school-based secondary vocational education.

Higher education has determined descriptors in terms of learning outcomes, as this approach is an essential part of the framework implementation. The

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([10]) Principal qualifications reflect comprehensive sets of learning outcomes and convey a sense of completion of a learning process e.g. skilled worker certificate. Supplemental qualifications are awarded for learning achievement that is additional to previous principal qualification e.g. skilled instructor certificate in addition to skilled worker certificate. Unit qualifications provide recognition for the achievement of a coherent set of learning outcomes that forms part of the overall requirements for a principal qualification (usually associated with modular learning programmes). Special purpose qualifications are awarded for sets of learning outcomes that form a distinct, coherent achievement that may be used alone e.g. licence to operate or do specific work.

descriptors are compatible with the EQF and the qualifications framework in the European higher education area. Competence is further divided into four components: autonomy and responsibility, learning to learn, field-specific competences, and social and communication skills, with an emphasis on foreign language competences and information communication technology.

The Ministry of National Education has launched curriculum reform in secondary education, for general and vocational and technical schools. Vocational curricula are modularised and the ministry has a database of more than 4 000 modules that are also used for the licensing and certification of adult learning. There are also plans to establish a national credit system for VET. Although curricula are advanced, most initial vocational qualifications are not yet fully learning outcome based. Modules based on learning outcomes are used for learning, but they are not separately assessed and often lack an assessment component. The higher education qualifications framework is a sub-framework within the TQF that is already functioning. National working groups for different fields of learning define common outcomes as a guideline for qualification and curriculum developers. A common register on the higher education qualifications framework website provides links to specific programmes ([11]).

The learning outcomes approach is seen as an essential part of the development of the TQF and is the stated intention of current reforms in all of education and training subsystems, supported by main stakeholders.

There has been common understanding for the levelling of the main general and higher education qualifications in Turkey since the beginning of the TQF development process. For instance, there has been no major discussion for the levelling of the bachelor diploma at level 6 or high school diploma at level 4. There has been some resistance towards the levelling of vocational qualifications (NVQs) provided through VNFIL at the same level as qualifications from a long education and training period. However, the levelling of these vocational qualifications is more transparent since all of them are defined in learning outcomes and the levelling decision is based on the actual comparison of the learning outcomes with the TQF level descriptors (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

([11]) http://tyyc.yok.gov.tr/

Stakeholder involvement and institutional arrangements

TQF development was initiated by the Ministry of National Education in 2005 through the EQF consultation process. Since the VQA was established in 2006, it has been coordinating the process together with the Ministry of National Education, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and other stakeholders.

The Ministry of National Education is responsible for a range of qualifications provided in formal and non-formal education. CoHE and higher education institutions are responsible for higher education qualifications and VQA is responsible for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) based on occupational standards. Non-formal education is being developed parallel to existing formal education under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education [12].

The three-member TQF Coordination Council is the decision-making body of the TQF. Its members are the deputy minister of the Ministry of National Education, the president of CoHE, and the president of VQA. The TQF Coordination Council is assisted by the 22-member TQF Council, representing the Ministry of National Education, CoHE, VQA and social partner organisations. The TQF Council addresses technical issues. According to the TQF regulation, the main duties and responsibilities of the TQF Coordination Council are:

(a) evaluate and approve procedures, principles, decisions, suggestions and opinions submitted by the TQF Council;

(b) collaborate with responsible bodies and institutions, international organisations, and the bodies and institutions of other countries.

Members of the Coordination Council are responsible for ensuring collaboration and coordination in implementing council decisions within their bodies. A consultation committee has been established as foreseen in the TQF regulation to evaluate issues and submit opinions on the framework. The TQF department of VQA undertakes secretariat services for the TQF Council and TQF Coordination Council.

Turkey has a system of sectoral committees [13], which is one of the cornerstones of the sustainability of the NVQS under the authority of the VQA. Sectoral committees in Turkey are tripartite structures with State, employer and

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[12] The certificates awarded under the VQA system are different from awards in formal education and can be provided via a process of validation. Aligning formal and non-formal curricula with the standards in this system continues. Once the system of standards is developed, qualifications in the formal system will be aligned with those used in the VQA system.

[13] Sectoral committees: http://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/tr/sektor-komiteleri

employee representatives; their establishment, duties and operation are regulated by law. 26 sector committees are operational. Sectoral committees perform tasks related to development and maintenance of occupational standards and qualifications for their sector.

The regulation on the quality assurance of qualifications to be included in the TQF, adopted in March 2018, details the quality assurance procedures and principles to which qualifications must comply to be included in the TQF. This regulation is applicable to all qualifications offered in in Turkey, whether achieved through formal education, non-formal education or a VNFIL procedure (ETF, 2018).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways ([14])

Turkey has made considerable progress in developing its qualifications system, while implementing a system for validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) has been a priority. Since 2006, the country has had a VNFIL system for national vocational qualifications that are part of NVQS. The aim of the system is to equip the labour force with up to date qualifications and recognise learning at the workplace. The TQF regulation (2015) refers to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and includes a specific article on it, which foresees the preparation of specific principles and procedures for the recognition and quality assurance of RPL. In October 2017, the Ministry of National Education issued the regulation on VNFIL principles and implementation, regarding accreditation, assessment and evaluation.

The assessment, evaluation and certification of learning outcomes against national vocational qualifications are carried out by authorised certification bodies. The national vocational qualifications are defined based on the occupational standards and their levels and assessed by testing. This validation is based on the demonstration of learning outcomes rather than on documented evidence. Since the regulation on VNFIL refers to the four stages of validation as defined by the EU recommendation 2012, and the existing validation system

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([14]) 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).

established by VQA is geared towards assessment and certification, the first two stages (identification and documentation) require further development.

The TQF Coordination Council, where all relevant partners are represented, will prepare guidelines for principles and procedures on RPL/VNFIL. This will be a general VNFIL framework like the EU recommendation 2012. The VQA, Ministry of National Education and the CoHE shall be responsible for applying these principles and procedures for the qualifications under their authority. The document is planned to be finalised by the end of 2019.

VNFIL is still in a starting phase in higher education, although it was legally introduced to the higher education system in 2011.

VNFIL is most advanced in NVQS. The VQA authorises accredited certification bodies in the form of VocTest centres that carry out assessment, evaluation and certification. By August 2018 the country had 170 centres. Successful candidates receive VQA vocational qualification certificates; by June 2018, 358 679 certificates had been issued in 16 sectors. VQA certification has become compulsory for 81 occupations, with the number of certificates awarded reaching 326 431 as of June 2018. TQF supports the processes for VNFIL, helping clarify the meaning of the qualifications and making visible which learning outcomes are necessary to achieve them.

NQF implementation

The TQF is designed as an inclusive, comprehensive framework for classification of all quality-assured qualifications, based on learning outcomes.

Legal arrangements for the TQF are in place and its implementation is in process. The TQF is at an early operational stage. New, outcomes-based qualifications are available and occupational standards have been developed. Quality assurance principles and procedures for qualifications to be included in the TQF are defined by law and a qualifications database ([15]) is operational and accessible to the public. There are around 1 650 qualifications in the database as of August 2018. All qualifications provided by the VQA (529) are included, as are a high proportion of those provided by the Ministry of National Education. So

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([15]) The Turkish qualifications database includes qualifications awarded in Turkey regardless of their quality. This means that the database currently functions as a qualifications inventory of Turkey rather than a register of the qualifications included in the TQF.

far, 348 qualifications from higher education institutions are also included. The database is accessible in Turkish and English ([16]) (ETF, 2018).

The TQF does not yet include qualifications since the realisation of quality assurance is a priority for qualifications to be included. The recently adopted regulation on quality assurance envisages the establishment and implementation of relevant systems by April 2020. The principles and procedures for the inclusion of the qualifications into the TQF are currently being drafted. Following the adoption of the principles and procedures, the quality-assured qualifications can be included into the TQF, expected in 2019.

The TQF will primarily include:

(a) qualifications awarded under the mandate of the Ministry of National Education. The ministry is responsible for developing qualifications under its mandate up to the fifth level ([17]);

(b) qualifications awarded under the mandate of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA).The VQA is responsible for developing national occupational standards and vocational qualifications at levels 2 to 8, except for the regulated occupations defined in the VQA law, Article 1 ([18]). Assessment, evaluation and certification for these qualifications are executed by Voc-Test centres, authorised by VQA. These qualifications are classified under vocational qualification certificate;

(c) higher education qualifications awarded under the coordination and supervision of the CoHE. For the national higher education qualifications framework national working groups have been established for different fields of learning, to define common outcomes as a guideline for qualification and curriculum developers. Links to specific programmes have been established that can be explored through the common register on the website of the higher education qualifications framework.

In time, the TQF will include more qualifications awarded under the mandate of other institutions.

([16]) The Turkish qualifications database: http://portal.tyc.gov.tr/

([17]) Vocational curricula are modularised and the Ministry of National Education has a database of approximately 3 500 modules that are also used for the licensing and certification of adult learning: http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/modulerprogramlar/

([18]) VQA Law, Article 1, paragraph 2 defines these professions: medical doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, veterinary doctors, engineers and architects as well as any other professions requiring education at graduate level as a minimum, for which conditions for inception of respective professions are regulated by law.

Since the official inclusion of qualifications into the TQF has not yet started, no decision has been made for the indication of TQF and EQF levels on new certificates and diplomas. However, TQF and/or EQF levels are indicated on the Europass supplements, totalling 3.2 million diploma supplements since 2009 and 500 000 certificate supplements since 2014 ([19]).

A communication strategy was developed in May 2018. Specific approaches to different target groups are identified in the strategy but, since the responsible bodies have been given priority, a single strategy is used to raise the awareness of and to attract them. The general public is addressed at a low level.

Referencing to the EQF

Turkey is an EU candidate country, a member of the EQF advisory group and participates in the Bologna process in higher education. It simultaneously referenced the TQF to the EQF and self-certified against the Bologna framework in 2017.

Important lessons and future plans

An important condition for establishing an NQF is to have solid basic legislation, clear responsibilities, defined roles and a coordination body which has a clear mandate. The collaboration and active cooperation between the Ministry of National Education, CoHE and VQA as main responsible bodies of the TQF is the greatest strength in the implementation, along with the management structure established with the TQF Coordination Council and the TQF Council. The TQF is designed as a comprehensive framework which comprises a wide range of qualifications from all sectors of the national qualifications system. This may also create a challenge for determining common approaches on issues such as quality assurance, VNFIL, and transfer system. Given that Turkey is a big country with a population of 80 million people, thousands of schools and hundreds of universities, the diversity and number of qualifications is also a key factor. (VQA, 2016)

([19]) Europass certificate supplement:
https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/documents/european-skills-passport/certificate-supplement/examples

The key challenge for very near future could be difficulties and/or delay in reforming the existing quality assurance systems in line with the TQF quality assurance principles. Some principles, especially self-assessment and external evaluation, are relatively new to the Turkish education and training system. Another key challenge would be to find a smooth and effective approach to include the qualifications officially in the TQF (European Commission and Cedefop, 2018).

Main sources of information
[URLs accessed 21.5.2019]

- The VQA is the EQF NCP: www.myk.gov.tr
- TQF and EQF website: http://www.tyc.gov.tr/
- TQF database: http://portal.tyc.gov.tr
- VQA (2016). Referencing of the Turkish qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning and self-certification to the framework of qualifications of the European higher education area: http://tyc.gov.tr/trr.pdf
- Qualifications framework for higher education, information about programmes: http://www.tyyc.yok.gov.tr/

Turkish qualifications framework (TQF)

TQF levels	Qualifications types awarded in formal education and training system	NVQ	Anticipated EQF levels
8	Doctoral diploma (PhD, proficiency in arts, specialty in medicine, dentistry)	Level 8 vocational qualification certificate	8
7	Master diploma (with thesis) Master diploma (without thesis)	Level 7 vocational qualification certificate	7
6	Bachelor diploma	Level 6 vocational qualification certificate	6
5	Associate diploma academic) Associate degree (vocational)	Level 5 vocational qualification certificate	5
4	High school diploma Vocational and technical high school diploma	Level 4 vocational	4

TQF levels	Qualifications types awarded in formal education and training system	NVQ	Anticipated EQF levels
	Mastership certificate	qualification certificate	
3	Lower secondary education certificate Journeyman's certificate	Level 3 vocational qualification certificate	3
2	Primary education certificate	Level 2 vocational qualification certificate	2
1	Pre-school participation certificate		1

Source: Adapted from VQA, 2016.

Abbreviations

EU	European Union
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession, the EU's support programme for candidate and potential candidate countries
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
MYK	Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu [Vocational Qualifications Authority]
NQF	national qualifications framework
NOS	national occupational standards
NVQS	national vocational qualifications system
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
TQF	Turkish qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training
VQA	Vocational Qualifications Authority

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[URLs accessed 21.5.2019]

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European Training Foundation (2018). *Inventory of NQF in Turkey.* https://connections.etf.europa.eu/wikis/home?lang=en#!/wiki/Wf591e43b607e_4ccf_8d94_a3256a255147/page/Turkey%20-%20NQF%20Inventory

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