CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (CDP) 2021

THEMATIC CDP BRIEFS **4.1**

Regional qualifications frameworks (RQF)

3 CASE STUDIES: SADCQF, ASEAN QRF, EQF

African Union

THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP

LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

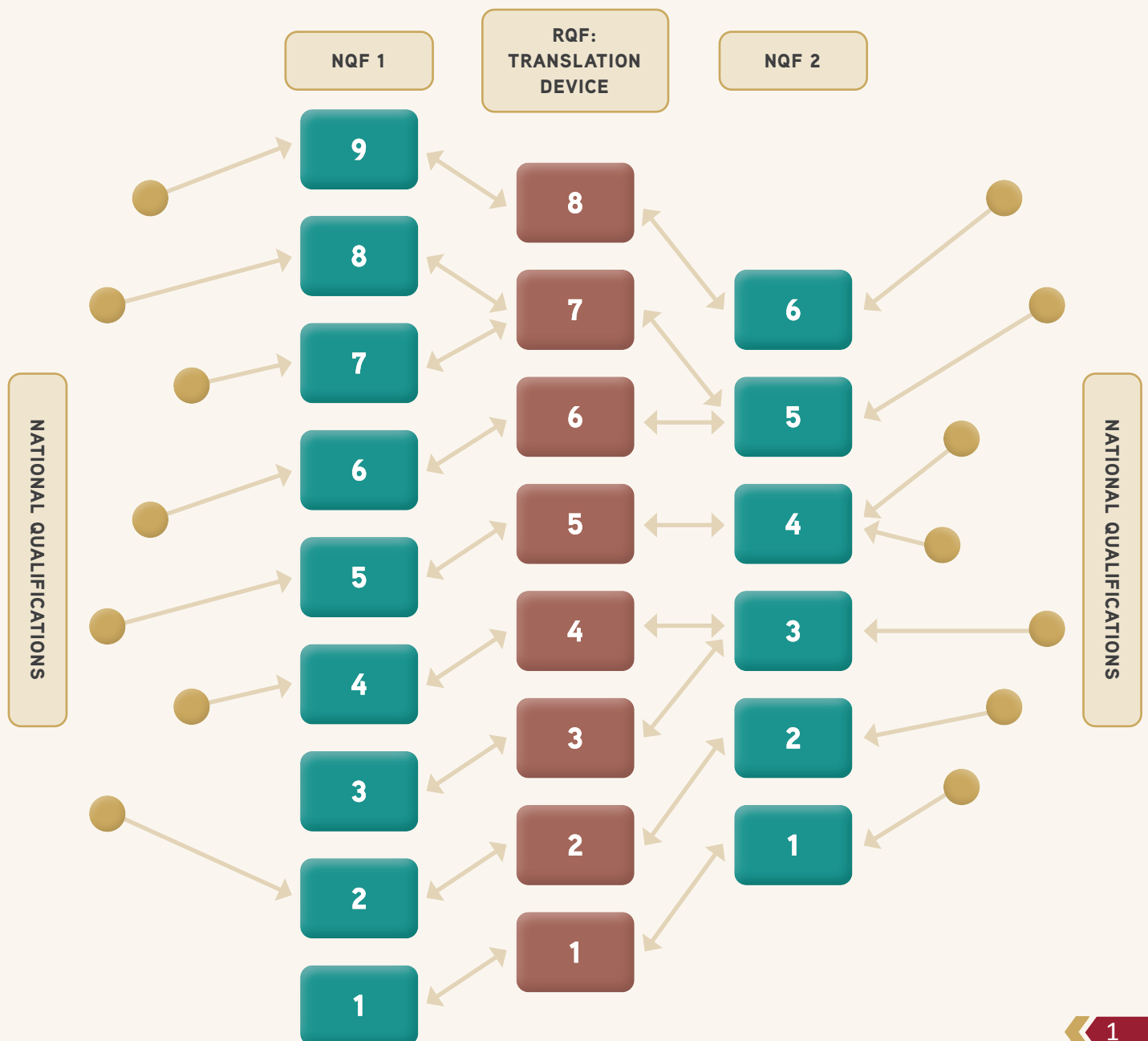## Capacity development programme (CDP) 2021

Thematic CDP briefs 4.1

Regional qualifications frameworks (RQF)

This Thematic brief provides an overview of Regional Qualifications Frameworks based on 3 practical examples from different continents: SADC Qualifications Framework (Africa), ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (Southeast Asia) and European Qualifications Framework (Europe)

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1 OVERVIEW ON REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS (RQF)

This thematic brief provides a comparative overview of main features, levels and descriptors, referencing / alignment practises and governance and technical foundations of three of the most active RQFs: SADCQF, ASEAN QRF and EQF.

RQFs are meta-frameworks, which support approximation and trust building between national qualifications frameworks, contributing to the wider and strategic objectives of regional cooperation, notably good quality qualifications, transparency and mutual trust, facilitation of recognition of qualifications, mobility of learners and workers, and ultimately to free trade and regional integration.

RQFs do not supersede the national qualifications frameworks and systems. Instead RQFs work on the basis of common principles geared towards enhanced transparency and portability of qualifications. RQFs build on shared concepts, emphasise quality assurance, support sharing of information and data among countries and application of common instruments (such as qualifications databases, common guidelines on key processes of recognition and transparency). RQFs also act as catalysts for development of NQFs.

Referencing / alignment (of NQFs to the RQF) is a major milestone in the implementation of RQFs. Referencing is based on agreed criteria and procedures, which are essential for transparency, credibility and quality of the process and outcomes. The use of RQF levels on qualifications documents and databases of the referenced NQFs is a major step towards portability of qualifcations and mobility of learners and workers.

RQF implementation requires governance based on participation of the relevant stakeholders, technical expertise and analytical capacity, a set of instruments supporting transparency and quality of RQF processes, communication, and an efficient information system to support decision-making within a na environment in rapid transformation.

Besides their essential regional mandate and goals, RQFs also play a fundamental role of communication and cooperation with other RQFs and with NQFs in other regions / continents. Cooperation and comparison between RQFs contribute to pave the way to global transparency of qualifications and qualifications frameworks, and ultimately to facilitate recognition of qualifications across regions. This process when fully implemented will play a critical role in harmonising qualifications in Africa and internationalizing African qualifications.

State of play of implementation of RQFs

The history of RQFs has being made in the last 20 years, considering the whole process of initial proposals and reflection and steps taken in different continents: in Africa (SADC RQF) and Europe (EQF). Table 1 summarises key features of three major RQFs (meta-frameworks): SACQF, AQF and EQF.

TABLE 1: **Summary of main features of the RQFs included in this comparison**

FEATURE	SADCQF	ASEAN QRF (AQRF)	EQF
REGION / COMMUNITY	Southern African Development Community 16 countries	ASEAN 10 countries	European Union and other countries with specific status of cooperation 38 countries
ESTABLISHMENT	Established: 2011 Operations: from 2017	Endorsed 2014 by Ministers Economy, Education and Labour	Council Communication: 2008; Revised in 2017
REFERENCING CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES	10 criteria	11 criteria	10 criteria
COUNTRIES THAT REFERENCED / ALIGNED NQFS TO RQF	2 (South Africa, Seychelles); 1 submitted report for adjudication (Mauritius)	AQRF Referencing Reports of ASEAN Member States: **Malaysia** **Philippines** **Thailand** **Indonesia**	35 countries referenced and these reports are **published**. 3 countries have updated referencing reports in 2020-2021 31 countries using EQF levels on their qualifications documents.
RQF SCOPE AND LEVELS	❯ Comprehensive; Inclusive all sub-sectors ❯ 10 levels ❯ Descriptors: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility	❯ Comprehensive; Inclusive all sub-sectors ❯ 8 levels ❯ Descriptors: knowledge and skills; b) application and responsibility	❯ Comprehensive; Inclusive all sub-sectors ❯ 8 levels ❯ Descriptors: knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy

These RQFs share a number of common features and maintain a degree of cooperation with each other. This cooperation has been largely ad-hoc, based on sharing of experiences and dialogue, and is not sustained by formalised agreements.

Governance and implementation of these RQFs is based on shared responsibilities and a participatory approach (Table 2). Governmental bodies have a predominant role and place in the governance set-up, which is a corollary of the fact that NQFs are part of public policy and most national qualifications are awarded in the name of the state / authorised public bodies. In some cases (e.g., EQF) the membership of EQF Advisory Group includes systematic representation of European students' organisations, civil society organisations, business associations, trade unions, and organisations of the sectors of higher education and technical vocational education and training.

The role of implementation management, coordination and secretariat is fundamental given the number of involved countries and institutions, the range of key activities and the gradual development and cooperation approach required for progress to happen.

❯ In the case of SADCQF, TCCA gathers the member states; and in replacement of the Implementation Unit (not yet established) SADC Secretariat supports and organises the activities with support of a group of member states.

❯ EQF implementation is coordinated and steered by the European Commission, working in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group. Funding to support EQF AG activities, research and peer learning is provided by the European Union budget, within the relevant programme.

TABLE 2: **Overview of governance settings of the RQFs**

	SADCQF	ASEAN QRF (AQRF)	EQF
GOVERNANCE	- SADC Council of Ministers - SADC Ministers of Education - TCCA – EXCO; - With thematic working groups - SADC Secretariat (supported by: Implementation Unit) - Funding: - SADC for regional coordination, some capacity development activities - Countries: all costs of participation in SADCQF meetings; NQF	- ASEAN Ministerial meetings: Economic, Education and Labour - AQRF Committee – supported by the AQRF Secretariat - National AQRF Committees - Funding: external sources in first phase; ASEAN for regional coordination and AQRF Committee; countries: all costs of participation in AQRF meetings.	- EU Level: - EQF AG: all countries; European Associations: business, youth, students, volunteering - Chair: European Commission DG Employment; provides also: secretariat and coordination function - Sub-groups thematic (ad hoc, temporary) - National level: NCPs - Technical / research support: Cedefop, ETF - Funding: EU budget
MAIN INSTRUMENTS	- Cooperation AQVN - Guidelines	**AQRF website** - Guidelines and handbooks - Cooperation with other ASEAN platforms	**Europass**: the EU-wide platform supporting skills and qualifications, **EQF**, skills intelligence, digital credentials, careers. - EQF technical notes, EQF annexes, Guidelines Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning - Peer learning activities - Cooperation ENIC-NARIC network (recognition)
MONITORING AND EVALUATION, REVIEW	- In the context of regular TCCA meetings, countries leading on the SADCQF implementation programmes report on progress, challenges and plans. - In TCCA meetings member countries report on their national initiatives and progress. - Systematic way of evaluating progress has not yet evolved	- ASEAN Ministerial meetings - AQRF Commitee	- Obligation to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of EQF is defined the EQF Recommendation. - Two major evaluations of the EQF Recommendation 2008 conducted. - Evaluation of the EQF Recommendation 2017 is in preparation to be started in 2021.

2 THE SADC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (SADCQF)

The Southern African Development Community (**SADC**) s a major Regional Economic Community (REC) consisting of 16 Member States namely: Angola, Botswana, United Republic of the Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Kingdom of eSwatini, Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe i). It is guided by a vision of a shared future, to be attained through regional cooperation and integration in the socio-cultural, economic and political areas.

Development and enhancement of relevant educated skilled human capital is one of SADC broad strategic objectives for regional integration to foster sustainable development of the Region. This objective is supported by SADC legal, policy instruments and strategic frameworks, notably: SADC Treaty 1992; Protocol on Education and Training 1997-2020; Protocol on Science, Technology and Innovation (2009); Protocol on Facilitation of Movement of Persons (2005); the Protocol on Trade in Services (article 7) 2012, updated in March 2017, calls for mutual recognition of qualifications for professional services; SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Road Map 2015-2063; RISDP (2020-2030); Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025).

The SADC Qualifications Framework has acquired a stronger centrality in the region's development plans for the decade (2030). This new impetus to strengthen implementation of the SADCQF capitalises on the outcomes of the first phase of implementation (2017-2020) and aims to incentivize development of NQFs aligned with SADCQF, and work in complementarity with other tools supporting recognition of qualifications across the region. This renewed support to SADCQF is consistent with the place of education in SADC strategies, listed above. In 2020 SADC reaffirmed its intent to give a new impetus to promote and implement the SADCQF, by including relevant measures in two key strategic plans for the decade: RISDP 2020-2030 and the SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025).

The SADC RQF was formally named the SADCQF at a September 2016 meeting of the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA). SADCQF's main policy and technical document as revised in 2017[1] defines purpose, scope, design features, underlying principles underpinning the SADCQF, and governance structure. Annex 1 of the SADCQF document specifies the **SADCQF level descriptors** and Annex 2 – the **SADCQF quality assurance guidelines**.

The SADCQF is a regional mechanism for comparability and recognition of full qualifications, credit transfer, creation of regional standards and facilitation of Quality assurance. It consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to meet the purposes of the SADCQF:

> Providing a mechanism for comparability and recognition of qualifications in SADC,

> Facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications in all Member States,

> Harmonising qualifications wherever possible,

> Promoting the transfer of credits within and among Member States and even beyond

> Creating SADC regional standards where appropriate.

The SADCQF was established as a ten-level reference framework, with level descriptors based on learning outcomes with three domains of learning: knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility. Its scope is based on the principle of inclusiveness encompassing all forms, types, levels and categories of education and training. This includes out of school, formal, non-formal and informal learning; general education, technical-vocational education and training, higher education and various modes of learning, including distance and online. It specifies **sixteen principles of quality assurance** for the government and relevant institutions in every member state. Quality assurance and verification are important objectives of SADCQF, working in complementarity with **SADC Qualifications Verification Network**, and Southern African Quality Assurance Network.

The SADC Council of Ministers, the Ministers responsible for Education and Training, the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA), the TCCA Executive Committee (TCCA EXCO) and an Implementation Unit (IU) are the main governing structures for the implementation of the SADCQF. However, the IU has not been put in place yet, therefore its role is assured by an arrangement of shared responsibility of SADC member states and the SADC Secretariat for the six implementation programmes of SADC. Member states volunteered to augment the capacity of the SADC Secretariat by providing administrative support on a rotational basis, using their capacities (human, technical expertise and funding) in the absence of the IU to drive the implementation of the six SADCQF programmes:

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1 Southern African Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). 2017. **https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADCQF%20booklet.pdf**

Programme 1: Alignment of NQFs to SADCQF - South Africa

Programme 2: Quality Assurance - Botswana

Programme 3: Verification - Kingdom of Eswatini

Programme 4: Articulation, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) - Namibia

Programme 5: Advocacy and Communication – Zambia

Programme 6: Governance - TCCA and SADC Secretariat

Implementation of the SADCQF

A guideline for alignment that contains the alignment criteria and steps for the alignment process (self-assessment exercise) and adjudication process was developed. SADC Member States have started aligning their NQFs to the SADCQF using the guideline. To date, two countries have completed the alignment process (South Africa[2] and Seychelles[3]), and Mauritius[4] has adjudicated its alignment report to SADC Secretariat for validation.

TABLE 3: **Alignment criteria of SADCQF**

SADCQF ALIGNMENT CRITERIA
1. Responsibilities of relevant national bodies involved in the alignment process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities;
2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between qualification levels in the NQF/ National Qualification System (NQS) and level descriptors of the SADCQF;
3. The NQF/ NQS is based on learning outcomes and links to non-formal and informal learning and credit systems (where these exist);
4. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or describing the place of qualifications in the NQS are transparent;
5. The National Quality Assurance System for education and training refers to the NQF or NQS and is consistent with quality assurance guidelines of the SADCQF;
6. There is a clear indication of the relevant national authorities responsible for the verification of the qualifications obtained in the national system;
7. The alignment process shall include a stated agreement of relevant quality assurance bodies;
8. Competent national bodies shall certify the alignment of the NQF/ NQS with the SADCQF. A comprehensive report on alignment and its evidence must be published by competent national bodies;
9. The official platform of the country must provide for a public comment process for the alignment report; and
10. Clear plans have been made to make changes to legislation and policy supporting alignment to SADCQF levels on new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent authorities.

2 Final report: SAQA (2019), Report on the alignment of the South Africa National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) to the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). **https://www.saqa.org.za/sites/default/files/2020-02/SADCQF%20alignment%20report%20%28js%2907012020.pdf**

3 Draft report: SQF (2018), Draft Report on the Alignment of the Seychelles National Qualifications Framework (SNQF) to the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). **http://www.sqa.sc/Resources/DocsForComment/DraftReportAlignmentSeychellesNQFSADCQF.pdf**

4 MQA (2019), Report on alignment of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Mauritius to the SADC Qualifications Framework. **http://www.mqa.mu/English/Documents/FS/Report15042019.pdf**

5 ACQF. 2021. Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework – Mapping report. AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability Programme – SIFA Technical Cooperation. **https://www.nepad.org/skillsportalforyouth/publication/african-continental-qualifications-framework-acqf-mapping-study**

To support implementation, SADCQF developed a set information booklets and infographics for accessible dissemination, and Guidelines. The SADC 'Qualifications Recognition Manual' (12/2020) was elaborated by a Task Team of country representatives (Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia). The ´Guidelines for SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer' (SADC-CATS) were presented to TCCA in October 2020 and reviewed for validation in April 2021.

State of play of NQF development in SADC

Over 50% of SADC member states have comprehensive NQFs, encompassing all levels and sub-sectors of education and training: (i) six countries have NQFs operational for some time and even reviewed: Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia; (ii) three countries have NQFs in place (legal act approved, implementation started): Eswatini, Lesotho, Zimbabwe; (iii) five other countries are at stage of development and consultation of their NQFs, some with good progress in 2020: Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Madagascar. Two countries are at very early thinking stage of NQF development: Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Lesotho and Eswatini have the most recent NQFs (approved in 2019 and 2020, respectively, with guidelines and tools).

Some countries have operational qualifications frameworks of sectoral scope (VET and higher education), and at the same time started developing integrated / comprehensive NQFs - case of Mozambique.

In the context of the construction of a reformed National Qualifications System, Angola has developed a 10-level NQF, which integrates also a comprehensive technical and policy proposal for the register of qualifications, governance setting and system of validation of non-formal and informal learning - this package is in the legislative consultation process at the moment of writing of this report.

Four countries are piloting a regional E-certificate initiative (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia).

Countries such as **Botswana**, **Mauritius**, **Namibia**, **Seychelles**, **South Africa**, and **Zambia** have well established National Qualifications Authorities, responsible for the integrity of the NQF, national qualifications databases, registration of qualifications, verification of qualifications, setting of standards and dissemination of information for end-users via websites, digital services.

The ten-level structure is used by all comprehensive NQFs in SADC, whatever the stage of development. Examples of domains of level descriptors applied in SADC NQFs:

1. Knowledge, skills and competence (Botswana)

2. Knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility (Mozambique, Angola) – comprehensive NQFs in advanced stage of development.

3. Areas of knowledge; nature of skills; agency and context (Lesotho)

4. Degree of complexity; reasoning & problem solving; knowledge; autonomy and responsibility (Zambia)

5. Applied competencies: Scope of knowledge; Knowledge literacy; Method and procedure; Problem solving; Ethics and professional practice; Accessing, processing and managing information; Producing and communicating information; Context and systems; Management of learning; Accountability (South Africa).

International dimensions of SADCQF

SADC has the most advanced regional qualifications framework in Africa. SADC development strategy 2030 contains measures dedicated to strengthen and consolidate implementation of SADCQF. The number of countries referencing to SADCQF is expected to grow in the coming years, as a result of new support measures and availability of resources.

From the launch of implementation in 2017, SADCQF sought cooperation and peer learning with other regional frameworks The SADCQF is currently not referenced to any continental or other regional qualifications frameworks, but has benchmarked with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and EQF in terms of the level descriptors, coordination and implementation mechanisms of these regional qualifications frameworks. The benchmarking was facilitated by a study[6] that compared, among others, the SADCQF with three NQFs and with ASEAN QRF and EQF. In 2017 TCCA EXCO undertook a peer learning visit to the EU to study the EQF institutional arrangements and their applicability to the SADCQF.

The alignment / referencing criteria of SADCQF, EQF and ASEAN QRF are very similar. Member states of these three regional frameworks (SADCQF, ASEAN QRF and EQF) use similar / comparable criteria to reference / align to the respective reference qualifications framework.

Cultural and political sensitivity embedded in SADCQF principles shall be given consideration in managing the comparison exercises with other RQFs: 'The SADCQF will facilitate interaction with relevant international developments and standards in a way that enhances the global standing of and respect for the region while effectively affirming local cultures, values and good practices.'

6 Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework: Analytical Review of Level Descriptors. 2017.
https://www.academia.edu/32433237/Southern_African_Development_Community_Regional_Qualifications_Framework_Analytical_Review_of_Level_Descriptors

3 THE ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (AQRF)

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): comprises 10 nations - Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos (the Lao People's Democratic Republic), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

Features

ASEAN QRF was endorsed in 2014 by the ASEAN Economic Ministers and ASEAN Education Ministers. It is an eight-level qualifications reference framework, with level descriptors based on the domains of learning: a) knowledge and skills; b) application and responsibility.

The framework is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance principles and broad standards related to: (i) the functions of the registering and accrediting agencies; (ii) systems for the assessment of learning and the issuing of qualifications; and (iii) regulation of the issuance of certificates. As such, these quality assurance processes build confidence and trust in national qualifications and in the value of the region's qualifications.

Key sources on AQRF:

▶ **ASEAN QRF. 2018. 'Practical handbook'. A Practical Guide and All You Need to Know**

▶ **SEAN QRF. 2020. Referencing Guidelines, 2020. https://asean.org/storage/2017/03/AQRF-Referencing-Guidelines-2020-Final.pdf**

Objectives of ASEAN QRF

The AQRF aims to support community pillars of ASEAN specifically, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint's goal of achieving the free flow of skilled labour (through harmonisation and standardisation) within the region and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint which seeks "to establish national skills frameworks as an incremental approach towards and ASEAN skills recognition framework". The AQRF is also in line with the ASEAN Charter's objective to develop human resources through closer cooperation with education and lifelong learning, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community.

The AQRF is first and foremost considered a quality assurance tool, using quality as a means to strengthen trust for mobility. It aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) within ASEAN countries.

The key objectives of the AQRF are thus to create:

▶ Flourishing trust with a robust QA system in HR development
▶ Better mobility
▶ More understanding of each other's qualifications
▶ Lifelong learning within ASEAN
▶ A more prosperous ASEAN
▶ A single Community ASEAN Vision

Referencing criteria of ASEAN QRF, are very similar to those of the SADCQF and the EQF (table 3).

TABLE 4: referencing criteria of AQRF

	AQRF - REFERENCING CRITERION
1	The structure of the education system is described
2	The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process.
3	The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualifications system are transparent.
4	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF.
5	The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.
6	The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training that refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system are described. All of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome.
7	The process of referencing had been devised by the main public authority and has been approved by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system.
8	People from other countries, who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.
9	One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria.
10	The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.
11	Following the referencing process, all certifcation and awarding bodies are encouraged to indicate a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level on new qualification documents issued.

Process of building the ASEAN QRF

In 2011 a process was initiated to develop a concept design for the AQRF. A task force on the AQRF, comprising representatives from ASEAN ministries of trade, education, and labour/manpower, as well as representatives of qualification, accreditation and other agencies, was created in 2012. The task force was set up under the auspices of the economic cooperation and work programme of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand free trade agreement, with the mandate of developing the AQRF in consultation with stakeholders in the different ASEAN countries. By 2015, the AQRF was completed and the document containing its principles and structure was endorsed by the ASEAN economic, education and labour ministers (in 2016).

Referencing, not standardisation of national qualifications and systems

Referencing is a process that establishes the relationship between the eight levels on the AQRF with the levels on an NQF or qualifications system of individual ASEAN Member States. The AQRF seeks to improve the understanding of the levels of an NQF or qualifications system, and the qualifications that are situated on these levels, across participating ASEAN countries. The AQRF is an information tool that facilitates the recognition of qualifications. It is not meant to replace the decision-making process (as it relates to individual qualifications recognition decisions) undertaken by competent authorities in each the ASEAN Member States.

The AQRF is based on agreed understanding between Member States and, by design, aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) of ASEAN Member States. It invites voluntary engagement from countries and does not require changes to national qualifications systems. The AQRF respects the Member States' specific structures and processes.

The most recent developments in the AQRF are:
- ❯ New Referencing Guidelines
- ❯ An agreed workplan for the next 5 years
- ❯ Utilising AQRF as a reference for supporting the ASEAN Diploma (as in Insurance professional)
- ❯ Harmonising the AQRF with other platforms developed by ASEAN

Governance of ASEAN QRF
AQRF governance and structure document was endorsed by ASEAN labour and education ministers in May 2016, and by economic ministers in August 2016. Governance is assured through three main levels:

- ❯ **ASEAN Ministerial meetings:** Economic, Education and Labour
- ❯ **AQRF Committee** – supported by the AQRF Secretariat
- ❯ **National AQRF Committees**

The AQRF Committee is a high level executive committee that engages with the complex policy and technical issues arising from implementation and evolution of a regional qualifications framework. The Committee is able to draw on its membership for up-to-date information from each ASEAN Member State and is regarded as an authority in its decision making.

The Committee is responsible for building the zone of trust by providing transparency to the public.

FIGURE 1: **Governance set-up of ASEAN QRF**
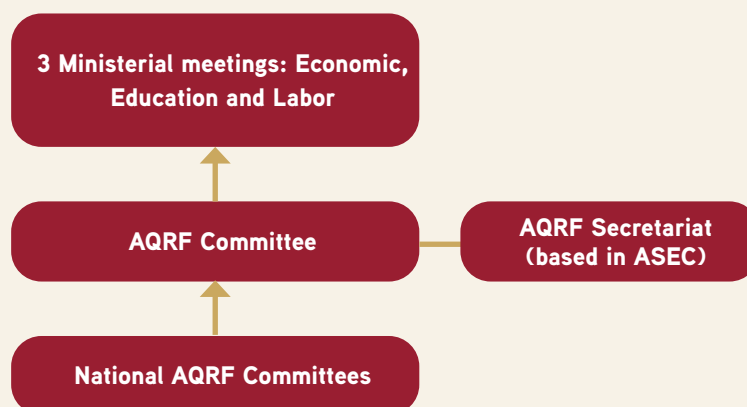
Functions of AQRF Committee:
1. To consider whether or not a referencing report submitted by each National AQRF Committee meets the AQRF referencing criteria and advises the National AQRF Committee on how all the criteria could be met.
2. To promote the use of the AQRF among AMS to enable support for lifelong learning.
3. To promote the quality assurance processes that underpin the AQRF and to foster the use of quality assurance frameworks as a benchmark.
4. To facilitate the AQRF process in addressing emerging regional and international qualifications framework issues in regional and international arena, including linkages to qualifications recognition.
5. To enhance the effectiveness of the AQRF by monitoring and evaluating its implementation, including review of the AQRF Committee's membership, operations and its TOR.
6. To periodically report to the three ASEAN Ministerial bodies on progress and activities and on further strategic steps to improve regional and national consistency and relevance.
7. To provide information and advice on the AQRF to interested parties. 8. To share approaches for further capacity building related to AQRF among AMS.

Membership:
1. Membership of the AQRF Committee shall comprise one representative one from each AMS. Each AMS can nominate an alternative.

2. Each AMS can determine the size and form of the country's delegation of observers to support the country representative.

3. The AQRF Committee may invite observers/technical experts to the AQRF Committee Meetings.

Chairpersonship:

1. The Chairpersonship of the AQRF Committee will be rotated every two years in alphabetical order. In case the next country inline is not ready to assume the Chairpersonship, the country can forego its turn.
2. The AQRF Committee through its Chair will report to the three ASEAN Ministerial Bodies.
3. The Vice Chair shall assist the Chair and assume the Chairpersonship in his or her absence. The Vice Chair will come from the AMS that is scheduled to chair the AQRF after an incumbent Chair.

AQRF Secretariat
Functions of AQRF Secretariat

1. To serve as the regional coordinating point on AQRF.

2. To provide administrative support to the AQRF Committee including servicing meetings and maintaining repository of information and decisions of the AQRF Committee, as well as information sharing with relevant stakeholders e.g. SEAMEO.
3. To assist the AQRF Committee in promoting AQRF including drafting communication strategies and maintaining the AQRF website.
4. To inform the AQRF Committee of funding/development partners interested in supporting AQRF and support in the design and/or implementation of regional projects as required.

National AQRF Committee

The National AQRF Committee is the body that is the interface between the national policy making bodies and national qualifications agencies and the AQRF Committee. The Committee considers information from AQRF Committee and is the single source of national information and AQRF implementation progress coming to the AQRF Committee. The Committee represents the main stakeholders in qualifications in the country (within the constraints of keeping membership to a manageable level). The discussions in the Committee can be considered to be well informed, expert and cognisant of policy positions in the country. The Committee will be responsible for the Referencing report but it may not be directly engaged in writing the report or conducting the referencing process.

Function: to act as the focal point for the AQRF in each AMS.

Resourcing and Sustainability:

- In the transition phase (2016-2018), the AQRF activities and establishment of the AQRF Committee are to be supported externally.
- Once the AQRF Committee has been established, the Chair of the AQRF Committee will host the meeting and cover the required meeting expenses under the host country's national budget.
- Each AMS shall cover the cost of their respective participation in the AQRF meetings.
- Each AMS shall contribute to the establishment and maintenance of the AQRF Secretariat.

4 THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF)

Features

The EQF has 12 years of implementation, involves 38 countries[7], of which 35 have referenced their NQFs or their national qualifications levels to EQF.

EQF was established in 2008, and revised in 2017 (**Council Recommendation**, 22/05/2017: on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning).

Two main milestones were set by the original EQF Recommendation of 2008: a) to reference NQFs (or national qualifications levels) to EQF according to criteria and procedures; b) to use EQF levels on qualifications documents and qualifications databases, upon endorsement and publication of the country's referencing report.

EQF is an eight-level framework, whose level descriptors are defined by three domains of learning: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility. Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual. Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). Responsibility and autonomy are described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility.

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7 In the context of Brexit, the United Kingdom is no longer involved.

The EQF **Council Recommendation** of 2017 contains six annexes, which define the essential principles and instruments of the EQF, such as the level descriptors, the referencing criteria, the quality assurance principles of the qualifications that are part of NQFs referenced to EQF, principles for credit systems related to NQFs referenced to EQF, elements for data fields for the electronic publication of information on qualifications with EQF level.

The ten referencing criteria of the EQF are defined in Annex III of the Recommendation 2017[8].

TABLE 5: **EQF referencing criteria**

	EQF REFERENCING CRITERIA
1	The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the competent authorities.
2	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.
3	The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.
4	The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.
5	The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this recommendation.
6	The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.
7	The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process.
8	The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.
9	Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.
10	Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

Governance of the EQF

> EU level:

- EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG), chaired and supported by the European Commission (Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Unit Skills and Qualifications), leads the work of EQF implementation. The meetings of EQF AG are the key instrument for implementation of the objectives and work programme of EQF (4-5 meetings annually). On 23-24/03/2021 the EQF AG had its 55th meeting (12 years of history).
- Membership of the EQF AG: 2 representatives per country (1 for the EQF proper, and 1 for the Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning / equivalent to RPL); representatives of Business Europe, EUPME Association, European Youth Forum, and by other civil society, students and educational associations of European dimension.
- RPL ('VNFIL' in EU terminology): the EQF AG steers and coordinates implementation of the objectives set in the Council Recommendation on VNFIL (2012).
- Ad hoc Sub-groups, composed of some (interested) EQF members states and bodies, are established to elaborate proposals or carry out specific analyses and pilots, which are then presented and discussed by the EQF AG in plenary meetings. Examples: sub-groups that explored on: sector international qualifications; horizontal comparisons of qualifications; comparisons with NQFs / RQFs of non-EQF countries / regions.
- Two EU agencies (Cedefop and ETF) support the work of EQF through analyses, elaboration of technical proposals and guides, and exploration of certain themes and issues.
- The EQF was evaluated twice before the revision of 2017, and the new evaluation is in preparation. Evaluations are mandatory.

> National level: National coordination points (NCP). The main tasks of the EQF NCP are to support national authorities in referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF and to bring the EQF closer to individuals and organisations.

> Funding:

- EU budget for the work carried out by the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF;
- EU budget / EU programmes to support the EQF NCPs, and developments at national level (for ex.: dedicated grant programme for development of national qualifications databases).

Role of the European Commission (EQF Recommendation):

> Ensure that the implementation of this recommendation is supported through actions funded by relevant Union programmes.

> Ensure an effective governance of the EQF implementation by maintaining and fully supporting the EQF Advisory Group established in 2009 composed of representatives of the Member States and other participating countries, the social partners and other stakeholders as appropriate. The EQF Advisory Group should ensure overall coherence and promote transparency and trust in the process of referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF.

> Report on progress following the adoption of this recommendation, as appropriate, in the context of relevant education, training and employment policy frameworks.

> Assess and evaluate, in cooperation with the Member States and after consulting the stakeholders concerned, action taken in response to this recommendation and by 2022 report to the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a possible review and revision of this recommendation.

Given its non-binding nature, the EQF recommendation conforms to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality by supporting and supplementing Member States' activities through facilitating further cooperation between them to increase the transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications. It should be implemented in accordance with national law and practice.

Referencing process

The EQF Recommendation invites Member States to reference their national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF, in order to establish a clear and transparent relationship between their national qualification levels and the eight EQF levels. Member States are recommended to review and update, when relevant, the referencing of the levels of the national qualifications frameworks or systems to the levels of the EQF.

Each country wanting to relate its national qualifications levels to the EQF has to prepare a detailed referencing report that follows the 10 EQF referencing criteria agreed in Annex III to the revised EQF Recommendation. **National referencing reports** are presented to the EQF Advisory Group which endorses them if they satisfy the referencing criteria.

Once national frameworks are referenced to the EQF all newly issued qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements), and/or qualifications databases should in principle contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF and NQF level.

The EQF works together with other European and international instruments supporting the recognition of qualifications, in particular:

> **The Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018** on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad refers to the EQF as a way to foster transparency and build trust between national education and training systems;

> Directive 2005/36/EC addresses the **recognition of professional qualifications in the EU**, enabling professionals to move across borders and practise their occupation or provide services abroad;

> The **Lisbon recognition convention** is an international agreement administered by UNESCO and the Council of Europe that allows for the recognition of academic qualifications in Europe and beyond;

> The EQF is compatible with the **Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area** and its cycle descriptors. The framework was agreed by education ministers of the intergovernmental **Bologna Process** in 2005.

> The **ENIC/NARIC network** is a network of national centres set up to directly support institutions and citizens with the recognition of academic qualifications.

SOURCES

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> Webpage: **ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework - ASEAN | ONE VISION ONE IDENTITY ONE COMMUNITY**

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2 European Qualifications Framework

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> EQF. Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF – Note No. 3, 2011 and Note No. 5 – Update 2013. **https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-series**

Markowitsch J., Luomi-Messerer K. 2007. Development and interpretation of descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework. **https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/491/42_en_markowitsch.pdf**

Markowitsch J., Luomi-Messerer K. 2007. Développement et interprétation des descripteurs du cadre européen des certifications. **https://www.academia.edu/33093014/D%C3%A9veloppement_et_interpr%C3%A9tation_des_descripteurs_du_cadre_europ%C3%A9en_des_certifications**

Web resources and instruments

EQF page in Cedefop website: **https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf**

EQF library: EQF qualifications frameworks and referencing reports; EQF series (technical notes), EQF brochure and infographic, EQF studies: **https://europa.eu/europass/en/document-library#documentation_73**

NQFs in the EQF: **https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/national-qualifications-framework-nqf/european-inventory**

Compare NQFs to EQF: **https://europa.eu/europass/en/compare-qualifications**

3 SADCQF

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4 Transnational qualifications framework

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Send us your questions and suggestions!
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