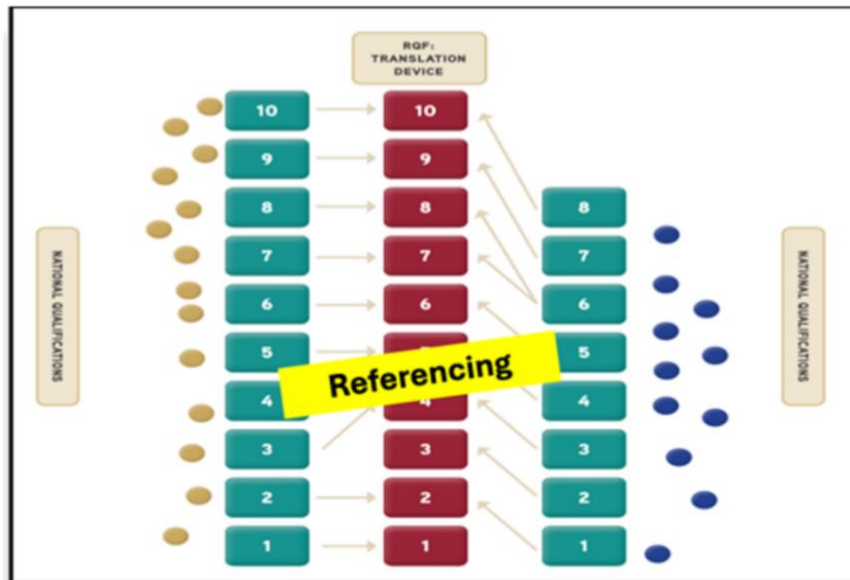




Technical Note

Linkages and Complementarities between the Addis Recognition Convention, National Qualifications Frameworks and the African Continental Qualifications Framework



This **Technical Note** is elaborated in the context of the Implementation Plan of the project “Supporting Implementation of the African Continental Qualifications Framework” (ACQF-II).

Views and opinions expressed in the document are the responsibility of the authors and should in no way be attributed to the institutions to which they are affiliated, or to the African Union Commission and the project implementation institution – the European Training Foundation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
APNNIC	Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres
ARC	Addis Recognition Convention
AU	African Union
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ENIC	European Network of National Information Centres
GRC	Global Recognition Convention
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LRC	Lisbon Recognition Convention
LRCC	Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NIC	National Information Centre
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
NUFFIC	Dutch Organisation for Internationalisation in Education
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
SADCQVN	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Verification Network
TCCA	Technical Committee of Certification and Accreditation

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1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE OF THIS TECHNICAL NOTE

The recognition of qualifications and credentials between and among countries has for a long time been considered as one of the major factors to increase collaboration among education systems and institutions and support the creation of academic and labour mobility programmes. Thus, regional conventions of mutual recognition of qualifications are crucial since they provide the legal instruments needed to support recognition of qualifications and credentials.

It was in view of the foregoing that the African regional convention was first adopted in December 1981 in Arusha, Tanzania and later on updated in Addis Ababa in 2014. The current (Revised) Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States, also known as the Addis Recognition Convention (ARC), establishes a legal framework for the fair and transparent recognition of higher education qualifications in the African region. The convention aims at supporting academic mobility and exchange among African States and to strengthen trust in the quality enhancement of institutions, learning programmes and systems, while also providing a pivotal network for advancing the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for equitable access to education and training in the region. Thus, the ARC is viewed as a critical instrument in strengthening and promoting inter-regional and international co-operation in the field of recognition of qualifications and credentials.

It is important to note that whilst each African Member State may have its own policies, guidelines and procedures for recognition of qualifications and credentials stemming from the existence of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), these can be facilitated more effectively by the development of regionally harmonised and eventually standardised policies, guidelines and procedures regarding recognition of qualifications. This conception has been ably supported by Article IV.8 (3) of the Addis Recognition Convention on National Implementation Structures, which states that “Parties agree to make use of national and regional qualifications frameworks, where they exist, in the recognition processes”.

Further, the need for a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) is amplified in the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, adopted by the 30th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, which specifies in its Article 18 on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications, that “The States Parties shall establish a continental qualifications framework to encourage and promote the free movement of persons”. The interdependence and complementary nature of the ARC, NQFs and RQFs was one of the driving force behind the development of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

This technical note aims to illustrate how the ARC, NQFs and the ACQF can work in cooperation and complementarity on the African continent with a view to:

- a) Contributing to comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and credentials on the continent;
- b) Facilitating recognition of different types of qualifications and credentials thereby supporting mobility of learners, workers and services; and
- c) Promoting cooperation and referencing between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa.

2. MAIN CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS ON KEY TOPICS AND ISSUES

2.1 Qualifications Frameworks

A national qualifications framework is an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels (ACQF, 2022b). It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes.

Further, according to the European Qualifications Framework Recommendation of 2017, a national qualifications framework (NQF) is defined 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.

National qualifications frameworks have varying purposes, depending on the needs of the country and the level of implementation of their qualifications system. National qualifications frameworks are communication devices, used to aid the transparency and trust of individual qualifications, and to support economic priorities (e.g., meet labour market needs) or social priorities (e.g., lifelong learning), (ACQF, 2022b).

Countries develop qualifications frameworks for a range of purposes, which may be implicit or explicit. Purposes are often documented in preliminary papers and may have underlying national economic, social and ethical motivations – the national perspective. The underpinning purpose of the NQF can affect the governance arrangements of the responsible body within a country. NQFs can vary in terms of whether they are tight or loose frameworks, noting that NQFs which are tight are generally based on legislation or regulation with which accreditation of qualifications are to comply. As such, there are often common rules and procedures for the development and approval of qualifications for all education and training sectors. Loose frameworks, on the other hand, tend to be based on general principles and are more guidance rather than requirements to comply with. The notion of loose or tight frameworks is more related to how the quality assurance arrangements are implemented as opposed to the NQF policy instrument (ACQF, 2022b).

A Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF), on the other hand, is understood to be broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. It is a means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country (ACQF, 2022b) – the regional perspective.

The international dimension of both national and regional qualifications frameworks is that they support mutual recognition and the transparency of qualifications across different jurisdictions.

2.2 Recognition of Qualifications and Credentials

Recognition of qualifications and credentials is a formal acknowledgement by a competent recognition authority regarding the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, credential, partial studies or prior learning/ acquired experience. Recognition of qualifications and credentials aims to provide an applicant with outcomes, including, but not limited to, the right to apply for admission to further education or training and the possibility to seek employment opportunities (ACQF, 2022a).

The process for recognition of qualifications and credentials involves a number of steps aimed at establishing the authenticity and comparability of qualifications or credentials. The following approach is based on common features of policies and practices used in the recognition process:

a) Establishing the legal status of the awarding body

In some jurisdictions, awarding bodies draw their mandate to award qualifications and credentials from statutes establishing them, while in others, the authority is conferred upon the awarding bodies through charters, decrees or accreditation by quality assurance bodies. Whichever the case, awarding bodies must have the legal mandate to award qualifications and credentials.

b) Establishing the authenticity of the qualification

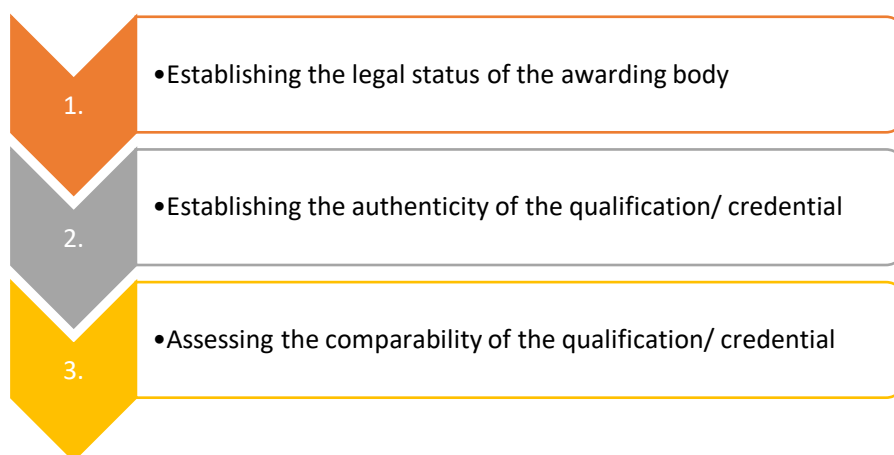
At this stage, confirmation is sought from the awarding body to affirm the awarding of the qualification or credential. However, the confirmation can also be obtained through private third party credential evaluators or foreign missions. During this process, it is also essential to establish whether or not the qualification or credential holder was enrolled by the awarding body and

whether the duration and other requirements for award of the qualification or credential were met.

c) Assessing the comparability of qualification

Assessment of the comparability of qualifications or credentials, also known as evaluation of qualifications or credentials, is carried out by making a comparison of the national level descriptors or specific programme learning outcomes from the source country to the national level descriptors of the receiving country. In addition to the process described above, comparison of the duration and entry requirements for a qualification or credential from the source country against that from the receiving country should be undertaken.

Figure 1: Steps in the qualifications and credentials recognition process



Note: Refer to ACQF Guideline 4 and Training Module 4 on Validation and Recognition of Learning, for a detailed step by step qualifications recognition process.

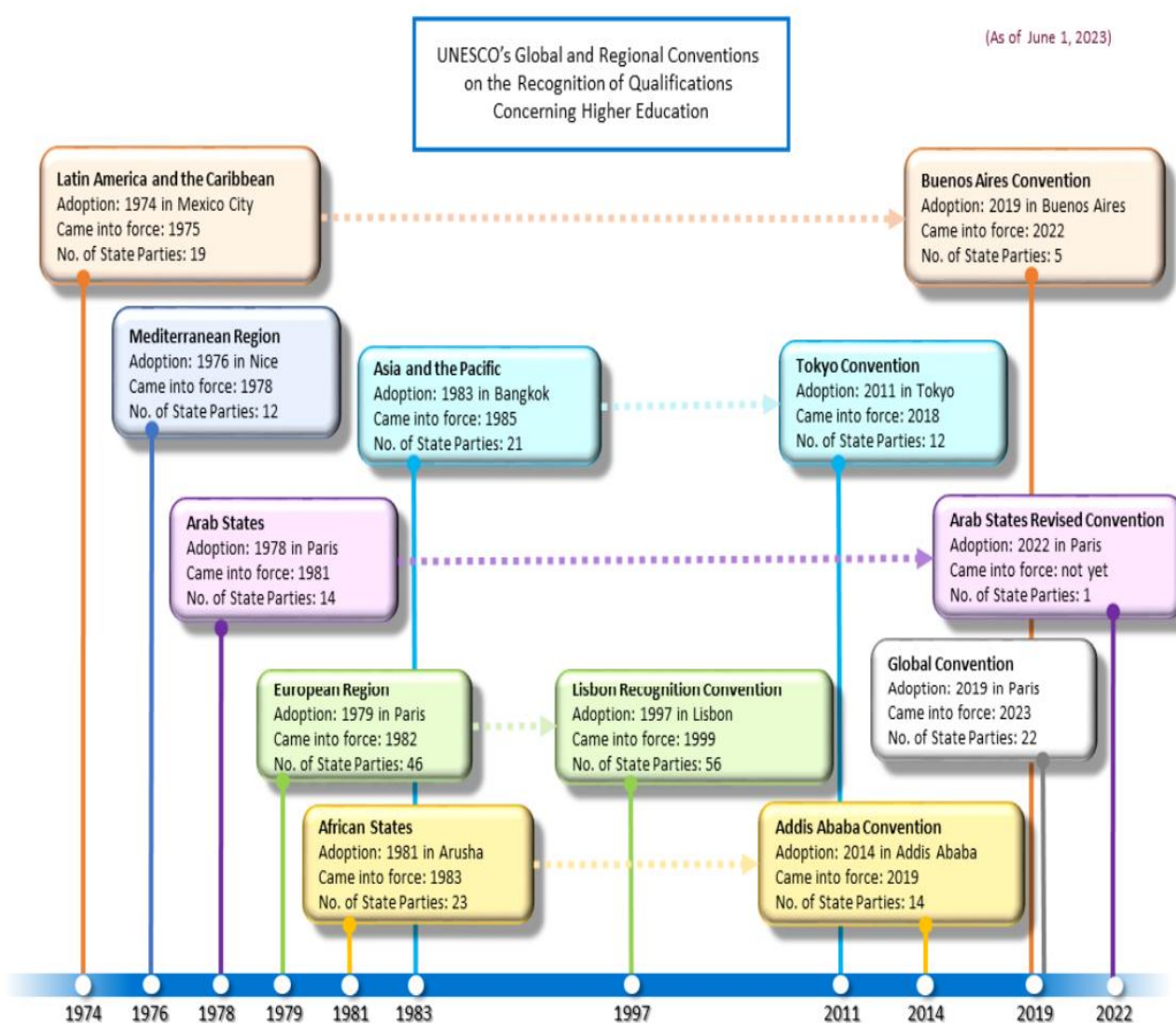
2.3 Regional Recognition Conventions

Generally speaking, Regional Conventions are binding agreements between States in a given region. They help to localise and contextualise international norms and standards. They are often negotiated under the auspices of regional intergovernmental organisations such as the African Union or the European Union (<https://bettercarenetwork.org/practitioner-library/legal-and-policy-framework/regional-conventions-and-action-plans#:~:text=Regional%20Conventions%20are%20binding%20agreements,Union%20or%20the%20European%20Union>).

When applied to the recognition of qualifications and credentials, the UNESCO Regional Recognition Conventions are seen as legally binding instruments which have been ratified by member states in different regions of the world. The main objectives of the conventions are to promote international cooperation in higher education and to reduce obstacles to the mobility of teachers and students through mutual recognition of qualifications and credentials by the countries that are ratified by them (https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/quality-and-recognition-in-higher-education/unesco-conventions-on-the-recognition-of-qualification_9789264015104-11-en#page3). These conventions constitute a unique legal framework, and 140 Member States have ratified, acceded to, or approved more than one convention. The conventions are focused on allowing the recognition of qualifications and credentials in higher education between “States Parties” (signatory states), subject to national legislation, for academic and professional purposes. At present, the conventions refer solely to the mutual recognition by signatory states of qualifications and credentials issued by educational institutions that are part of the education system of a UNESCO Member State. (https://www.cicic.ca/1408/unesco_regional_conventions_on_the_recognition_of_qualifications.canada)

Figure 2: Timeline of the UNESCO Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education. Source: <https://www.nicjp.niad.ac.jp/en/site/unesco-conventions.html>.

In order to amalgamate recognition efforts at regional levels, the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was adopted by the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019, becoming the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope. The Global Recognition Convention (GRC) establishes universal principles for fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education and offering avenues for further study and employment. The Global Convention also facilitates



the recognition of qualifications and credentials, prior learning and study periods earned remotely. In addition, it promotes the recognition of refugees' qualifications, even in cases where documentary evidence is lacking.

By ratifying the Addis Recognition Convention and the Global Convention, African Member States commit to strengthening bilateral and international cooperation in higher education, raising its quality at home and worldwide, and helping make academic and labour mobility, as well as the recognition of qualifications and credentials a reality for millions around the globe.

3. LINKAGES BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND KEY COMPONENTS OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

3.1 Recognition and Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are one of the big movements in education and training at present. The increasing need for targeted, flexible acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences that meet new and emerging needs in society and the labour market, and the possibility for individuals to fill the skill gaps they need to succeed in a fast-changing environment, have all given impetus to the raise of micro-credentials.

Micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills, and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials can be seen as a way to tailor the learning offer and to make visible the knowledge, skills and competences acquired.

Thus, there is need for countries and regions to establish legal grounds for the academic recognition of micro-credentials and support their fast and fair recognition. Countries are also encouraged to explore the possibility of recognition agreements on micro-credentials among education providers, also at regional and cross-regional levels. There is also need for countries and regions to include micro-credentials in recognition manuals and guidelines so as to support the development of day-to-day recognition practices.

3.2 Recognition and Green Skills

Green skills are undoubtedly an important area of debate and policy action, and which has become a priority in research (quantitative and qualitative) and social communication lately. Several international organisations are working on the analysis and taxonomies related to green competences.

Green skills are the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to live, work and act in economies and societies that seek to reduce the impact of human activity on the environment". The Green Transition will enable job creation and economic growth, but requires adequate skills and competences.

Thus, recognition of green skills and competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts is key in boosting the greening transition which seeks to improve efficiency in the use of energy and raw materials, limit greenhouse gas emissions, minimize waste and pollution, protect and restore ecosystems, and support adaptation to the effects of climate change.

3.3 Recognition and Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems

Credit accumulation and transfer systems (CATS) are becoming increasingly imperative in the context of internationalisation of education, mobility of learners, rise of micro-credentials, recognition of learning periods and qualifications, lifelong flexible pathways for learning and the increasing demand for recognition of learning achieved via non-formal and informal learning contexts.

Thus, most countries have embarked on developing functional and coherent CATS policies and guidelines that are encompassing all forms of learning and aligned with international good practice. The development of CATS policies and guidelines, and linking them to NQFs and RPL will, without a doubt, ease the understanding and comparability of qualifications and credentials, thereby facilitating recognition and portability of the qualifications and credentials.

3.4 Recognition and Lifelong Learning through the Recognition of Prior Learning

People learn anytime and everywhere. Outcomes of prior learning in all contexts of life often remain invisible, while they can be validated, recognised, certified to give people access to new perspectives and opportunities in education and training, decent employment, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and career progression. Across the world, countries and regional communities increasingly acknowledge the value of non-formal and informal learning and many are establishing systems to make visible people's skills and knowledge gained in all learning contexts.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) implies the formal validation and certification of learning outcomes acquired in all learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal). RPL is learner-centred, and individuals may combine RPL with training modules to complete a full qualification.

Recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications obtained through RPL promotes learner and graduate mobility and lifelong learning.

3.5 Recognition and Articulation

Articulation can be understood to mean the progression of students from one course to another, or from one education and training sector to another. Articulation arrangements facilitate the movement from a completed qualification to another with admission and/or credit in a defined qualification pathway.

Articulation arrangements broaden access into formal learning and may be a potential source of credit based on student achievement through formal learning. Articulation arrangements provide a seamless pathway with automatic admission into one qualification from another.

Articulation arrangements may include:

- a) Clustered qualifications involving lower qualifications that are embedded completely in the next qualification with multiple exit and entry points (an articulated suite of qualifications), or
- b) Partially clustered qualifications that include some qualification components of the lower level qualification nested into the linked qualification, or
- c) Arrangements where two separately designed qualifications are linked to each other to form a defined qualification linkage and credit pathway.

Recognition of previously acquired learning outcomes and qualifications/ credentials (regardless of the learning context) supports articulation, leading to enhanced learner mobility and progression.

3.6 Recognition and Digitalisation and Modern registers of Qualifications/ Credentials

Trends such as digitalisation, migration and sustainability have created a demand for innovations in key areas of the development, management, and revision of national and regional qualifications frameworks. Such innovations allow for improvements in labour market intelligence, yield new data sources and analysis methods, improve efficiencies, and allow education systems to respond to the needs of individuals, societies and the world of work. New types of recognition of learning such as micro-credentials and digital credentials are emerging, non-formal learning and alternative learning pathways are increasingly being recognised, and innovations such as partially-automated credential comparison and qualification passports have been introduced to allow greater labour mobility and opportunities for migrants.

In many countries around the world, authorities and departments managing qualifications and credentials at national level are taking steps to improve and modernise the tools, technology and methods used to structure, manage and visualise information and data on qualifications and credentials, including digitisation of recognition processes through the use of management information systems.

Digital registers of qualifications and credentials are an example of digital tools being deployed in the management of information related to qualifications and credentials. These registers are essential for transparency and information-sharing. Minimum qualification and credential information fields for electronic publication in digital databases are useful for comparability of qualifications and credentials between countries in a region, thus facilitating the recognition of the qualifications and credentials. Accordingly, qualifications authorities, awarding bodies, and education and training institutions shall all contribute to the systematisation and delivery of updated and reliable information on all qualifications and credentials in readable and digital format, secured and accessible for the public, so as to smoothen and enhance the efficiency of recognition processes.

4. POINTS OF INTERSECTION AND SYNERGY BETWEEN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS/ CREDENTIALS

National Qualifications Frameworks are important information and transparency tools in the recognition of qualifications and credentials. They play a key role in providing clear information to local and international stakeholders on qualifications issued within a country, as well as the existing quality assurance arrangements, so as to build confidence and trust in the qualifications (ACQF, 2022b).

From a lifelong learning point of view, NQFs can also facilitate the recognition of prior learning, since they describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes independently from learning paths. Undoubtedly, NQFs are critical tools for establishing similarities between foreign qualifications and relevant qualifications within the education system in which recognition is sought, and whether or not there are substantial differences between qualifications. It is imperative to note that NQFs facilitate recognition especially when they have been linked in a transparent and comparative way – through self-certification and referencing – to the regional frameworks, such as the ACQF. The positioning of qualifications within the NQF of the awarding country and their relation to one or more regional frameworks gives important information to facilitate the recognition processes.

5. USE OF INFORMATION ON NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN QUALIFICATIONS/ CREDENTIALS RECOGNITION PROCESSES

The recognition of qualifications and credentials is now at the very center of global policy discussions in the field of education and training. Fair recognition is acknowledged to be the cornerstone of the internationalisation of education and training, and of learner and worker mobility. It is a well-known fact, that, fair recognition can only be a reality if reliable information on NQFs and RQFs is made available in a timely and consistent manner. This requirement is echoed in the ARC under Article IV.8, 3 on National Implementation Structures, in which it is stated that “Parties agree to make use of national and regional qualifications frameworks, where they exist, in the recognition processes”.

Thus, countries must ensure that information on their NQFs is readily accessible to international recognition agencies and other stakeholders. The information should include; (1) Details of NQFs, including qualification levels, level descriptors and qualification types, (2) Details and links to national registers of approved providers and registered qualifications and, (3) Details of quality assurance bodies and quality assurance processes – including policies, guidelines and procedures (ACQF, 2022b - adapted). Countries are also strongly encouraged to reference their NQFs to RQFs, and use NQF and RQF levels on national qualifications documents. The use of qualification/ diploma supplements is a concrete example of how information on NQFs and RQFs can be better packaged to effectively support recognition processes.

6. INFORMATION-SHARING, BUILDING TRUST: NETWORK OF NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

In order to ensure comparability and recognition of qualifications/ credentials, and support mobility and progression of students across the continent and beyond, African countries need to put in place mechanisms for sharing of information pertaining to recognition of qualifications/ credentials in their jurisdictions. This requirement is well supported by Article IV.3 of the ARC which states that, “Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent, reliable, fair and non-discriminatory, in particular, **by making public such procedures and criteria**”.

Article IV.4 of the ARC also emphasises the need for information sharing by stating that, “Parties shall ensure that decisions on recognition of qualifications are made in the following manner: a. Decisions on recognition are made **on the basis of appropriate information on the qualifications** for which recognition is sought; c. Parties shall instruct, or encourage, as appropriate, all education institutions belonging to their

education systems to **comply with any reasonable request for information** for the purpose of assessing qualifications earned at the said institutions and; d. Parties shall encourage institutions belonging to their education systems to **provide, upon request and within a reasonable timeframe, relevant information** to the holder of the qualifications or to the institution or the competent recognition authority of the Party in which recognition is sought". Article IV.5 backs up the preceding article by stating that, "**Each Party shall ensure**, that in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, **adequate and clear information on its education system is provided**".

The need for information sharing to facilitate the recognition of qualifications/ credentials become even more pronounced in the ARC under Article IV.8,5 on National Implementation Structures, where it is stated that, "Parties, in order to reinforce exchanges of information on recognition of qualifications in higher education, agree to **have a system to collect and disseminate information and successful experiences as regards recognition of qualifications**, as well as mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation of institutions and programmes. This may take the form of a national information service. **Parties agree to make available to all other Parties complete, reliable and regularly updated data and information about level of enrolment, recognized higher education institutions, programmes, subjects, studies, degrees, qualifications, as well as the recognition of higher education qualifications and diplomas in their territories**". Article IV.8,5 is well in line with Article IV.10 on African Network of National Implementation Structures which states that, "1. **A network of national implementation structures providing information on mobility and recognition shall be established** to assist the practical implementation of this Convention by the competent recognition authorities by **facilitating the exchange of information** among the Parties relating to recognition and mobility, as well as counter-fraud measures; and 2. Parties shall appoint representatives from the national implementation structures to the African network".

Riding on the above provisions, an important milestone was reached for the recognition of higher education qualifications and credentials in Africa on 15th September 2022, with the launch of African Network of National Implementation Structures. The network brought together recognition authorities from the 14 States, which were then Parties of the Addis Convention for Africa, with the aim to promote exchange of information, capacity development and peer learning in order to strengthen recognition and academic mobility on the continent (<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/network-launched-recognition-higher-education-qualifications-africa>). However, the network still requires operationalisation.

7. MAIN BENEFITS AND BENEFICIARIES OF MORE EFFECTIVE LINKAGES BETWEEN RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS/ CREDENTIALS, NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Effective linkages between recognition of qualifications and credentials, NQFs and the ACQF act as cementitious binding materials between countries and institutions within and across the African continent. Beyond the ultimate goal of promoting intra-regional and inter-regional integration, they are beneficial in the following ways:

- a) They provide a mechanism for countries to facilitate recognition of qualifications and credentials on the basic principles of reliable and consistent information and transparency.
- b) They make student mobility more attractive as an opportunity to upgrade their learning, acquire skills and knowledge in an international environment, which in turn impacts on the productivity and social transformation of their societies.
- c) The linkages guarantee efficient, transparent, accessible and effective student and labour mobility.
- d) They contribute to the establishment of equitable, symmetrical and important regional integration, based on solidary academic cooperation.
- e) They offer transparent and updated information on institutions, curricular content and performance profile, which inspires confidence among higher education actors.

Entities that benefit from effective linkages between recognition, NQFs and the ACQF include, among them, the following:

- a) Policy makers – central governments/ ministries/ departments/ agencies.
- b) Competent recognition authorities/ NQF Authorities.
- c) Credential evaluators.
- d) Professional bodies.
- e) Education and training institutions.
- f) Quality assurance bodies/ sector regulators.
- g) Students.
- h) Employers.
- i) Prospective employees.
- j) Recruitment agencies.

8. MAIN EXPERIENCES / CONTENT FROM LISBON AND TOKYO RECOGNITION CONVENTIONS

8.1 The Lisbon Recognition Convention (Lisbon Convention)

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, also known as [the Lisbon Recognition Convention \(LRC\)](https://www.enic-naric.net/page-lisbon-recognition-convention#:~:text=Each%20country%20shall%20recognise%20qualifications,own%20qualifications%20and%20the%20qualifications), aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have adequate access to an assessment of the qualification in another country in a fair, flexible, and transparent way. The LRC is the key legal instrument regulating recognition of higher education qualifications from abroad across Europe and North American regions and was adopted in 1997. It has been signed and ratified by 55 countries and was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO (<https://www.enic-naric.net/page-lisbon-recognition-convention#:~:text=Each%20country%20shall%20recognise%20qualifications,own%20qualifications%20and%20the%20qualifications>).

The LRC emphasises that a foreign qualification must be recognised unless the recognising authority (in most cases a higher education institution) can demonstrate that the foreign qualification is substantially different from a national qualification that would grant access to the desired learning activity (typically an academic programme). It also stresses that higher education institutions must provide accurate, up-to-date, and transparent information to potential applicants on how to initiate a recognition procedure and the steps involved.

The following is a selection of the key points of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (<https://www.enic-naric.net/page-lisbon-recognition-convention#:~:text=Each%20country%20shall%20recognise%20qualifications,own%20qualifications%20and%20the%20qualifications>):

- a) No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic, or social origin.
- b) The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.
- c) Each country shall recognise qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees – as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
- d) Recognition of a higher education qualification issued in another country shall have one or more of the following consequences: access to further higher education studies, use of an academic title, and access to the labour market.

- e) All countries shall develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence.
- f) All countries shall provide information on the institutions and programmes they consider as belonging to their higher education systems.
- g) All countries shall appoint a national information centre, one important task of which is to offer advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons. A national Information Centre (ENIC or ENIC-NARIC) is an entity established by each Party to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. The national information centre reports to its respective national competent authority (Ministry of Education or similar body) as a Party to the LRC. Upon request, the national information centre may provide information to UNESCO and the Council of Europe, in their role as Co-Secretariats of the LRC, but also to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC). The status and mandate of the national information centre is determined by the respective national competent authority. However, a national information centre should abide by LRC provisions, including the 2004 Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services, and the 2019 Guidelines for National Online Information Systems. Depending on the implementation structure, some Parties may also mandate their national information centre to evaluate qualifications held by individuals, and thus issue recognition advice/recommendation or legally-binding recognition decisions.
- h) All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition.

8.1.1 Lisbon Recognition Convention: Subsidiary Text June 2013 (1)

The Subsidiary Text of June 2013 (1) titled “RECOMMENDATION ON THE USE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS” indicate that the Council of Europe and UNESCO aim to achieve greater unity between their members.

Article III, on recommendations to the Subsidiary Text provides that:

- 1) The competent recognition authorities, and the ENIC Network should develop a common understanding on how to use national, European or other overarching qualifications frameworks for the purpose of facilitating the fair recognition of qualifications and should identify the opportunities and challenges they present.
- 2) Qualifications frameworks should be used to make it easier for competent recognition authorities to assess foreign qualifications.
- 3) Qualifications frameworks should be used while considering the five key elements in recognition: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile. However, qualifications frameworks provide limited information to support the recognition process when it comes to the profile of a qualification.
- 4) The following principles should apply to assure the effective use of qualifications frameworks in recognition practice:
 - a) **Level:**
 - i. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is, as a general rule, no need for the competent recognition authority to investigate the level of qualifications further; and

- ii. In the case that qualifications have been referenced/self-certified towards the same level in overarching frameworks, they should be seen as broadly compatible.

b) Learning outcomes:

- i. The learning outcomes of National Qualifications Frameworks and of overarching qualifications frameworks are generic and provide a reference point for recognition; and
- ii. In cases where the learning outcomes provided by the qualifications frameworks are insufficient for recognition purposes, the more detailed descriptions of learning outcomes provided by institutions should be used. The description of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement or other documents is useful for recognition purposes.

c) Quality:

- i. A transparent link between recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance should be established; and
- ii. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is an assumption that the individual qualifications included in the framework by the competent authority are quality assured. Therefore, as a general rule, there is no need for the recognition authority to investigate the quality of the qualification.

d) Workload:

While recognising that qualifications should as far as possible be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes, competent recognition authorities may also be guided in their assessment by the workload learners are assumed to require in order to obtain the given qualification. This is normally expressed as credits and indicates the typical workload expected to achieve the learning outcomes associated with a qualification.

8.2 The Tokyo Recognition Convention (Tokyo Convention)

The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, also referred to as Tokyo Convention, was adopted in November 2011 in Tokyo, Japan. It is the second generation of the Asia-Pacific Convention and a replacement to the Bangkok Convention which was adopted in 1983 in Bangkok, Thailand. With the adoption of the Tokyo Convention, the Asia-Pacific has become the second region in the world to have a revised regional recognition convention after Europe's Lisbon Convention which was adopted in 1997. As at 19 April, 2022, 11 member states and the Holy See had ratified the Tokyo Convention (<https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/evolution-tokyo-convention-lessons-and-insights>).

It is a key requirement that after the Tokyo Convention enters into force at the national level, parties to the convention need to identify competent recognition authorities. These recognition authorities can be ministries, specialised agencies, higher education institutions and employers, depending on whether systems are of a centralised or decentralised nature.

Parties to the convention also need to designate one entity or several entities to serve as national information centres (NICs). Countries tend to assign their existing quality assurance agencies as their recognition authorities and as their NICs. It is commonly understood that recognition decisions should be based on a process of comparing information to determine if there are substantial differences between foreign and domestic qualifications. Therefore, NICs can provide professional advice on foreign credentials based on an analysis and comparison of the information available which is then considered by recognition decision-makers. In many cases, these kinds of services are fee-paying in order to recover some of the

implied costs, especially as more people now possess foreign qualifications following the expansion of higher education opportunities within and across countries.

[The Tokyo Convention Committee](#) was set up, whose aim was to review the progress of the implementation of the Tokyo Convention, identify obstacles and gaps and push for the development of relevant guidelines and tools to help build the capacity of the parties when it comes to implementing the convention. Further, [the Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres \(APNNIC\)](#) web portal was jointly launched by the NICs of the parties to the Tokyo Convention in November 2020. This is the key regional recognition infrastructure which ensures that all NICs are connected efficiently through a common platform to promote transparency and fairness for information-based qualification recognition (<https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/evolution-tokyo-convention-lessons-and-insights>).

8.3 Lessons Learnt from the Lisbon and Tokyo Recognition Conventions

The following lessons can be drawn from the Lisbon and Tokyo Conventions:

- a) Having champions in the ministries and competent authorities concerned with recognition of qualifications and credentials is key. These champions should be identified, empowered and incentivised to initiate the ratification processes in the countries as they are in the driver's seat to engage with domestic and international stakeholders and experts for consensus-building and technical back-up.
- b) The development of strong narratives about the benefits of joining Regional and Global Recognition Conventions are extremely important for convincing national policy-makers and other stakeholders to support the ratification process.
- c) It is important to note that the Recognition Conventions require information transparency on qualifications from different countries. Information transparency with regard to quality assurance and qualifications frameworks is critical. This allows learning outcomes to be compared for a substantial difference check that can lead to a recognition decision.
- d) Qualifications frameworks should be used to make it easier for competent recognition authorities to assess foreign qualifications and credentials. Qualifications frameworks should be used while considering the five key elements in recognition: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile.
- e) Recognition decisions can hinder or facilitate cross-border mobility of students and professionals. Hence, there is need to ensure that due process is followed.
- f) Political commitment is critical for facilitating the ratification of Recognition Conventions. In many cases, this commitment is simply a matter of prioritising the ratification among other pressing issues on the government agenda to get the processes truly up and running.
- g) It is notable that ratifications of Recognition Conventions begin with countries with large numbers of inbound and outbound international students, as these countries have already got a big stake in the implementation of the Conventions. However, countries with fewer international students need to follow suit, if the importance of fair recognition for promoting inclusive and equitable access to quality higher education for all is to be felt on the African continent and beyond.
- h) There is no need to reinvent the wheel in implementing the Recognition Conventions as an integrated approach toward using and upgrading existing national entities and mechanisms could prove to be the most expeditious way forward.
- i) Diploma supplements are a critical tool in the recognition of qualifications and credentials in Europe. It would be worthwhile implementing them on the African continent.

- j) Recognition of refugees' qualifications and micro-credentials should form part and parcel of recognition procedures and processes.
- k) Bilateral agreements are a sure way of promoting automatic recognition of qualifications and credentials among countries and regions – quality assured once, recognised everywhere.
- l) It is important to take into consideration the purpose of recognition when assessing a foreign qualification or credential, in order to ensure that the assessment is accurate and relevant.
- m) Digitisation of recognition processes is aiding the effective and efficient recognition of qualifications and credentials.

9. CHALLENGES FACED IN THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDENTIALS IN AFRICA

Research has shown that there exist a number of challenges that humper the smooth and efficient recognition of qualifications and credentials in most countries on the African continent. These include, but not limited to, the following:

- a) Absence of NQFs or well elaborated National Qualifications Systems (NQSs) in some jurisdictions.
- b) Inadequate, and in some cases, lack of reliable and consistent information on education systems, qualifications and credentials/ learning programmes, institutions (regulatory and awarding) - including quality assurance mechanisms.
- c) Differences in structures, content and duration of qualifications and credentials.
- d) Delays in receiving confirmations to verification requests.
- e) Diploma and accreditation mills remain real threats to the credibility of qualifications and credentials in Africa.
- f) Absence of a fully functioning continental network to champion the sharing of information for recognition purposes.
- g) Limited capacities of credential/ qualification and credential verifiers/ evaluators.
- h) Lack of clear guidelines and procedures to inform the qualifications and credentials recognition processes.
- i) Slow efforts towards ratification and domestication of the ARC, GRC and referencing to RQFs.

10. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to promote effective, efficient, transparent and fair recognition of qualifications and credentials in Africa, the following interventions should be considered at both continental and country levels:

- a) Intensifying efforts towards the ratification and domestication of the ARC and GRC by all African Member States.

- b) Establishment of Competent Recognition Authorities and National Implementation Structures across the continent.
- c) Operationalisation of the African Network of National Implementation Structures.
- d) Development and implementation of NQFs – leveraging on the ACQF and other initiatives.
- e) Referencing of NQFs and RQFs to ACQF – no need to linger.
- f) Use of NQF, RQF and ACQF levels on qualification and credential documents.
- g) Introduction of qualification and credential supplements to ease the recognition process.
- h) Intensify collective efforts towards the recognition of qualifications and credentials for refugees and displaced persons.
- i) Automatic recognition – need to set the ball rolling.
- j) Take more pragmatic steps towards the recognition of micro-credentials in Africa – need to build on past discussions and engagements.

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