

# Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework

## SYNTHESIS REPORT





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This report concludes the mapping study of qualifications frameworks in Africa, elaborated in 2020 in the context of the project AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability/Skills Initiative for Africa, Technical Cooperation – Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
APC	Approche Par Compétences
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation
CAMES	African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
EAC	East African Community
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
ECOWAS	Economic Community of Western African States
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HAQAA	Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IUCEA	Inter-University Council for East Africa
LMD	Licence, Master et Doctorat
NAQMIS	National Qualifications Information Management System
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
PAQAF	Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
REC	Regional Economic Community
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
RVCC	Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SIFA	Skills Initiative for Africa
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UC-SNQ	Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System
VAE	Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience

## 1. ACQF mapping study: A contribution to transparency

Commissioned by the African Union (AU)-European Union (EU) Skills for Youth Employability Programme: Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA) Technical Cooperation – Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)<sup>1</sup>, the ACQF mapping study represents robust baseline evidence and an instrument supporting the future ACQF. The mapping report includes various types of reports:

- A set of country and Regional Economic Community (REC) reports exploring the key issues and features of qualifications frameworks and systems in thirteen countries (Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria<sup>2</sup>, Senegal, South Africa and Togo) and in three RECs – the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).
- It culminates in a comprehensive report outlining the findings from the country and REC reports, in the context of i) the AU policies and of ii) the international storyline of several generations of qualifications frameworks (1980–2020).
- The central piece of the comprehensive mapping report is the 75-page chapter synthesising the most salient features and trends of qualifications frameworks (national and regional) on the African continent, building on the continental ACQF survey and country and REC reports. This chapter comprises high-value specific analyses of: i) a sample of qualifications (in the fields of hospitality, accounting and coding) and ii) level descriptors of a sample of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) based on progression across domains.
- This synthesis report focuses on this key chapter.
- Finally, the comprehensive report includes several hyperlinks, and a set of online tools and templates for policymakers and researchers working in this discipline, which have been incorporated in the ACQF website, notably: [ACQF inventory](#); [Analytical framework of national and regional qualifications frameworks in Africa](#); [ACQF qualifications profiles](#); and [Analysis of level descriptors](#).

The comprehensive report was pre-published in English on 20 November 2020 in the same repository with the reports of the ACQF mapping study. The final publication in English, French and Portuguese is scheduled for January and February 2021.

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1 JET Education Services conducted the study; the ETF provided substantial inputs to design, review, analysis and drafting.

2 The country reports Ivory Coast and Nigeria were developed by the ACQF project in the period September-December 2020 after completion of the assignment with JET Education Services. The authors of these reports are, respectively: Mohammadou Merawa and Jacinta Ezeanmukwe.

## 2. ACQF in the policy context of the African Union

Education, skills and qualifications are at the heart of the African Renaissance. Therefore, the ACQF is a vital policy underpinned by key strategic commitments and policies of the AU:

- Agenda 2063<sup>3</sup>;
- African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)<sup>4</sup>;
- Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment (AU Free Movement Protocol)<sup>5</sup>;
- Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)<sup>6</sup>; and
- Sectoral development strategies, such as the African Tourism Strategic Framework (2019–2028)<sup>7</sup>.

The most explicit references to a continental qualifications framework are found in the following policies:

- AU Free Movement Protocol: Article 18; and
- CESA 16–25: Strategic Objective 4 c), d).

Most importantly for the ACQF, the AU Free Movement Protocol, adopted by the 30th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly (20 January 2018), in its Article 18 (on ‘Mutual Recognition of Qualifications’), specifies: ‘The States Parties shall establish a continental qualifications framework to encourage and promote the free movement of persons’<sup>8</sup>.

CESA’s Strategic Objective 4 aims to ‘ensure the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups through harmonisation processes across all levels for national and regional integration.’ Goals c) and d) explicitly refer to the establishment of qualifications frameworks, notably a continental qualifications framework linked with national and regional qualifications frameworks<sup>9</sup>:

- c) Set up national qualification frameworks (NQFs) and regional qualification frameworks (RQFs) to facilitate the creation of multiple pathways to the acquisition of skills and competencies as well as mobility across the subsector; and
- d) Develop continental qualifications framework linked to regional qualifications and NQFs to facilitate regional integration and mobility of graduates.

3 Agenda 2063: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

4 AfCFTA: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated\\_text\\_on\\_cfta\\_-\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf); Factsheet on the AfCFTA: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/faqs/2377-african-continental-free-trade-area-faqs-june-2018-update/file.html>

5 AU Free Movement Protocol: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/1965-protocol-to-the-abuja-treaty-free-movement-of-persons-right-of-residence-and-establishment-adopted-29-january-2018/file.html>

6 CESA 2016–2025: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa\\_-\\_english-v9.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf)

7 African Strategic Tourism Framework 2019–2028: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/3118-african-tourism-strategic-framework-2019-2028-executive-summary/file.html>

8 <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/1965-protocol-to-the-abuja-treaty-free-movement-of-persons-right-of-residence-and-establishment-adopted-29-january-2018/file.html>

9 [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa\\_-\\_english-v9.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/29958-doc-cesa_-_english-v9.pdf)



The EU has committed to supporting the development of the ACQF, as defined in Action 4 of the Communication on a New Africa–Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs: Taking Our Partnership for Investment and Jobs to the Next Level, a communication adopted on 12 September 2018 by the European Commission<sup>10</sup>. This communication was endorsed by all heads of state of the EU, at the European Council meeting (18 October 2018)<sup>11</sup>.

### The issue of labour mobility

Among its policy recommendations, the African Economic Outlook 2020 emphasises the need to address obstacles to labour mobility to enhance growth's inclusiveness, within sector productivity growth and cross-sector labour reallocations to reduce poverty in Africa<sup>12</sup>. By merely allowing labour to move freely across sectors, African countries could increase incomes and reduce poverty and inequality. To this end, policies should reform labour regulations and employment policies to ensure the free movement of labour. In addition, while the labour movement within countries is less prone to restrictions, cross-border labour mobility is often discouraged on the grounds of protecting local labour markets. The African Economic Outlook highlights that implementing international agreements, such as the AfCTA, can help to remove most obstacles to the free movement of workers between countries. Moreover, policies should contribute to increasing the transferability of skills and qualifications across sectors or the acquisition of sets of new skills and qualifications to meet the requirements of receiving sectors.

## 3. ACQF vision and development

Development of the ACQF was officially launched at the inaugural workshop held at the African Union Commission (AUC) headquarters from 2 to 3 September 2019. This process is led by the AUC, working in partnership with the EU, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the European Training Foundation (ETF). The process is participative, based on analysis and evidence, and builds on African and global experience. By the third quarter of 2022, the ACQF policy and technical document, supported by an action plan will be submitted for AU decision-making. A set of technical guidelines, a web platform with tools, will accompany the ACQF document and a network of trained experts will offer capability for sustainable operations of the ACQF.

### ACQF vision and aspirations

According to the initial vision for the ACQF presented at the inaugural workshop in September 2019, the ACQF is envisioned as an overarching qualifications framework for the continent, based on the principles of:

- **Inclusiveness** of all types of learning and levels of qualifications (all sub-systems of education and training);
- **Openness** to learners' and stakeholders' needs, to policy learning and lessons from other qualifications frameworks; and
- **Innovation-readiness**: notably the transformation of skills and learning in the context of digitalisation, greening and beyond Covid-19 reconstruction.

10 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-africa-europe-jobs-alliance-communication-643\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-africa-europe-jobs-alliance-communication-643_en.pdf)

11 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36775/18-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>

12 African Economic Outlook 2020: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38116-doc-african\\_economic\\_outlook\\_2020\\_.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38116-doc-african_economic_outlook_2020_.pdf)

The **objectives** of the envisioned ACQF are:

- Comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and to support people's lifelong learning;
- To facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates, and support mobility (learners, workers, services);
- Work in cooperation and complementarity with NQFs and RQFs and support the creation of an African education and training space; and
- Promote cooperation, alignment/referencing between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide.

As a policy instrument, the ACQF is anticipated as an enabler, fulfilling a range of functions, such as:

- A platform providing benefits to countries and RECs, such as easily accessible and updated information on NQFs on the continent; databases and inventories; various capacity development, peer-learning and networking facilities and e-resources; public (users') outreach activities;
- A hub and catalyst for development and support to operationalise qualifications frameworks at national level; and
- A reference for cooperation with African and other international frameworks.

The ACQF will cooperate and interact with NQFs, with the RECs and the respective RQFs.

## Developing the ACQF

The ACQF development process is already underway (2019–2022) and is based on evidence and analysis, stakeholders' participation, political lead of the AUC, awareness-raising, networking and capacity development. This process is organised into two phases:

### *Phase 1 (September 2019 to September 2020) (completed)*

- Baseline evidence and analysis: mapping of the state of play, dynamics, main characteristics and perspectives of qualifications frameworks on the continent; and
- Engagement with stakeholders, start of capacity development and peer learning on key themes related to qualifications frameworks and systems.

### *Phase 2 (2020–2022): Development of the ACQF Policy and Technical Document and Action (underway)*

- The process moves from evidence creation to the reflection on options and scenarios for the ACQF as a sustainable policy instrument;
- Building on the joint competence of a team of experts selected from different African countries, the reflection on possible scenarios for the ACQF will consider the wider goals of continental integration (the aspiration), the findings of the mapping study (the current situation and foreseeable dynamics at national and regional levels), and the overall context of transformation of skills and learning accelerated by the response to Covid-19; and

- › The ACQF policy and technical document will reflect the orientations from the discussion with AUC and the ACQF Advisory Group of the scenarios and options for the ACQF.

## 4. ACQF mapping study

The mapping study was designed according to **eleven thematic areas**, which provided the conceptual framework in which the analysis took place, elaborated in the main ACQF project planning document and in the terms of reference of the study<sup>13</sup>. The themes cover the key policy and technical areas in which qualifications frameworks develop and are implemented, namely:

1. Conceptual, policy and legal base of the qualifications frameworks/systems (NQFs and RQFs): legal Acts and policies that underpin the qualifications frameworks;
2. Governance: leading institutions and key agencies, the role of social partners and other stakeholders, partnerships, sector councils, resources, indicators and mechanisms to support implementation and monitoring;
3. Qualifications frameworks' vision, scope and structure: objectives and added value for education and training systems, employability policies, levels and descriptors, scope (partial, comprehensive coverage of levels/sub-sectors of education and training); place of non-formal, informal learning and validation/recognition of prior learning – practices and policies;
4. Quality assurance (QA): principles, policy, institutions, practice, registers, verification mechanisms;
5. Learning outcomes: concepts, use in different contexts (qualifications standards, curriculum, assessment) and subsectors (vocational education and training, higher education) and links with QA;
6. Credit systems: concepts, specifications, transferability/pathways between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), secondary education and higher education qualifications, status of development/implementation;
7. Alignment, referencing NQF-RQF: objectives, approaches, criteria and status of implementation;
8. Searchable databases/registers of qualifications, inclusion of qualifications, target users, governance, involved agencies;
9. Costs, financing of NQF/RQF;
10. Dissemination, communication to end-users (learners, employers, education and training providers, career guidance advisors, employment/recruitment agencies): mechanisms, practice, public/online platforms, use of digital tools in qualifications' management; and
11. Role and place of RQFs in supporting development at a national level: for example, clarity of learning pathways and permeability, promoting mutual trust, use of common QA principles/mechanisms, use of learning outcomes, renewal and reform of qualifications, new technologies, improved approaches for better qualifications, other aspects of the ecosystem of education and training.

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13 Developing the ACQF: Scope of Work and Roadmap 2019–2022 (2019), technical working document, AU–EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme: SIFA Technical Cooperation. Author: Eduarda Castel-Branco (ETF).

These thematic areas will guide the next phases of the ACQF development project, laying a coherent foundation in designing the ACQF policy and technical document, making sure that all key dimensions are taken into account.

The ACQF mapping study integrates knowledge and data collected through a combination of information sources: 1) the online survey, which received responses from 33 countries; 2) deeper analyses at country and regional levels; and 3) desktop research. The ACQF peer-learning webinars, conducted from July 2020, turned out to be major sources of updated information on the ongoing dynamics and initiatives related to NQFs and RQFs in Africa. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, these seven peer-learning webinars largely replaced the originally planned conventional ACQF workshops in 2020 and allowed the ACQF stakeholders to stay connected, aware and informed.

In total, by October 2020, the mapping study had collected relevant information from 41 countries. The scope, completeness and documentation collected from different countries and RECs vary. During the span of the current ACQF project, the information baseline established by this mapping study ought to be updated and embedded in the planned ACQF website. The ACQF inventory and other reference instruments elaborated together with the mapping study will be further developed and supported by the ACQF website and advertised in the community of institutions and bodies coordinating and managing NQFs and qualifications on the continent.

The mapping study comprises several types of analysis: 1) online survey report; 2) thirteen country and three REC reports, including Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, the EAC, ECOWAS and SADC; 3) final reports, which include comprehensive analysis and synthesis with infographics. Additional reports are planned to include countries and regions with limited coverage in published research.

Countries and RECs were selected for the technical visits based on four criteria: 1) coverage all four languages of the AU; 2) coverage of different stages of development/implementation of NQFs; 3) coverage of different African geographical regions; and 4) RECs with more tangible development of their RQFs.

The ACQF mapping study pioneered the publication of analysis on qualifications frameworks/systems of several African countries and RECs, not included in the recent editions of the Inventories of Qualifications Frameworks<sup>14</sup>. These are countries whose qualifications frameworks experiences are rarely known: Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Senegal, Togo and the EAC. These cases have enriched our knowledge of the diversity of relevant approaches in the different cultural and regional contexts of the continent. This is a fundamental issue for the ACQF development process.

The mapping study is accompanied by a set of web-based tools for further reference, compilation, update and comparison of information on qualifications and qualifications frameworks. For this reason, the report includes several hyperlinks, both within the report, and to external sources, and a set of online tools and templates for policymakers and researchers<sup>15</sup>.

As anticipated, qualifications frameworks are at different stages of development and implementation across the continent. Discussion and exchanges unveiled NQF dynamics of

14 CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO and UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, *Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks* (edition 2019). <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/2019-global-inventory-qualifications-frameworks-out>. Three previous editions are available online.

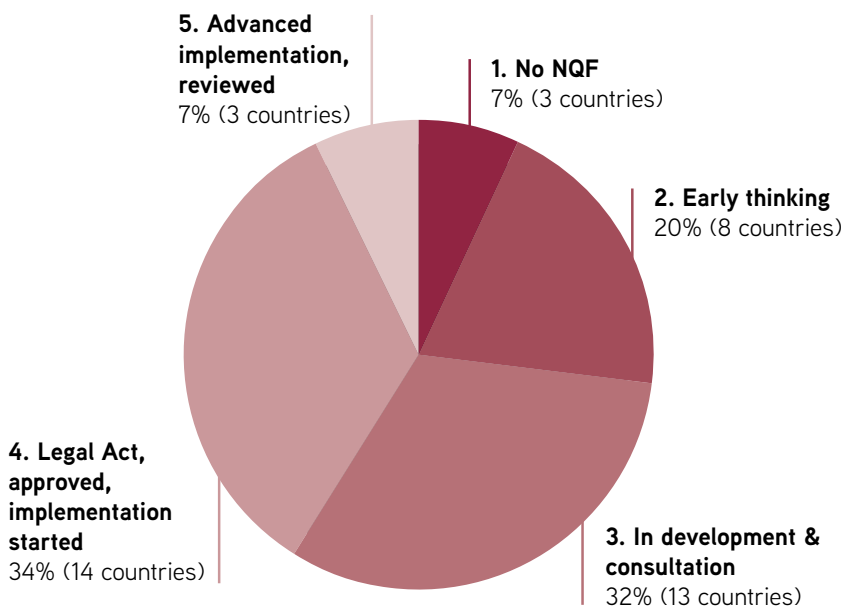
15 The tools and templates are developed using a Google platform. Copies need to be made by the individual user to allow for editing rights. It is envisaged that over time, these tools will be refined and migrated to the ACQF website.

different types and time frames. For dynamic analysis, the mapping study uses five stages to categorise the different situations of qualifications frameworks' development and consolidation:

1. Qualifications framework not in place, the development process not started;
2. Qualifications framework at the early thinking stage;
3. Qualifications framework in development and consultation with stakeholders and experts;
4. Qualifications framework in place, approved as a legal Act, implementation started; and
5. Qualifications framework in implementation for some time, reviewed, improvements adopted.

Some countries moved from the early thinking stage to tangible steps of analysis and consultation towards an NQF (for example, Angola and Cameroon). Other countries are now moving from parallel sectoral frameworks (TVET, higher education) to establishing integrated, comprehensive NQFs (for example, Malawi, Mozambique and Rwanda). Other countries have moved to stage 4, following official approval of their NQF (for example, Eswatini, in August 2020). Another recent development concerns Lesotho: the country approved its revised NQF in June 2019 and uploaded the NQF Manual of Procedures, which can be viewed by any country interested in home-grown NQF experiences.

**Figure 1:** Overview of National Qualifications Frameworks in Africa – 41 countries covered by the ACQF mapping study in 2020



Source: ACQF mapping study: a) online survey, b) country visits and reports, c) desktop research, d) continuous exchanges (peer-learning webinars, engagement with countries)

The following situations can be found in the different African geographical regions:

- The majority of qualifications frameworks in Africa are operational in countries of the Southern Africa region, where the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) is well established. These NQFs have been implemented for a longer period and, as a result, have more mature legal bases, operational instruments and governance structures maintaining and assuring the integrity of the NQFs. As noted above, two of the newest NQFs are located in SADC: Eswatini (approved in August 2020) and Lesotho (approved in June 2019).
- Recent developments in East Africa, notably in Kenya (since 2014), are noteworthy, with the establishment of the legal base, governance structure, new online register of qualifications.
- In the north, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have had legally established NQFs for some time and continue working to put in place implementation structures and registers of qualifications.
- In the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region, Ethiopia has designed the technical-conceptual bases of its NQF, but the start of implementation still requires enabling drivers.
- In West Africa, we found a more diverse panorama of qualifications frameworks: some countries, notably Senegal and Togo, have established qualification systems, such as the Licence, Master et Doctorat (LMD) system in higher education, but there is no comprehensive, integrated NQF yet. Ghana implements an eight-level TVET framework and is developing a comprehensive NQF encompassing higher education. Cape Verde is a rare example in the region of a comprehensive NQF, with a decade of operational experience governed by a specialised entity, which was not well known before the ACQF mapping process. Other West African countries, such as Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, have started the early stages of their NQF development processes in 2020.
- In Central Africa, Cameroon has been implementing the LMD framework in higher education since 2007, and a system of qualifications levels and types for TVET. As the country's Education Strategy 2020 gives priority to establishing an NQF, a stakeholders' group started reflection in 2017, and a specific project with sizeable resources has been approved to start in 2020.

Angola is worth noticing, as the NQF coordination unit in charge of steering the development process made substantial progress in 2020, finalising the technical-conceptual design of the NQF and the proposal for the governance structure and register of qualifications. The process is based on strong national ownership and participation of stakeholders, supported by EU cooperation.

In several analysed cases, the NQF is seen and designed as one of the pillars/components of the national qualifications system, or of the wider education system. This is the case in Cape Verde, Mozambique and, more recently, Angola. The latter provides a useful example of a country where the NQF has become firmly entrenched in key national strategic documents, notably in the National Development Plan 2018–2022 of Angola. In August 2020, the new law, 32/20, introduced modifications to the Law of Bases of Education (17/16). Most importantly, the new law for the first time mentions the national qualifications system (section 19), defining it as the guarantor of the articulation between the levels and domains of learning outcomes from the different sub-systems of education and the National System of Professional Education.

The question of NQF scope concerns levels but also types of qualifications, and the extent to which frameworks accommodate non-formal and informal learning paths to qualifications. In terms of scope, the analysed African qualifications frameworks can be clustered in several situations:

- Sector-specific frameworks that operate independently, that is, in TVET, and higher education, without an integrated unifying framework;
- Sector-specific qualifications frameworks that are operational but are linked and work together with the wider integrated NQF; and
- One type of qualifications framework: national, comprehensive and inclusive.

The level structure of the analysed NQFs is diverse. Regional integration plays an important role in defining the NQF structure in certain parts of the continent. In southern Africa, the ten-level structure predominates. In the north, two of the NQFs have eight levels, one has seven. In West Africa, an eight-level structure is established in some of the NQFs. Ethiopia moved from an initial ten-level concept to an eight-level comprehensive framework. Although the sectoral scope of the framework conditions the level structure, there are several cases of sectoral frameworks spanning a large part or the full set of levels: this is the case of the TVET framework in Ghana (eight levels), the Occupational Qualifications Subframework in South Africa (eight levels), and the proposed architecture of the revised professional qualifications sub-framework in Mozambique (nine levels). The Kenya NQF and the Lesotho NQF both have TVET qualifications pillars spanning ten levels.

The range of level descriptors captured by the survey shows some diversity, but in the comprehensive NQFs, and in some sector-specific TVET and higher education frameworks, there is a clear predominance of the domains: knowledge, skills, competence, and autonomy and responsibility. The newest of the approved NQFs (Eswatini) combines the domain 'personal attributes' to the two usual domains 'knowledge' and 'skills'. Lesotho opted for a combination of 'areas of knowledge (depth, breadth and complexity)', 'nature of skills' and as a third domain 'agency and context'. Two countries (Morocco and Tunisia) opted for a combination of more than three domains of learning, adding 'complexity', 'adaptability' and 'communication'.

NQFs are associated with a range of strategic and policy objectives, which can be clustered as related to:

- Integration, coherence and permeability between the learning outcomes and qualifications of sub-systems;
- Quality, transparency, enhanced visibility and trust of end-users: by introducing learning outcomes approaches, stakeholders' participation in qualifications development and approval, and accessible users' information through digital and online instruments;
- Parity of esteem and value of learning in different contexts and sub-systems: academic, vocational, formal and non-formal;
- Inclusion: qualifications can be obtained via validation of non-formal learning, recognition of experience from work and life, accessible for people with little schooling;
- Regional and global comparability and recognition of diplomas and certificates; and
- Wider societal and economic goals, in particular: increase the stock of the qualified labour force, enhanced employability of holders of qualifications, strengthen competitiveness and productivity of the economic sectors, align the qualifications system with demand and changing skills needs.

In terms of the governance of NQFs, it was found that more advanced NQFs in Africa tend to be overseen by qualifications agencies (authorities, coordination units) but also to a large extent by QA agencies and specialised commissions. Overall, there is a trend towards national settings as opposed to sectoral agencies. In cases where sectoral agencies, in TVET, higher education and general education, are well established, the national ministries provide more of a coordinating and oversight function. Ministries always play a key role in NQF governance and often act as incubators for the national and/or sector agencies that follow later. The risk of a diversity of departments and agencies with overlapping mandates is genuine, more so in countries with sparse resources. Some countries are trimming their institutional set-up of education and training, seeking to optimise resources, roles and outputs.

QA systems were found to be strongly associated with the sub-systems linked with the analysed NQFs. In most cases the higher education sector tends to have better-structured QA mechanisms than TVET and general education, having adhered to policies and practices of internal and external evaluation and accreditation, led by QA agencies (and departments) with varying degrees of autonomy and capacity. National and regional levels interact through the activities of regional councils, which play an important role in disseminating good practice and QA guidelines and providing methodological support to member states. Examples include the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) and, at a different level, the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF). The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) developed by the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) initiative were approved in 2019. The ASG-QA comprise guidelines recommending that learning outcomes be defined and documented for all programmes and benchmarked against level descriptors of NQFs or RQFs. In 2019, eight African national quality agencies participated in pilot external evaluations testing the ASG-QA.

In several countries (Cape Verde, Cameroon, Morocco, Tunisia), the QA framework in TVET is closely associated with the principles and methods of the competence-based approach (*Approche Par Compétences*, APC). The cycle of the APC involves upstream prospective skills analysis, mostly with a sector delimitation, leading to the design of standards of competence and of assessment. Graduate tracer studies are known to usefully contribute to evidence-based monitoring of the quality and relevance of learning and qualifications. Still, the mapping study found only rare cases of such studies being regularly conducted and findings being used to improve quality (Morocco is one of these cases).

The adoption of learning outcomes as a fundamental concept and instrument to design and organise qualifications and learning has gained ground in many countries. With this affirmation of learning outcomes approaches, firstly in TVET qualifications, but also gradually in higher education, systems and frameworks increasingly open up to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)/*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE)/Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC).

Terminology and concepts matter in the diverse context of the African continent. Among the French-speaking countries, the term *validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE) is widely used and relates to documenting and assessing the knowledge, skills and competencies developed through work and life experience against qualifications standards valid for other forms of learning (formal). VAE can take various forms and encompasses a sequence of steps – candidate-centred. Among the Portuguese-speaking countries, especially Angola and Cape Verde, the predominantly used term is *reconhecimento, validação e certificação de competências* (RVCC). At the same time, in Mozambique, there is a preference for the term *reconhecimento de competências adquiridas*. In general terms, the meaning of RVCC and VAE is quite similar. In the context of English-speaking



countries, the term RPL has general currency. Still, its meaning can have a different interpretation encompassing recognition of any form of learning (not only non-formal and informal, from life and an interpretation of work experience).

The ACQF country reports found that VAE, RVCC, and RPL have reached a differentiated degree of integration and visibility in education and training policies and qualifications systems. In some countries, the qualifications framework is welcoming to non-formal and informal learning, and regulatory-technical implementation mechanisms and capacities are in place or development. A few selected examples illustrate the range of situations in respect to RPL/RVCC/VAE:

- In Angola, the establishment of the system of RVCC is defined in the National Development Plan 2018–2022 of Angola as one of the key objectives of the national qualifications system. Two targets of the programme concern the operationalisation of RVCC: the approval of the legal basis of RVCC and completion of 80 experiences of RVCC.
- The Law on Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (Decree-Law 54/2014 of 22 September) of Cape Verde states: ‘People acquire, with their life experience, namely in professional activities, knowledge and competencies relevant for the exercise of many activities. Those competencies can and shall be formally certified, and, if necessary, complemented with training adjusted to individual needs, thereby promoting access to higher levels of qualification.’ The law also defines the RVCC processes over three phases, starting with information and guidance, followed by the recognition and validation of competencies, and then the certification of competencies. To support practitioners and implementation agencies, the Coordination Unit National Qualifications System (UC-SNQ) issued guidance materials, notably: a) Guide supporting the operationalisation of processes of professional RVCC, March 2016, and b) Process of recognition, validation and certification of professional competencies, March 2013.
- In Morocco, the Strategic Vision 2030 for a School of Equity Quality and Promotion foresees the development of a comprehensive system of VAE, noting: ‘Adopt a unified system of validation of individuals’ cognitive and professional achievements, overseen by an independent national body, where the various departments of education and training and professional sectors will be represented’ (Lever 19, p.70). In the past ten years, VAE has gathered some experience, based on partnerships of the Department of Professional Training with sector federations and sector ministries, which carried out several VAE projects in sectors with high demand for labour with qualifications. The VAE process is structured in four phases: a) Information and counselling of the candidates; b) Admissibility: instruct the application file and decide on the eligibility; c) Follow-up with the candidate; and d) Certification: the jury decides on the validation of the competencies from professional experience – on the base of the certification standard.
- Since its inception, South Africa’s NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL. Since 2014, when the submission of the data became mandatory, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has made systematic efforts to make NQF stakeholders aware of this aspect and to enable the RPL data loads into the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD). While it is known that there have been many more successful RPL cases than those recorded, the amount of RPL being submitted is increasing over time. At the time of writing, the number of learners who had achieved one or more part-qualifications via RPL was

87 915, with the records of achievements of part-qualifications via RPL numbering 610 956. RPL in South Africa is undertaken and awarded in a holistic way, which includes the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, and requires the involvement of the full range of NQF stakeholders. Two primary forms of RPL are distinguished, one to provide alternative access routes into learning programmes, professional designations, employment and career progression and the other to provide for the awarding of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF. The Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy provides for the coordination and funding of RPL and elaborates and holds SAQA and the quality councils accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act. The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development study of RPL, involving over 20 countries, positioned South Africa in a cluster of only 5 countries at 'Stage 5 of 7', which signified a country with 'islands of good RPL practices'.

Credit accumulation and transfer systems are widely used, although there are some differences across countries and sectors. The LMD system in higher education, adopted by a large number of countries in West and Central Africa, is associated with a standardised model of 30 credits (student workload) per semester. In one of the analysed countries, the higher education system follows the model of 1 credit = 25–30 hours of student workload, while the TVET system uses the model of 1 credit = 10 hours of student workload. In a number of countries, the model of 1 credit = 10 hours is established. The use of notional hours is widely used, although different interpretations of the concept can be found in different sectors.

International practice shows that the establishment of qualifications databases or registers contributes to making NQFs operational, improving transparency, outreach and public use. Repertoires and registers of qualifications cannot be disconnected from taxonomies and classifications. In the examples below, the linkage to various related classifications differs. Not all countries link qualifications with International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) fields of education, but many link to the national occupational classifications. This issue can be addressed in a harmonised manner at the regional and continental level, and the ACQF could play a role. The ACQF mapping study found different situations and dynamics with respect to qualifications databases and registers, which can be grouped as follows:

- Databases of quality-assured qualifications linked with the NQF, accessible and searchable online, notably via the website of the NQF institution. Examples of this situation include the well-developed SAQA NLRD, which includes all qualifications of all sub-frameworks and levels and part-qualifications. The Kenyan National Qualifications Authority is finalising the development of the National Qualifications Information Management System (NAQMIS), which will bring together the qualifications-awarding institutions, the qualifications that they award and the learners (launch foreseen in October 2020). The online national catalogues of qualifications of Mozambique and Cape Verde can be included in this group, although they comprise only pre-tertiary vocational-technical qualifications linked with the NQF.
- Listings and repertoires of courses and qualifications under the oversight of the different sub-systems (such as QA agencies) and institutions (providers, sectoral organisations), accessible online in yearbooks, tables and legal Acts of authorisation. The mapping study found a range of different examples with these characteristics, such as in Angola, Morocco and Senegal.

- Information on authorised, accredited courses and qualifications available upon request or without internet support (in printed publications), as in the case of Cameroon. Some types of qualifications databases provide structured and detailed information on the qualification profile and exit outcomes, associated units of competence, assessment criteria and credits. Others are much more terse listings of titles of qualifications by sectors.

Resource and capacity constraints determine the quality and completeness of these instruments, notably the frequency of their updates. To ensure transparency and integrity of qualifications databases, some countries issue specific legislation and methodological guidance (for example, Cape Verde).

In one of the countries in the study (Angola), we identified an interesting example of a mobile app (*Qualificar*), promoted by the large National Programme of HR Training, which includes information on all courses of the whole education and training system, searchable by different variables (sector, level of qualification, geographic location, institution). This app aims to support career and study choices of young people and to enhance transparency in the qualifications system.

Monitoring and evaluation of NQFs and measurement of their contribution towards wider objectives are not often considered and organised early on. An increasing number of countries in Europe and other continents are undertaking reviews and evaluations of their NQFs. The South African NQF went through several evaluations underpinning structural transformations and the new legal basis. Discussions during the mapping study with NQF instances showed that the problematic of monitoring and evaluation of NQFs is not underestimated and many countries welcome support to develop adequate tools and systems. In some countries, the NQF legislation stipulates the obligation to monitor progress and measure impact (Cape Verde). In other countries, the education law mandates the state to assure regular evaluation of the education and training system by specialised organs (Cameroon). Morocco's National Council of Education Training and Scientific Research is entrusted and equipped with the resources to conduct regular evaluation of all sub-systems of education and training and other specific thematic analyses.

Governments and socio-economic partners agree on the need to improve and better use labour market information to monitor and anticipate demand and supply dynamics, employability, the impact of megatrends (digitalisation, ecological transformation and events such as the Covid-19 pandemic) on skills and qualifications – seen as indispensable to improve matching and to adjust/reorient qualifications systems. Today, this implies engaging in innovation to improve labour market intelligence: reinforce labour market observatories, explore the potential of existing and new data sources (internet and administrative, under strict data protection rules), interconnect databases and information systems, use new visualisation tools and novel data analytics. The mapping study identified several labour market observatories working with different technical and analytical capacity in countries such as Angola, Morocco, Mozambique and Tunisia.

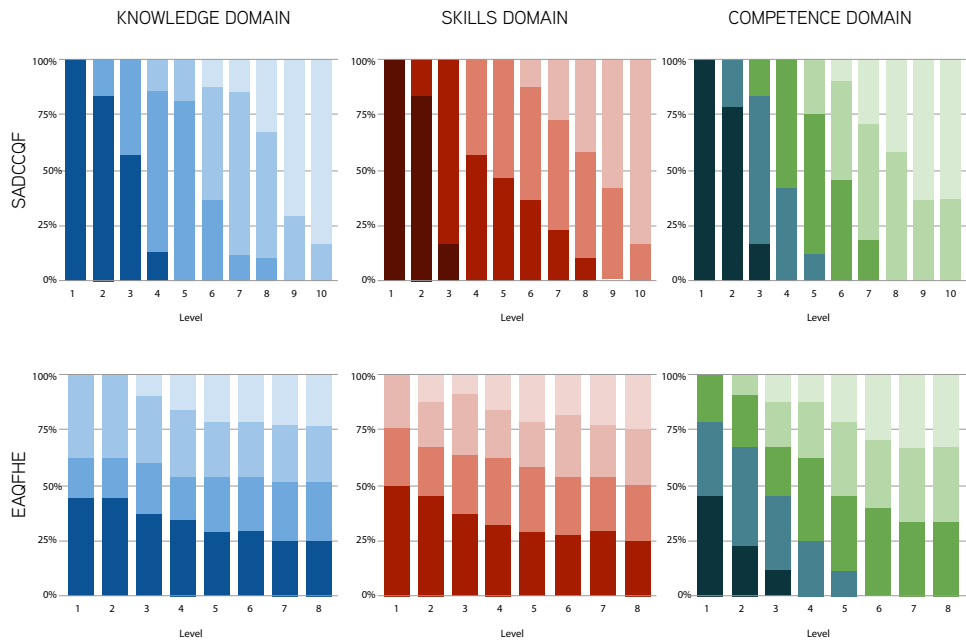
## 5. Analysis of level descriptors

An initial comparative analysis of a selection of level descriptors of national and regional qualifications frameworks was conducted, these include level descriptors from Cape Verde, The Gambia, Senegal, Egypt, Botswana, Morocco, Mozambique and Ghana, as well as from SADC and the EAC. The analysis includes both qualitative and quantitative components.

From the qualitative analysis it was found that most NQFs focus strongly on factual knowledge in their first levels, but some introduce conceptual knowledge earlier, such as in Senegal. On the other extreme, the introduction of descriptors at the metacognitive level in the highest NQF levels is not consistent. For example, Kenya focuses exclusively on this area, while Cape Verde and Mozambique still contain a distribution of knowledge dimensions in their highest NQF levels. Across the levels, the analysis demonstrated a gradual shift towards higher knowledge levels across NQF levels. Overall, it was found that divergences in language and across level descriptors used in different types of qualifications frameworks result in differences in the way learning outcomes are defined and described.

The quantitative analysis involved the application of three taxonomies (Revised Bloom, Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome and the Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition) to three commonly used domains (knowledge, including a cognitive dimension, skills and competence). The analysis showed similar variances between the SADCQF and the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE) level descriptors across the knowledge, skills, and competency domains as illustrated in the diagram below<sup>16</sup>.

**Figure 2:** Variances between the level descriptors of the SADCQF and EAQFHE



**Key**

Knowledge	Factual	Conceptual	Procedural	Metacognitive	
Skills	Pre-structural	Uni-structural	Multi-structural	Relational	Extended abstract
Competence	Novice	Advanced beginner	Competent	Proficient	Expert

16 The analysis of NQF level descriptors is presented in a similar manner in the mapping report.

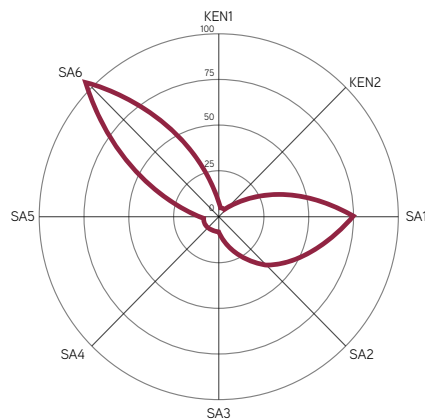
This analysis of level descriptors explored in the mapping study suggests that a wider application of the methodology may be of value, including a more automated approach using algorithms. These refinements could enable more consistent analysis of descriptors during referencing processes.

## 6. Analysis of qualifications

An analysis of a selection of qualifications from Kenya, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia was also undertaken. The approach was based on a set of agreed criteria to select a sample of qualifications from African countries that could be matched to European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), and presented as qualifications profiles.

In the context of this mapping study, comparable examples of qualifications for a hotel assistant were not found and were replaced with qualifications that are common in the hospitality training sector and reflect broad training in hospitality services at certificate level. In the case of qualifications for an accountant, it was found that first degree courses in accounting were not common. Teaching coding courses were also included in the analysis. It was found that the hospitality qualifications did not necessarily have the same focus as ESCO qualifications, while the breadth and depth of accounting qualifications also differed from ESCO qualifications at the same levels. The analysis of the coding course profile to ESCO is presented in Figure 3 below<sup>17</sup>.

**Figure 3:** Learning outcomes of coding courses – profile of comparison with ESCO skills



Coding, Digikids and @iLabAfrica, Strathmore University	Coding workshops, Pwani Teknogalz	WeThinkCode	Umuzi
KEN1	KEN2	SA1	SA2
Project CodeX	CodeSpace	Quirky30	CapaCiTi
SA3	SA4	SA5	SA6

<sup>17</sup> The analysis of the accounting and hospitality qualifications profiles to ESCO is presented in a similar manner in the mapping report.

## 7. Regional Qualifications Frameworks

Among the RQFs, SADC was found to be the most advanced in terms of its legal, technical and institutional basis, with the SADC RQF having been approved since 2011, and reactivated in 2017. In ECOWAS, the ministers of education approved in October 2013 the guidelines and roadmap for implementation of NQFs and RQFs in the region. In the EAC, the EAQFHE was adopted by the ministers in April 2015, working in complementarity with the regional QA systems. The EAQFHE has eight levels, from lower primary education to a doctorate degree. The SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) stood out as a long-standing oversight body that has promoted the SADC RQF. In the EAC, the overall coordination for the higher education section of the EAQFHE rests with the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), which is the custodian and governing body delegated by the EAC. The NQFs of two SADC member states have been aligned to the SADC RQF (South Africa and Seychelles) and alignment is underway in Mauritius.

## 8. Differentiated approaches to support development of NQFs

The ACQF aims to contribute and enable qualifications frameworks' development on the continent. Supporting development of NQFs should be contextualised, while also learning from other experiences, and fit for purpose.

Several layers of differentiation of qualifications frameworks have been found by this mapping study. The stage of NQF development and implementation is a fundamental line of differentiation.

As noted in section 4 of this synthesis report, African countries are clearly at different levels of NQF development. Most importantly, the allocation of countries to stages of development can be quite fluid given the current dynamics, and should therefore be reviewed and updated, as more countries are moving between stages. In 2019–2020, several countries took steps to start developing their NQFs (Angola, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Somalia). But this group of 'NQF at early thinking' is already changing, as Angola entered the stage of 'NQF in development and consultation', and by end 2020 is finalising the NQF conceptual and technical design, discussed among public institutions, professional organisations and social partners. In 2019–2020, two countries adopted their NQF legal text and regulatory basis (Lesotho and Eswatini) and moved to the stage of 'NQF in place, legal base approved, implementation initiated'. In the same period, at least one country (Cape Verde) reviewed the existing NQF legal Acts and adopted a new package of legal and regulatory instruments strengthening the national qualifications system and the NQF. Other countries are preparing to engage with the review of their NQF (Seychelles). In a number of cases, policy efforts have been centred in the integration of existing sectoral qualifications frameworks into one NQF of comprehensive scope (Rwanda and Mozambique).

This mapping study captures traces of these movements. Other specific characteristics cannot be overlooked – for example, those related with certain regional commonalities. As elaborated in section 9 of this report, a critical overlay across the groupings are the differences between anglo-, luso-, francophone and Arabic countries. These differences should not be glossed over and specific engagements with countries in each of these language categories should take place across the groupings summarised in the table below. The ACQF project continues engaging with the countries, to collect updates on their ongoing and planned NQF initiatives, and to fill in the information gaps on a number of countries.

**Table 1:** Differentiated support to NQFs – considering different stages of development

Stage of NQF development	Type of support that could be the most valuable
NQF in place and implemented for some time, and reviewed	Networking, collaboration, peer review, referencing, explore new methodologies. Streamlined monitoring and evaluation. Alignment with other policies such as the labour market. These NQFs should share their experiences, challenges and perspectives with all other NQF initiatives in Africa.
NQF in place, legal base approved, implementation initiated	Technical support, peer learning related with key implementation factors (dimensions), such as: organisational shaping and planning, operational instruments, register of qualifications, methodology package; governance and management of NQF for sustainability and impact; inventory of existing qualifications. Participation in regional, continental and international networks and groupings.
NQF in development and consultation	Technical support, peer learning related with major policy and technical issues and themes, unlocking key obstacles, guidance on regulatory-legal aspects.
NQF at early thinking	Technical assistance, peer learning, sharing of experiences supporting vision building and participation. Analysis of options, SWOT analysis, strategic planning, capacity development and stakeholders' buy-in.
NQF not in place, development not started	High-level technical support, sharing of experiences – local capacity building, self-assessment and baseline analysis.

## 9. Diverse landscape of qualifications frameworks and education and training systems on the continent

Developments and research on qualifications frameworks and systems have often been associated with English-speaking countries, communities and literature. As seen in this ACQF mapping report, on the African continent, currently NQFs have achieved wider consolidation among English-speaking countries. Among 17 countries (out of 41) found to have NQFs in place (legal Act approved and implementation started, and NQF in place for some time and reviewed), 11 are in SADC, of which only Mozambique is not an English-speaking country. Beyond SADC, other NQFs in place are in Cape Verde, Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, Tunisia and Uganda.

However, for the ACQF development process and the configuration of the role and instruments of the future ACQF, it is fundamental to build on a nuanced and contextualised understanding of the similarities and differences of the diverse education and training traditions and qualifications frameworks, enabling their strengths and contributing to mutual understanding among the diversity of countries and regions. In other words, this implies improved knowledge of the features, developments and perspectives of qualifications systems and the qualifications frameworks of the Arabic-, French- and Portuguese-speaking African countries too. The aspiration of a common continental education space built on shared principles and goals partly

depends on the gradual mutual acceptance of each other's achievements, principles and paths in establishing the qualifications systems and frameworks of independent African countries. Policy learning, rather than policy borrowing, should inform the ACQF process. Policy borrowing risks, at best, different levels of confusion and, at worst, denial of the education and training tradition in the country and/or region.

A more nuanced comparison of the similarities and differences is attempted below and will have to be further explored during the ACQF process. In this regard, it is important to note that despite national and societal specifics and education and training traditions, these countries also share certain aspects of concepts, principles and structural features related to their systems of education and training. Considering the domains of interest of this mapping report, we look at the main dimensions below:

- Status of NQFs;
- Concept of 'qualification'; and
- Competence-based approach.

## Countries with links to French traditions in education and training

### *Status of NQFs*

In this report, we have made a distinction between a national qualifications system and an NQF. This differentiation is essential when we argue that countries without established qualifications *frameworks* have qualifications *systems* with defined types and levels (cycles) of qualifications, including more or less developed QA of cycles, programmes and of design and award of qualifications.

### *Qualification system*

This includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, QA processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.

### *Qualification framework*

A qualification framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector – for example, initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis, whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualification frameworks, however, aim to establish a basis for improving the transparency, quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

The European Qualifications Framework Recommendation of 2017 defines a qualification framework as



a policy and instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

This mapping study found that countries such as Cameroon, Senegal and Togo have *implicit* qualifications frameworks, consisting of a range of levels of qualification in the sub-system of TVET, and the higher education framework. The shift to develop *explicit* NQFs, based on explicit descriptors of levels of qualification, and oriented to integrate and clarify the links between levels and sub-systems, is a further step that countries can take.

Except for Morocco and Tunisia, the development and establishment of *explicit* NQFs, in the meaning explored in this report, has not been at the forefront of most countries' policy priorities, or has not been particularly successful. If Mauritius can be considered bilingual (English and French), then it is a rare case of an advanced NQF (in operation and review) related to this country grouping. In the last few years, a changing trend is gradually emerging, though. Countries such as Cameroon and Madagascar have taken steps to start reflection and conceptualisation of their NQFs, as the need for integration and permeability between sub-systems and types of existing qualifications has become a determining issue for clarity in the qualification system, and better chances for people's lifelong learning pathways.

The relative rarity of an explicit qualifications framework has not prevented the development of instruments such as credit systems and learning outcomes approaches. The prevalence of the APC in TVET systems of Morocco, Tunisia and Cameroon shows clearly that a) learning outcomes approaches can predate the establishment of an NQF in a country; and b) the linkage between APC training engineering and the target qualifications levels of the sub-system, as exemplified for Morocco and Cameroon. The establishment and operationalisation of NQFs will build on the existing system of qualifications levels and types, as they have social meaning and value, and bring in new paradigms related with vertical and horizontal links, progression, a more inclusive and flexible view on a continuum of learning pathways and learning achievements.

### **Concept of 'qualification'**

As discussed above, in most French-speaking countries, the concept of 'qualification' (in English) corresponds to '*certification*' (in French), which corresponds to the assessed outcome of learning (*diplôme, brevet, certificat*). In contrast, the French term '*qualification*' corresponds to a different category: the level of the *certification*. The qualification level of a *certification* is given in agreement with the world of work (social partners). Consequently, NQFs consist of *certifications* (*diplôme, brevet, certificat*), which are 'objects' classified by level of 'qualification'.

The newly adopted French National Framework of Professional Qualifications, adopted on 8 January 2019, has eight levels of qualification and makes explicit the definitions of level descriptors, based on the combination of knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy.

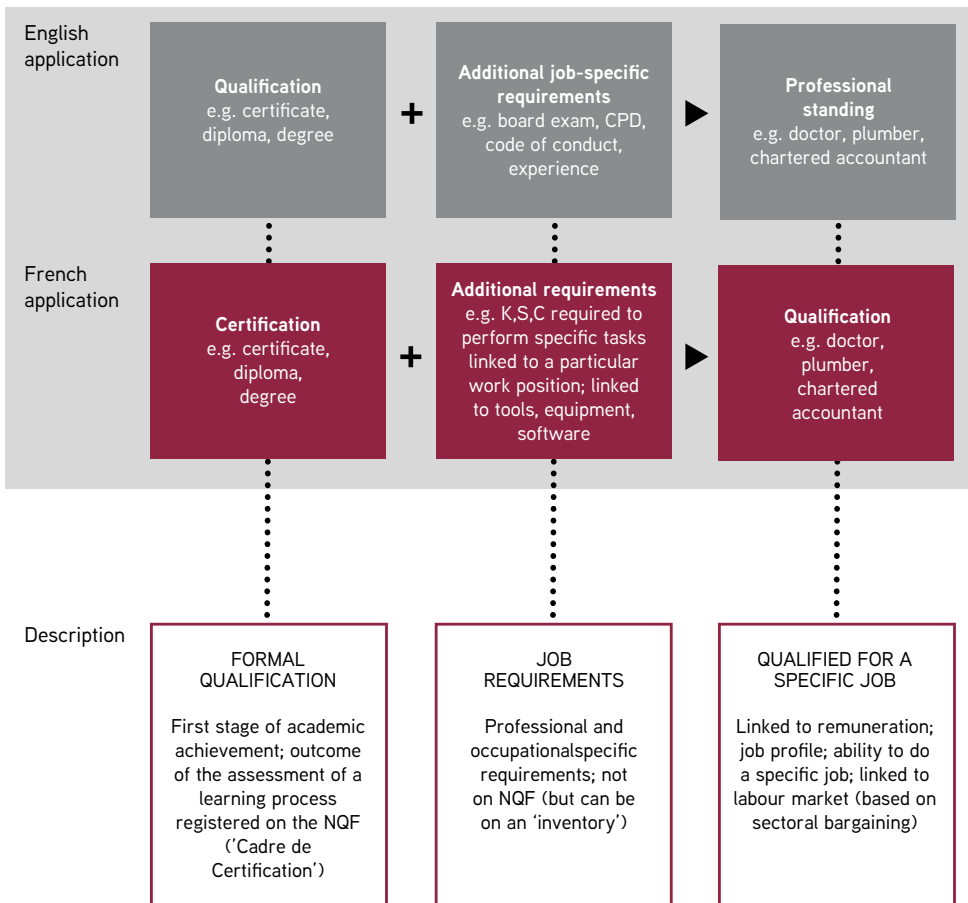
In the context of Morocco, the TVET system offers two types of this training-qualification relation: *formation diplômante* (training leading to a *diplôme, brevet, certificat*) and *formation qualifiante* (continuing training, not leading to a certification, but valued by employers for employment purposes). It should be mentioned that some French-speaking countries have adhered to the term 'qualification' as used in the English-speaking context. Examples are Tunisia and in the European Union, Luxembourg. The Tunisian NQF is called Classification Nationale des Qualifications, whereas Morocco's NQF is named Cadre National des Certifications.

Luxembourg also uses the terminology ‘qualification’, as defined in English-speaking contexts, as emphasised in the Referencing report of Luxembourg NQF to the EQF. This clarification is worth noticing:

One of the features of the CLQ [Cadre Luxembourgeois de Qualifications] concerns the terminology it uses. Although the French word ‘certification’ is used in the official European texts as the equivalent of the word ‘qualification’ in English, here in the Grand Duchy, further to the initial discussions on developing a national framework, we have preferred to opt for using the word ‘qualification’ in French, because this both includes the notion of certification and establishes a link with the employment world.

Figure 4 provides a high-level summary of the similarities and differences across English- and French-speaking countries. It is hoped that this summary can be expanded in the ACQF process to include other nuances in the interpretation and use of key qualifications concepts.

**Figure 4:** Different concepts on qualifications



Source: Adapted from an earlier diagram prepared in consultation with Borhene Chakroun, James Keevy, Kayllash Allgoo, Patrick Werquin, Anne-Marie Charraud and Herve Huot-Marchand

Most of the French-speaking countries in Africa adhered to and implemented the LMD system, based on the three-cycle structure of degrees, underpinned by a credit system. Two directives of regional scope have been enacted establishing the LMD system:

- Directive 02/06-UEAC-019-CM-14 of 10 March 2006: organising higher education studies in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community in the framework of the LMD system (Central Africa); and
- Directive 03/2007/CM/UEMOA of 4 July 2007: adopting the system LMD in the universities and higher education institutions in West African Monetary and Economic Union (also known by the French acronym, UEMOA).

This mapping study took stock of a range of qualifications with common understanding elements in many French-speaking countries: Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP), Baccalauréat, Brevet of Higher Technician (BTS), Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (DUT), Diplôme d'Études Universitaires Générales (DEUG), Diplômes d'Études Universitaires Professionnelles (DEUP), Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Scientifiques (DUES), Licence (Academic, Professional, Technology), Master (Professional, Academic, Specialised), Engineering Diploma. But common designations and reference points do not necessarily mean full comparability of qualifications in different countries. The structure of education cycles and institutional organisations in each country determines different outcomes of learning associated with qualifications sharing similar designations across countries.

### ***Competence-based approach in TVET systems***

Several French-speaking countries have adopted a competence-based approach to TVET programmes and qualifications. Morocco and Tunisia have engaged with the APC for more than a decade, developing a large number of TVET programmes (all levels) and comprehensive methodological packages. The APC tradition is well anchored and was supported by several rounds of partnerships and technical assistance with Canada. In the case of Cameroon, the APC reform started in 2004 and has been applied to the design of the majority of programmes of secondary technical education. Implementation of APC-based training is not always granted after the collection of standards, programmes and assessment has been approved for new profiles and specialisations. There are several reasons for this, ranging from institutional preferences to high technical and pedagogical requirements to make these programmes operational at providers' level. The APC is not the sole learning outcomes-based approach to TVET, as the case of Morocco exemplifies.

### **Countries with Portuguese traditions in education and training**

Four of the five Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa have adopted and are developing or implementing NQFs. This mapping report provides ample evidence on NQF trends and achievements in Angola, Cape Verde and Mozambique. Guinea-Bissau started developing its NQF in 2020, supported by international partners. São Tomé and Príncipe is conscious of the interest to start a roadmap towards its NQF, and the ACQF process is likely to contribute to support this motivation. The concept of 'qualification' applied in these countries does not differ from international definitions used in this report.

In other dimensions of their qualifications systems, these countries share some similarities – especially the three-cycle structure and credit system of the higher education degrees (Cape Verde and Mozambique) and the use of the competence-based approach (APC type) for TVET (Cape Verde and Mozambique). The level descriptors of the NQFs are broadly shared: Cape

Verde and Mozambique have both opted for the combination of three domains: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy. Some differences can be noted in the structure of the NQF (Cape Verde is the only case with the eight-level structure) and in the greatly differing architecture of TVET systems (levels and institutions).

In these countries, the NQF is evidently one of the components of the wider national qualifications system, not a separated or isolated policy instrument. The NQF works together with the other essential instruments and components – the national catalogue of qualifications, the QA system and the system of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This systemic attachment of the NQF is defined in policy documents and the legal basis and is put in practice by the governance set-up. The NQF experience of Cape Verde is the most advanced and shows how the national qualifications system coordination body embraces all the above-mentioned components. The case of Mozambique has the particularity that the qualifications framework experience so far has been based on sectoral frameworks (TVET and higher education). Nonetheless, the TVET qualifications framework is a component of the wider system of QA and governance of TVET, and the higher education qualifications framework is closely linked with the system of QA (evaluation and accreditation). Angola is following the same systemic approach in conceptualising and designing its NQF – various components and instruments converging together. The three country reports (Angola, Cape Verde and Mozambique) included in this mapping study provide ample evidence of this view of the place and role of the NQF in the wider system.

The NQF fulfils objectives of a domestic nature, but is also clearly oriented to position the countries' qualifications and levels in the relevant regional context. References to this international comparability and integration role of the NQF are clearly specified in the legal basis of the NQF of Cape Verde and integrated NQF of Mozambique. The former is eager to align and compare with the European Qualifications Framework and cooperate with frameworks and systems in ECOWAS. At the same time, Mozambique is focused and oriented to SADC and the commitment to align the NQF with the ten-level structure of the SADC RQF. The current NQF reflection process in Angola is aligned with the SADC RQF too.

## 10. The interplay between NQFs, RQFs and the ACQF

The mapping study has highlighted the fact that the interplay between emerging RQFs, the various NQFs across Africa and the proposed ACQF will be a critical factor for future work in this area. While NQFs are quite distinct in their orientation and purpose, the potential cooperation and complementarity between the RQFs and the ACQF needs a foundation based on a shared vision, acknowledgement of specific key regional interests and goals, and consideration of economies of scale. Dialogue, consultation and trust-building will be essential in shaping the priority functions and operational modes of the ACQF towards NQFs and RQFs in Africa. Of importance is a future-oriented vision, in which new learning, new types of certificates and of awarding tools are part of the menu for every qualifications reform and framework.

CESA 16–25 priority objective 4 (c and d) provides the political vision and foundation for the wide scope of the ACQF in its interrelations with regional and national qualifications frameworks on the continent. The findings of this mapping study and ongoing peer exchanges with RECs and national-level (NQF) authorities supply evidence supporting the ACQF's development options for effective, sustainable and pertinent cooperation with the existing RQFs on the continent (such as the SADCQF, EAC RQF and others in development), and with RQFs involving African NQFs (such as the Arab Qualifications Framework). The concrete objectives, modalities and

legal format of the interrelations between continental, regional and national levels will be the subject of political deliberations and technical and organisational analysis. The advantages and disadvantages of each scenario must be carefully unpacked and, critically, the process and reaching some form of consensus should be done through social dialogue. Building trust during this process will be essential to ensure that the implementation of the model can be done in a sustainable, constructive and coordinated manner.

## 11. Conclusion

Interest in experience sharing and peer learning regarding issues related to qualifications frameworks and systems is high among the African countries. The ACQF is seen as a catalyst for policy learning, for convergence of practices and tools enabling comparable and transparent qualifications, and eventually for fair mobility. Most countries expect the ACQF to support developments of qualifications frameworks and operational mechanisms at regional and national levels.

This mapping study and the process and outputs planned in the context of the ACQF development project contribute to a first stage (or scenario) towards the future ACQF: a platform and network for increased harmonisation, transparency and easily accessible information on qualifications frameworks and systems across the continent. Most importantly: a continental qualifications framework for the people.

## Main sources of this synthesis report

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