Qualifications and Credentials Platform

Baseline Analysis Report

ACQF
African Continental Qualifications Framework

Date of report: 30 April 2024

Table of Content

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
MC	Micro-credentials
NQF	National qualifications framework
QCD	Qualifications and Credentials Database
QCP	Qualifications and Credentials Platform

Executive summary

Activity 2 of the ACQF-II project involves a survey and webinars with representatives from priority and interested countries. The survey covers various aspects such as stakeholder needs, existing qualifications databases, challenges, desired features, and funding considerations. Two webinars were conducted to engage stakeholders and validate baseline analysis results. The survey and stakeholder consultation process yielded valuable insights into the status, needs, challenges, and perspectives surrounding qualifications and credentials databases (QCDs) across surveyed countries.

The status of QCDs varies across countries, with a few countries possessing fully operational databases, while others are in development or consultation phases. Operational databases range in maturity and coverage, from comprehensive ones spanning multiple sectors to those focusing on specific education and training areas. This disparity underscores the need for tailored strategies to address each country's unique challenges in database development and maintenance.

The survey identified various institutions responsible for QCD operation and development, such as qualifications agencies, ministries of education, and accreditation bodies. However, there's inconsistency in institutional involvement across countries, indicating potential issues in role clarity among stakeholders. Establishing clear governance structures and coordination mechanisms, as well as building capacity are crucial steps for effective database management and sustainability.

QCDs primarily focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), with varying coverage levels for general and higher education. The number of qualifications in databases differs significantly among countries, reflecting disparities in database maturity, data collection methods, and institutional capacities.

Stakeholders emphasise the importance of understanding user needs to maximise the utility and impact of the qualifications and credentials platform (QCP). They highlight the need for a core feature enabling comparison of qualifications and credentials across countries, facilitating co-development, harmonisation, and informed policy decisions. Stakeholders advocate for comprehensive databases covering all education sectors, particularly TVET and higher education, to capture the diversity of valued credentials. Key challenges include technological limitations, resource constraints, and lack of harmonisation between educational systems, emphasising the need for proactive measures to enhance database value and sustainability, combined with providing capacity development opportunities for various stakeholder groups and users, particularly administrators.

Based on the stakeholder analysis and the current status of national Qualifications and Credentials Databases, creating a QCP should have at its core to be a transparency instrument that supports national frameworks, while simultaneously allowing for cooperation. This would in effect enhance the quality and general policies around qualifications and credentials, it would facilitate educational and labour mobility through the portability of qualifications and credentials and lastly should support a more modular and lifelong process of education and training.

The analysis recommends that among the main features of any architecture should be:

- the easy registration and management of qualifications,
- search, comparison and visualisation features for qualifications,
- provision of credible and reliable (authoritative) data on qualifications and credentials to facilitate recognition procedure,
- accessibility for a wide range of user types,

- comprehensiveness, through covering the range of desired qualifications and education and training sectors,
- clarity, with regards to governance and the various roles and tasks for operating the QCP on the national and continental levels,
- efficiency in terms of operation, in order to ensure long-term sustainability,
- scalability, to accommodate currently existing qualifications databases of various sizes, as well as expected future use.

These core-features should be detailed in a technical manner based on this analysis report, transforming the user-needs and requirements and the current status quo, needs and expectations into concrete use-cases as a basis of an architectural design for the QCP.

1 Introduction

The African Continental Qualifications Framework II (ACQF-II) project, in collaboration with the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the African Union (AU), is embarking on an ambitious initiative aimed at enhancing the recognition and comparability of qualifications across the African continent. At the heart of this endeavour, as part of output 3.1 of ACQF-II, lies the development and operationalisation of the ACQF Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP), envisioned as a cornerstone for facilitating educational and occupational mobility, fostering transparency in qualifications systems, and promoting lifelong learning initiatives.

The ACQP Qualifications and Credentials platform aims to enhance trust in qualifications systems across Africa, addressing diversity in education and skills needs. It facilitates recognition of international qualifications, fosters the development of common continental qualifications, and promotes access to reliable information for learners, employers, policymakers and other potential user groups, ultimately fostering mobility and portability of qualifications among Member States.

Central to Activity 2 of the Qualifications and Credentials Platform component of ACQF-II project is the implementation of a survey and a series of webinars with representatives from priority countries and other interested stakeholders with experience in national qualifications databases. Through these channels, quantitative data will be collected via the survey to map existing practices, assess the stage of development of qualifications databases, and understand stakeholder needs, national capacities, and resources. Complementing the survey, webinars will provide a platform for exploring stakeholder perspectives in greater depth, allowing nuanced interpretations of baseline conditions and facilitating discussions on complex questions.

This Baseline Analysis Report serves as the culmination of Activity 2, synthesising the findings from both the survey and webinars. It provides a comprehensive overview of existing practices, evaluates technical viability matters, and identifies the needs of stakeholders crucial for the successful development and implementation of the ACQF QCP. The report is conceived and elaborated in consultation with the ACQF-II Project Coordinator, ensuring alignment with project objectives and priorities.

By providing insights into stakeholder perspectives, mapping existing practices, and evaluating technical considerations, this report lays the foundation for informed decision-making and the design of the proof of concept for the ACQF QCP.

2 Methodology

This chapter will present the survey and webinars, detail participation in the two consultation instruments, present the analysis undertaken as well as any other methodological considerations.

2.1 Background

The project African Continental Qualification Framework (ACQF-II), implemented in partnership with the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the African Union (AU) has launched the activities to develop, test and operationalise the ACQF Qualifications and Credentials Platform (ACQF QCP). As part of the project, Activity 2 aims to collect information and data for the fine-tuning and contextualisation of the proposed concept and architecture of the QCP.

Activity 2 is implemented as a combination of a survey and webinars with the representatives of priority countries, and other interested countries with experience of national qualifications databases. The rationale for the two different consultation methods is to allow for the collection of comprehensive qualitative data via the survey, and, at the same time, be able to explore stakeholder perspectives in greater depth and more complexity during the webinars.

2.2 Scope and data collection

To ensure the highest relevance of the ACQF QCP for its intended users and to inform its technical design and implementation, a survey was conducted among stakeholders and priority countries involved in the ACQF-II project. The survey aimed to gather insights into stakeholder needs, perceptions, and expectations regarding qualifications databases. Additionally, it sought to explore the existing landscape of qualifications databases across African countries. The survey was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the diverse perspectives and requirements of stakeholders.

The survey questionnaire covered a range of topics relevant to the development and operationalisation of qualifications databases. These included:
● Demographic and organisational information to contextualise survey responses
● Stakeholder needs and perceptions regarding qualifications databases, including desired information, intended users, and expected benefits
● Challenges and barriers to the achievement of qualifications databases, along with potential solutions
● Features and use cases desired by organisations for qualifications databases
● The current state of qualifications databases across African countries, including data formats, accessibility, and user groups
● Funding sources and sustainability considerations for qualifications databases

In total, the survey contained 43 questions, with multiple routing conditions, depending on the stage of development of qualifications databases and the type of the respondents' organisation. The survey was distributed online, via an email campaign to the relevant authorities of priority countries, in three languages, English, French and Portuguese.

The data collection period of the survey took place between March 14 and 26. The survey was disseminated via email, primarily targeting the relevant national authorities, such as ministerial departments and various qualification authorities.

As discussed, Activity 2 includes two webinars, planned for consultation with ACQF QCP priority countries. Out of the two, one was held on the 8th of March 2024. The webinar presented the ACQF

QCP project and its timeline, gathered initial input of stakeholders on the draft survey questionnaire and concluded a session on stakeholder needs assessment.

The second webinar was planned for the 16th of April, during which baseline analysis report results were validated and various facets of the architecture report presented.

2.3 Survey and webinar metrics

The first webinar was held online with participants from the ACQF QCP priority countries.

In total, the survey has gathered **39 complete responses**, meaning that the respondents have gone through all the questions of the survey and answered all obligatory questions, but not necessarily all optional questions. With partials, 83 responses were submitted. However, most of the partial respondents abandoned the survey early on and a large number of responses were submitted by the same persons.

The figure below shows the geographic distribution of the respondents across the continent. In most of the cases, there was a single response submitted, whereas Angola, Eswatini, Seychelles (3 responses each), Mozambique and South Sudan (4 responses each) stand out with more respondents.

Figure 1. Responses across countries
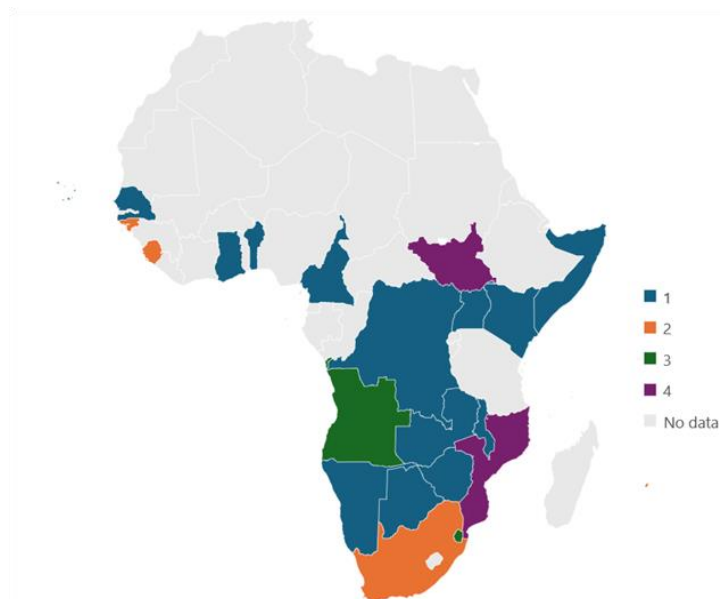
Given the dissemination strategy, the survey is composed largely of respondents from national qualifications authorities, agencies or bodies (14), national government ministries (12) and quality assurance or qualifications bodies (12). Thus, the survey has successfully reached the relevant, high-level national target groups. Furthermore, a few other respondents were collected from education and training providers (2), regional economic communities (1) and another type of organisation (1).

Figure 2. Organisation types across respondents
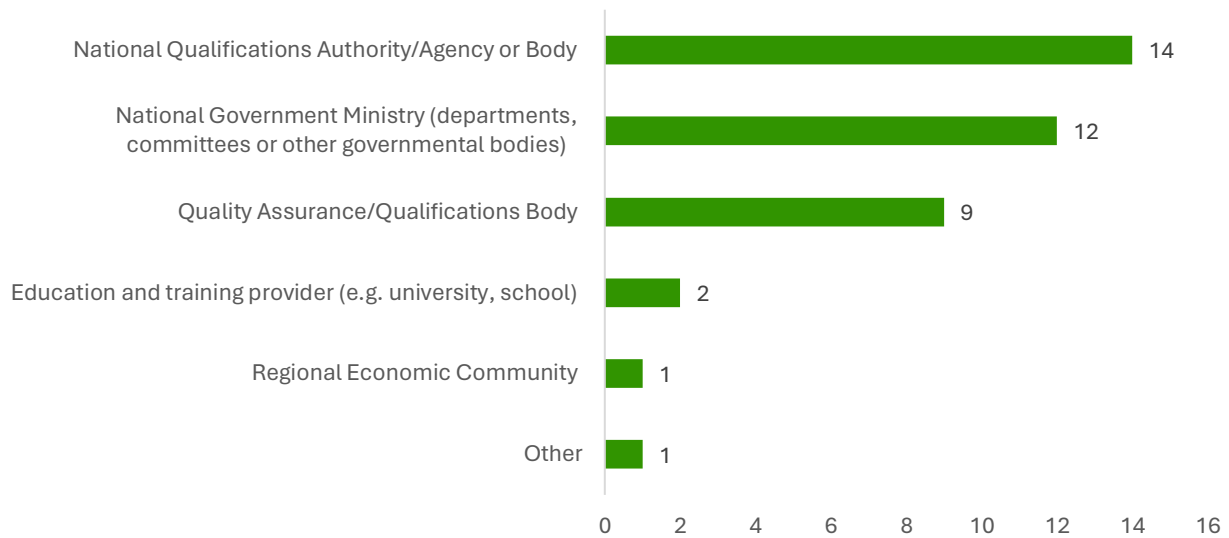
2.4 Analysis

Upon completion of the survey, the collected data were subjected to rigorous analysis to identify key trends, patterns, and insights. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative responses were analysed thematically to extract nuanced perspectives and identify emerging themes. The analysis was conducted with a focus on understanding stakeholder needs, identifying challenges, and uncovering opportunities for the effective development and implementation of the ACQF QCP.

The report primarily presents results by frequencies and absolute values, instead of percentages. This choice is motivated by respondent numbers not reaching the one hundred limit, generally considered the lowest threshold for presenting non-distorted results in percentages.

3 Baseline analysis findings

3.1 Overview of existing qualifications databases

The subchapter will present details on the currently existing databases, using results from the ACQF NQF survey as well as the ACQF QCP survey.

As the proceedings will present, there is a wide diversity of databases, which the conceptual framework should reflect and accommodate. This diversity is not only present in relation to the current stage of qualifications and credentials databases but also with regards to the types of the currently used data formats, the number of currently included qualifications as well as the various institutional and organisational set-ups.

3.1.1 Current state of development and future plans

Following the operationalisation of the ACQF-II NQF Survey, the status of qualifications and credentials database(s) were operationalised via a 5-scale question, specifying various degrees of adoption. In decreasing order, we surveyed the following stages of adoption:

- **Operational.** At this stage, the database is fully functional and actively in use. It contains relevant data, and users can access and utilise it for various purposes.
- **In place** (fully developed, started implementation). The database is ready for implementation but may not yet be fully operational. It has been developed, and the necessary infrastructure is in place, but is not fully functional.
- **In development or in consultation.** At this stage, the database is actively being worked on. Developers are creating the necessary components, refining the design, and ensuring that it aligns with the intended goals. Consultation with stakeholders and experts may occur during this phase to gather feedback and make informed decisions.
- **Early thinking.** This stage represents the initial conceptualisation of the database. Ideas are being explored, and discussions are underway regarding its purpose, structure, and potential benefits. It's a preliminary phase where feasibility and requirements are considered.
- **Development** has not started. No concrete steps have been taken to create the database, and there is no active ideation or development work, and no resources have been allocated.

Results indicate that there are only a few countries with an operational qualifications and credentials database (3) or in place (7). In comparison to the relatively lower number of responses according to which a qualifications and credentials database has been developed, most respondents signalled that their databases are under development or in consultation currently (23). Finally, the last group of respondents, those not having started development or being in a phase of early thinking, amount to the smallest in numbers (6 in total).

Thus, in most of the cases, there is still active work happening on databases, while some of the countries are only at a very nascent stage. While progress varies across countries, the collective efforts toward qualifications and credentials databases are encouraging, as most have begun tackling qualification databases.

Figure 3. Stage of development of qualifications and credentials database(s) (by respondents, multiple-choice)
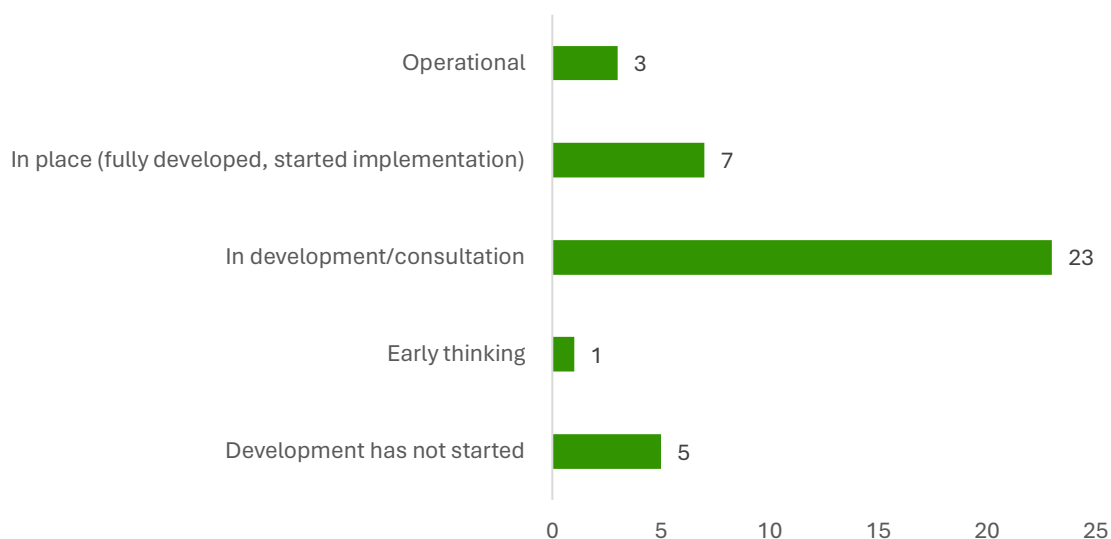
The table below summarises the results by country. Crucially, responses from the same country were aggregated and, if needed, recorded. In the case of countries which did not yet start developing, respondents did not know of any concrete plans or decisions to be made on this matter.

Table 1. Stage of development of qualifications and credentials database(s)

	Stage of development
Angola	In development/consultation
Benin	In development/consultation
Botswana	In place (fully developed, started implementation)
Cabo Verde	In place (fully developed, started implementation)
Cameroon	In development/consultation
Democratic Republic of the Congo	In development/consultation
Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)	In development/consultation[1]
Ghana	In place (fully developed, started implementation)
Guinea-Bissau	In development/consultation
Kenya	In development/consultation
Malawi	Development has not started
Mauritius	In development/consultation[2]
Mozambique	In development/consultation[3]
Namibia	In place (fully developed, started implementation)
Senegal	In development/consultation
Seychelles	In development/consultation
Sierra Leone	In development/consultation
Somalia	Early thinking

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[1] Kept value indicated by the majority of respondents
[2] Repository is already accessible in a PDF file
[3] Repository is already accessible in a PDF file

South Africa	Operational
South Sudan	In development/consultation
Uganda	In development/consultation
Zambia	In place (fully developed, started implementation)
Zimbabwe	In development/consultation

3.1.2 Organisational structures

This section will provide information on institutions that are responsible for the operation of qualifications and credentials databases where the qualifications system is in the post-developmental phase. Furthermore, it will provide data on institutions that are responsible for the development of the databases in countries where the system is in the process of development. The chapter also presents information on prevailing funding sources and stakeholders' opinions on the sustainability of QCDs.

In the case of countries with an operational database, countries indicated a wide variety of institutions and organisations responsible for day-to-day operations. What is more, some countries selected various, disparate entities, which may speak to the fact that the responsibilities are either not clarified sufficiently across different bodies, or that stakeholders are not clear on the exact division of roles. Most respondents (9 of those who answered the question) indicated that the responsible institution is a qualifications agency or institute. Education quality assurance and accreditation agencies were mentioned by 5 respondents, while the Department or Ministry of Education and Department or Ministry of TVET and Occupations were selected by 4 respondents each. Department or Ministry of Science and Higher Education was chosen the least times. The graph below displays the results in more detail.

Figure 4. Institutions, responsible for the operation of the country's qualifications and credentials databases (multiple-choice)
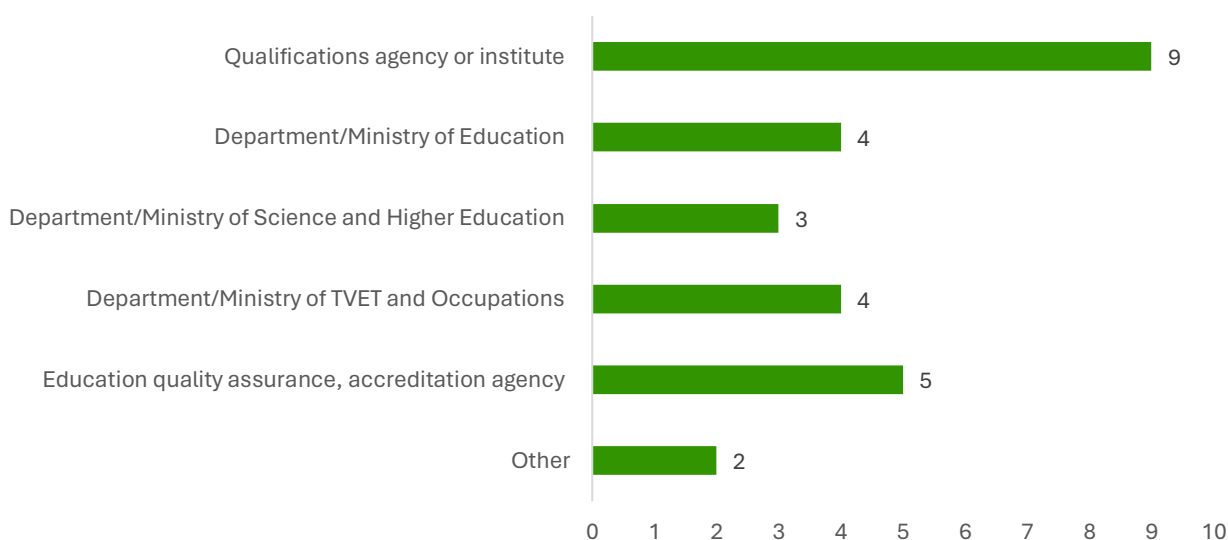
When considering results country-by-country, stakeholders from most countries identified at least one institution responsible for the operation of the databases. Respondents from South Africa had diverse information about the state institution responsible for supervising the operation of the country's qualifications and credentials databases. Two of the respondents identified that the country's qualifications agency or institute was responsible, one respondent each also mentioned the department or ministry of Education, department or ministry of Science and Higher Education,

department or ministry of TVET and Occupations and education quality assurance or accreditation agency. Respondents from Cabo Verde also indicated almost all the above-mentioned institutions except for the qualifications agency. Stakeholders from Namibia also indicated almost all institutions apart from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The representative from this country additionally mentioned that other professional and credential bodies are responsible for the operation as well. This shows a trend that different respondents from the same country usually have diverse knowledge of the institution that is involved in the operation of the databases. More detailed country results can be seen below.

Table 2. Institutions, responsible for the operation of country's qualifications and credentials databases (country-by-country)

Responsible institutions	Countries
Qualifications agency or institute	Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa (2), Zambia
Department/Ministry of Education	Cabo Verde, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa
Department/Ministry of Science and Higher Education	Cabo Verde, Sierra Leone, South Africa
Department/Ministry of TVET and Occupations	Cabo Verde, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa
Education quality assurance, accreditation agency	Cabo Verde, Namibia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa
Other	Namibia (Professional Bodies, and other credentials bodies such as Microsoft)

In the case of countries with a database that is at least in development, respondents were asked about the institutions that are responsible for the development of the qualifications and credentials databases and provided a variety of institutions that contribute to this process. Most of the respondents identified that the National qualifications agency or institute was responsible for the development of their country, which was mentioned 13 times (or by 44.8% of respondents). Slightly fewer times respondents chose the Department or Ministry of Education and Education Quality Assurance or Accreditation Agency, these institutions were selected by 11 (37.9%) respondents each. A council (commission, task force) of stakeholders from the public, private sector or civil society was selected by only 5 stakeholders.

Out of those respondents who chose another governmental or non-governmental institution, one mentioned that another national qualification agency is responsible for the development of the databases, while others identified local governmental organisations. Detailed results can be seen down below.

Figure 5. Institutions, responsible for the development of country's qualifications and credentials databases (multiple-choice)
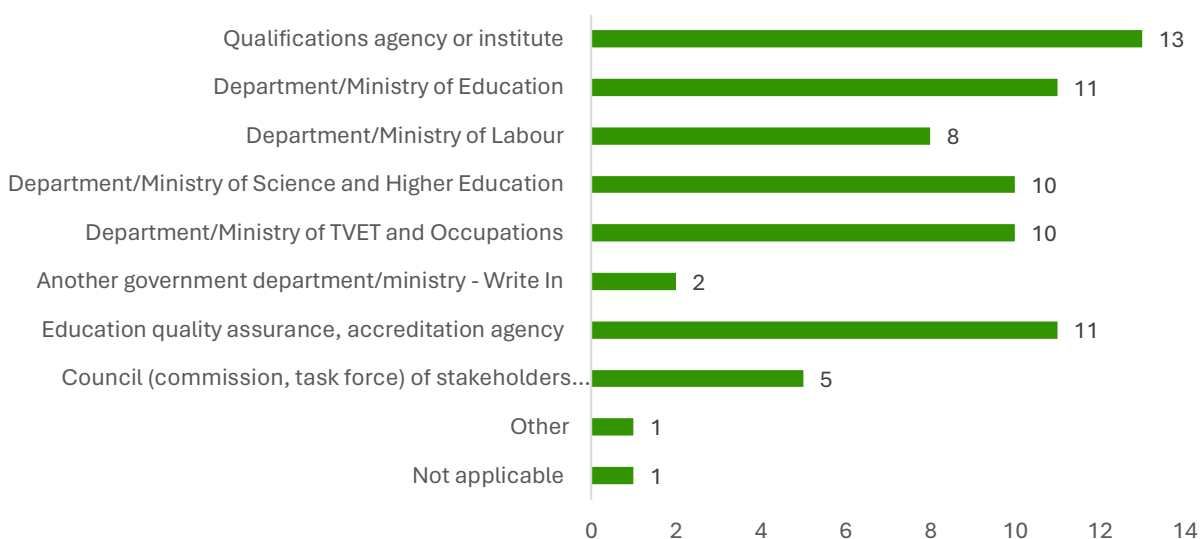
Results also show that most of the funding for long-term maintenance is allocated by the government. Nonetheless, international and private donors also contribute with funding in a substantial number of cases. When asked about long-term funding resources for the maintenance of qualifications databases, the prominent option chosen was government grants, it was selected by 34 respondents (87.2% of respondents). Less frequently mentioned was international donor funding (25, 64.1%), while the private sector partnerships option was selected by 16 respondents (41%). 4 people who wished to indicate other funding resources mostly mentioned that the funding is fully or partly covered by the state's budget. The figure below indicates the distribution of the results.

Figure 6. Sources of funding support available for the long-term maintenance of qualifications databases (multiple-choice)
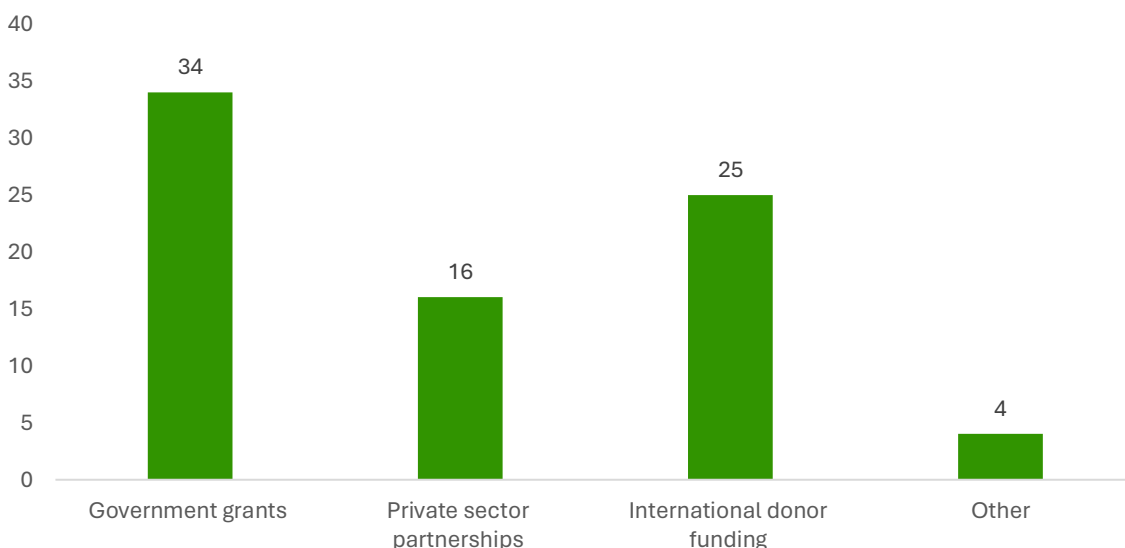
However, only a part of the respondents indicated that the funding is sufficient for the long-term sustainability of the databases. 13 (39.4%) respondents identified that the current funding is

enough to ensure long-term sustainability, while 11 (33.3%) identified that the funding is insufficient for long-term maintenance. 9 (27.3%) respondents could not answer the question.

Figure 7. Are sources sufficient for the long-term sustainability of the databases

Overall, there are a few institutions in every country responsible for the operation and development of qualifications and credentials databases. While qualifications agencies stand out most prominently regarding operation, more parties are involved in the development, including education quality assurance agencies and various ministries. It is noteworthy that a sizeable proportion of the respondents could not answe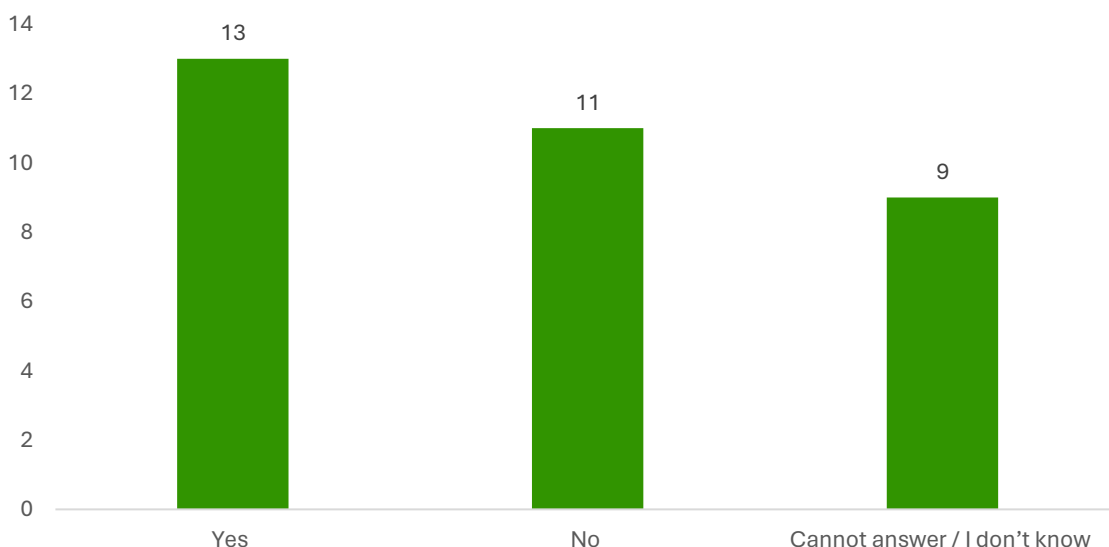r the question on the availability of sufficient funding, even though most respondents were representing official authorities.

3.1.3   Main characteristics of current databases

This subsection presents the evidence collected on the main characteristics of the already developed qualifications and credentials databases, in terms of covered sectors, data formats, number of qualifications captured and other measures such as quality assurance and access.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training is the primary sector for the current published qualifications data (31 or 79.5% of respondents have indicated that TVET is currently publishing data). Furthermore, to a lesser extent, general education (20, or 51.5% of those who answered) and higher education (24, 61.5%) are also more prominent sectors (see figure below). In comparison, qualifications from outside the formal education system (6), adult education (6) and other sectors (2) are much less frequently published. Only in one case are all the listed options providing qualifications data.

Consequently, the three most selected sectors, TVET, higher education, and general education may be regarded as priority sectors, given that qualifications data are already present. Furthermore, while data is significantly less likely to exist in the case of other types of education and training sectors, there are examples of this across the surveyed countries.

16

Figure 8. Education and training sectors currently publishing qualifications data (multiple-choice)
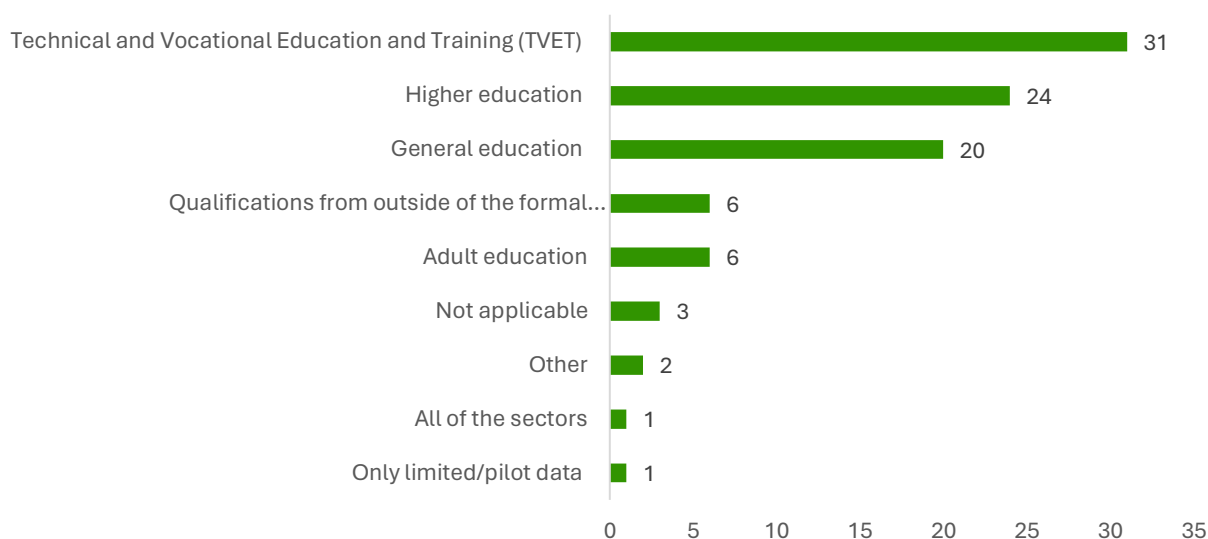
In contrast to the high number of responses related to sectors publishing qualifications data, there is a much lower frequency of qualification being included in the database(s) or register(s). In line with the ranking of sectors publishing qualifications data, the TVET sector is most frequently included in qualifications database(s) and register(s), followed by higher education and general education. Other sectors lag somewhat behind, such as adult education, qualifications from outside of the formal system or other types of qualifications. Please see the detailed results in the figure below.

Figure 9. Education and training sectors currently included in qualifications database(s)/register(s) (multiple-choice)
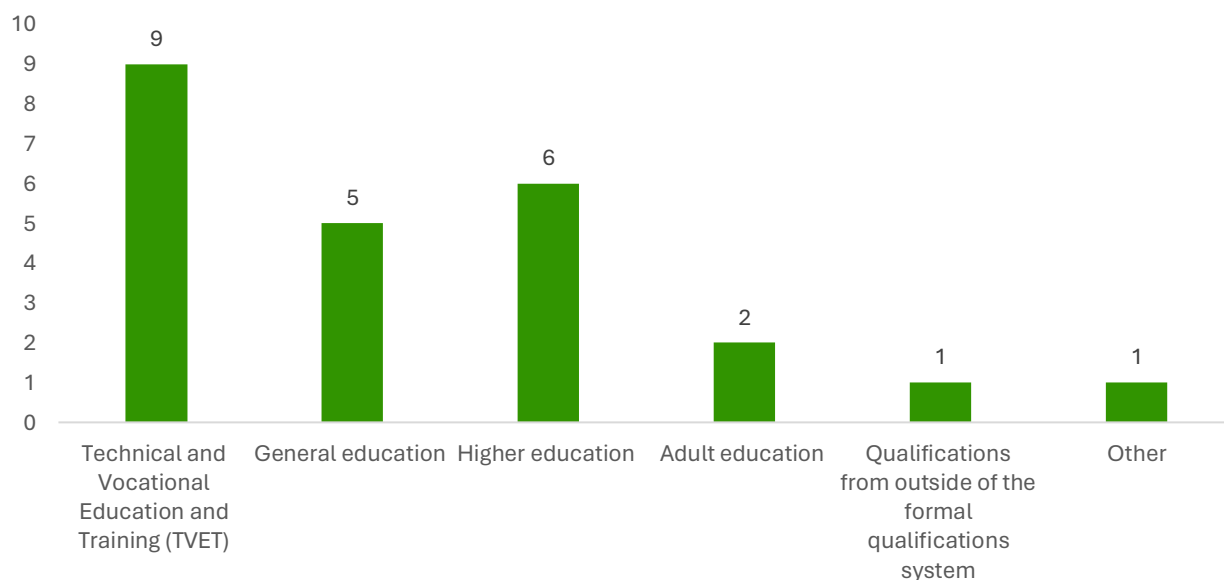
In the case of countries with an existing QCD (developed or operational), technicians tend to use documents (in a PDF, .doc format or similar types of extensions) most frequently (5 times). Spreadsheets and relational databases are implemented in equal measure (2 cases each).

Table 3. QDB data formats used in countries with a developed database

Country	QDB data format
Botswana	Documents (PDF, doc, etc.)
Cabo Verde	Other (provided website link)
Ghana	Spreadsheet
Mauritius	Spreadsheet
Namibia	Relational database
Seychelles	Documents (PDF, doc, etc.)
Sierra Leone	Documents (PDF, doc, etc.)
South Africa	Relational database; Documents (PDF, doc, etc.)
Zambia	Documents (PDF, doc, etc.)

Furthermore, the same countries have reported an exceptionally wide range in the number of qualifications included in databases. While some countries have around 25 or 64 qualifications included, at the other end of the spectrum, some have around 3000, or even more, 8176 qualifications included in the database. Thus, these approximations are a useful indication of how disparate the picture is, even among countries that have a developed or operational QCD.

Table 4. The current approximate number of qualifications included in the country's database(s)

Country	Number of qualifications
Botswana	908
Cabo Verde	64
Ghana	236
Namibia	3000
Sierra Leone	25
South Africa	8716
Zambia	588

Most of the countries have chosen to centralise their data-entry systems. Of those responding, 5 countries have a centralised data-entry method (Botswana, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia), while 2 operate with decentralised systems (Mauritius, South Africa). In one case, data entry is managed by two different organisations, one being responsible for higher education and the other for VET (Cabo Verde). In another case, there is a CTVET institutional-level database (Ghana).

The overwhelming majority of national databases are updated near-to-real-time. Thus, it is clear that the ACQF QCP should also operate in a similar fashion. In the same fashion, most databases employ some kind of data versioning measures.

According to the collected responses, only the South African QCD provides open access to the public. Additionally, in this case, the public is also given the chance to interact with the database via a query interface. No respondents reported that feedback is collected on how the public uses the database.

More of the technical details are presented in a summary table below.

Table 5. Summary of technical details on QCDs

	Data-entry	Update frequency	Data versioning	Public access
Botswana	Centralised	Near-to-real-time	Yes	-
Cabo Verde	Other	Near-to-real-time	Yes	-
Ghana	Other	Near-to-real-time	Cannot answer	-
Mauritius	Decentralised	-	-	No
Namibia	Centralised	Near-to-real-time	Yes	-
Seychelles	Centralised	Near-to-real-time	Cannot answer	-
Sierra Leone	-	Near-to-real-time	Cannot answer	-
South Africa	Centralised/Decentralised	Near-to-real-time	Yes	Yes
Zambia	Centralised	Quarterly	No measures	-

Lastly, a few respondents have also reported the various quality assurance mechanisms in place, linked to the maintenance of the qualifications and credentials databases. In Zambia, a committee overseeing the platform website was put in place to ensure regular updates; general data quality assurance practices are applied in Namibia, with regularly updated data through the maintenance of MySQL systems; another respondent from Cabo Verde explained that data quality is ensured via introducing qualifications only after its publication in the official bulletin, data is aptly standardised and the review of qualifications is required by law every 3 years.

To summarise, the evidence collected reveals several important aspects of already developed qualifications and credentials databases. TVET emerges as the primary sector for published qualifications data. General education and higher education are also prominent sectors. Regarding inclusion in databases or registers, the TVET sector similarly leads the way, followed by higher education and general education. Notably, while many sectors publish qualifications data, the frequency of actual inclusion in databases or registers is much lower, due to the current state of QCDs. Furthermore, the data formats used vary significantly, as well as the number of qualifications included in databases.

3.2   Stakeholder needs mapping

3.2.1   Main user groups

This section outlines stakeholder groups which, in the view of respondents, should be the main users of the qualifications and credentials databases once developed as well as the groups which currently use the databases extensively in the countries where they are already established.

The intended main users of QCDs are distributed rather evenly, covering most of the groups that would be interested in national qualifications databases. Stakeholders claimed that the groups which would be the primary database users are learners (36, 94.7%) and employers (35, 92.1%). Slightly fewer respondents (33 each, 86.8%) indicate that education and training providers and qualifications agencies, authorities or bodies would be the main users of the national qualifications and credentials databases.

Overall, almost all the options were chosen around 30 times or more, constituting the overwhelming majority of the respondents. The one option selected less frequently (26, 68.4%) was the general population. Respondents also identified professional bodies and teachers and trainers' unions as the groups that would also use the national qualifications databases. The figure below displays detailed results.

Figure 10. Stakeholder groups that would be intended users of national qualifications and credentials databases (multiple-choice)

Stakeholder group	Value
Learners	36
Employers	35
Qualifications agencies, authorities or bodies	33
Education and training providers	33
Employment agencies	31
Quality assurance and accreditation agencies	31
Qualifications recognition bodies	30
Policy-makers	28
General population	26
Other	4

In line with these results, webinar participants also confirmed that the primary target groups are the various public administration officials (receiving an importance rating of 4.3 out of 5, where 5 corresponded to being very important) and citizens or students (4.5 out of 5) general.[4]

Out of those countries that have their qualifications and credentials databases already in operation, stakeholders from South Africa and Mauritius have identified user groups who are currently the main users of the national databases. In South Africa, the user groups are more extensive, including citizens, learners, education and training providers, employers and policy-makers. The respondent from Mauritius claimed that quality assurance and accreditation agencies and qualifications agencies, authorities or bodies are the main users of the databases.

Table 6. Current groups of main users of national databases by country (multiple-choice)

Current main users	Countries
Citizens	South Africa
Learners	South Africa
Education and training providers	South Africa
Employers	South Africa
Quality assurance and accreditation agencies	Mauritius
Qualifications agencies, authorities or bodies	Mauritius
Policy-makers	South Africa

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[4] The webinar included a simple Mentimeter questionnaire.

Overall, we found that while learners, employers and education providers are rather more exposed to the qualifications databases, qualification and quality assurance bodies should be considered equally. Although the question on the current group of users showed that citizens are using the databases, this option was less popular among the respondents identifying intended users.

3.2.2 Stakeholder needs and expectations

This section concerns itself with the variety of needs and expectations by various user groups to inform the proposed use-cases and functions of the QCP. For the purpose of identifying features and functionalities, survey respondents were asked questions related to user experiences, needs and expectations.

The survey began by asking participants which type of information qualifications database users would typically need. The second set of questions related to information about the primary citizen needs, while the last set explored the primary needs of the administration for ACQF QCP.

Participants were given the opportunity to select multiple answers from a list of predefined information when responding to questions about the type of information qualifications database users typically need. All options provided were deemed relevant since they were chosen a significant number of times. However, some pieces of information were considered slightly more important than others.

The most important information users would typically need, were chosen by over ¾ of survey participants. The 'level of the qualification' (33 respondents), the 'Awarding body or competent authority' (31 respondents), as well as the 'Accreditation status' (29 respondents), highlighting the importance that survey respondents put on the relation between qualifications and their authority.

Another frequently requested date of information is the 'Learning outcomes' with 29 survey respondents (or 76.3%), ascertaining the importance of the learners' perspective by the respondents.

Even the least requested data of information from the list 'Possibilities to acquire the qualification', was still chosen by 17 respondents (almost 50%), showing that none of the choices of information provided through the survey to participants were considered irrelevant per se.

Among the free text answers, information on the 'dissemination of the National Skills System and Qualification types' was named as additional information that users would typically need.

Figure 11. Type of information that qualifications database users typically need (multiple-choice)
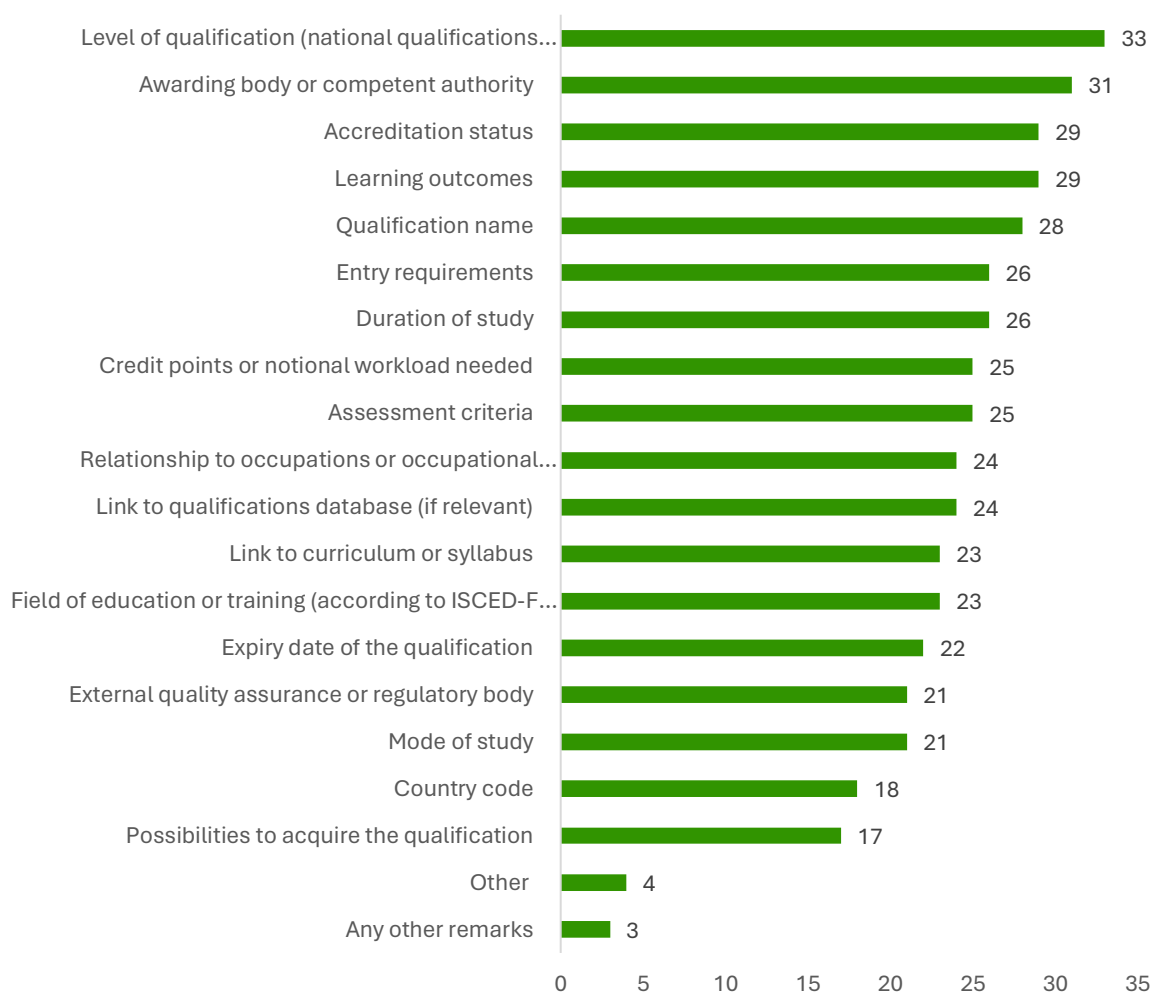
To gain a better understanding of the potential features of the QCP, survey respondents were asked to outline the primary citizen needs. This information provides insights into the perception of the most relevant user requirements and would inform the identification and prioritisation of potential QCP features and functionalities.

When it comes to perceived citizen needs, the 'increased recognition and comparability of qualifications across countries' was almost unanimously chosen as the most relevant need with 36 (or 94.7%) of respondents selecting this answer.

Other important citizen needs identified were 'enhancing mobility of both learners and workers' with 32 answers (84.2%), and the general 'Increase transparency and trust in the qualifications systems across borders' (34 answers or 89.5%).

Additionally, although slightly less emphasised, more than half of the survey respondents highlighted the importance of three other citizen needs: 'assist students and learners in pursuing educational advancement across borders', 'support lifelong learning initiatives by providing clear pathways of development' and 'support the verification of credentials (e.g. digital credentials)'.

The least chosen need with only 11 (or 28.9%) responses was the 'speed-up and improvement of the recognition of foreign qualifications. Detailed information can be found in the figure below.

Figure 12. Primary citizen needs the ACQF qualifications and credentials platform is expected to satisfy (multiple-choice)
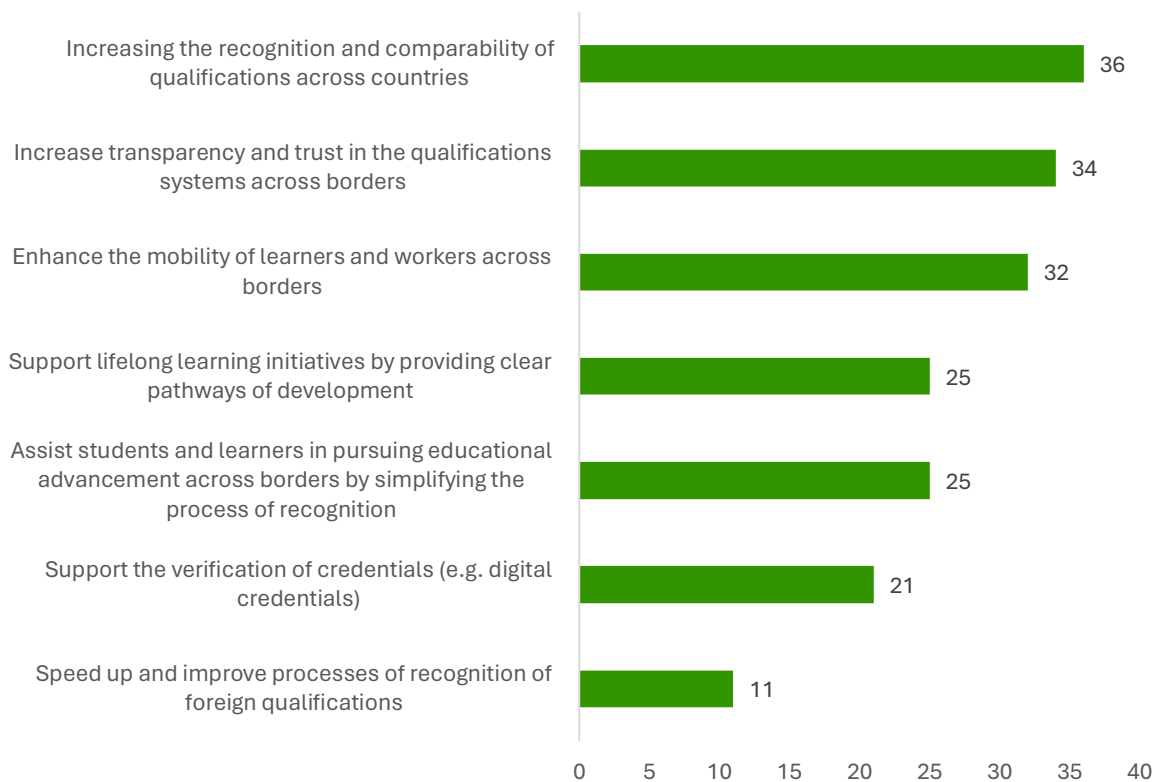
As one of the main stakeholders of the ACQF QCP will be its administrators, which will largely decide on its success when initially adopting the platform and during its everyday operation, the third question focused on identifying the primary needs of these administrators for the ACQF qualifications and credentials database. Participants were asked to select up to 5 needs from a predefined list.

By far the most chosen need for administrators according to the survey respondents is the need to 'develop and harmonise qualifications with other nations, ensuring consistency and comparability across borders' with 35 survey respondents (corresponding to 92.1%).

Another primary need considered as important with 28 survey respondents selecting it (or 73.7%), is the 'provision of a comprehensive reference for policymakers to develop and implement education and training policies in line with continental standards.' This is in line with the key premise of the ACQF QCP being a transnational platform.

Most of the other listed needs were chosen by roughly half of the survey respondents as can be seen in Figure 12. The only need not considered important and only chosen by 2 respondents (5.3%) is the need for assessing the state of qualifications in other countries of the continent. This shows the importance that survey participants put on the autonomy of each AU member state.

3.2.3   Desired features and functionalities

This section will detail the primary features and functionalities the different stakeholder groups are interested in as related to the likely use cases of ACQF QCP.

Just as important as identifying baseline user requirements for the most relevant target groups of the QCP are the demands for features and functionalities of the platform. Survey participants were therefore asked two questions in relation to features and functionalities. The first question allowed them to choose among a list of predefined features they would be most likely to use, while the second question prompted them to detail how their organisation would use the qualifications and credentials database(s), giving them the chance to provide a more detailed elaboration to identify potential functions and features.

When choosing from the predefined list, three features stand out as the most requested by survey participants. The 'comparison of different qualifications and credentials to understand their value' was chosen by 36 (or 94.7%). The same number of participants (36) chose 'verifying the authenticity of qualifications and credentials' as a highly requested feature of the platform, making these two the most requested features.

The comparison feature can be understood as particularly important not only to a single but to all user groups, as it allows for fulfilling several needs identified by survey respondents in the use-case question, such as increasing transparency, recognition and comparability of qualifications more broadly.

The fact that the verification feature was chosen as one of the two most desired features underpins the finding that survey participants put a high value on the general authority of qualifications.

The feature with the second highest number of respondents was the base-line feature of 'registration of qualifications'. It is pivotal for participants, as it provides a foundational element to the ACQF QCP.

The least desired feature is the guidance for career choices, which still has a considerable number of participants choosing it with 16 (or 42.1%) selections. The only free text answers pinpointed the feature of 'Guidance on study pathways offered by Accredited institutions' as a potential feature. More broadly speaking, a feature allowing for guidance services is thus understood as a secondary feature. The figure below shows the detailed answers.

Figure 14. Primary features of a qualifications and credentials database most likely to be used by the survey participants' organisation (multiple-choice)
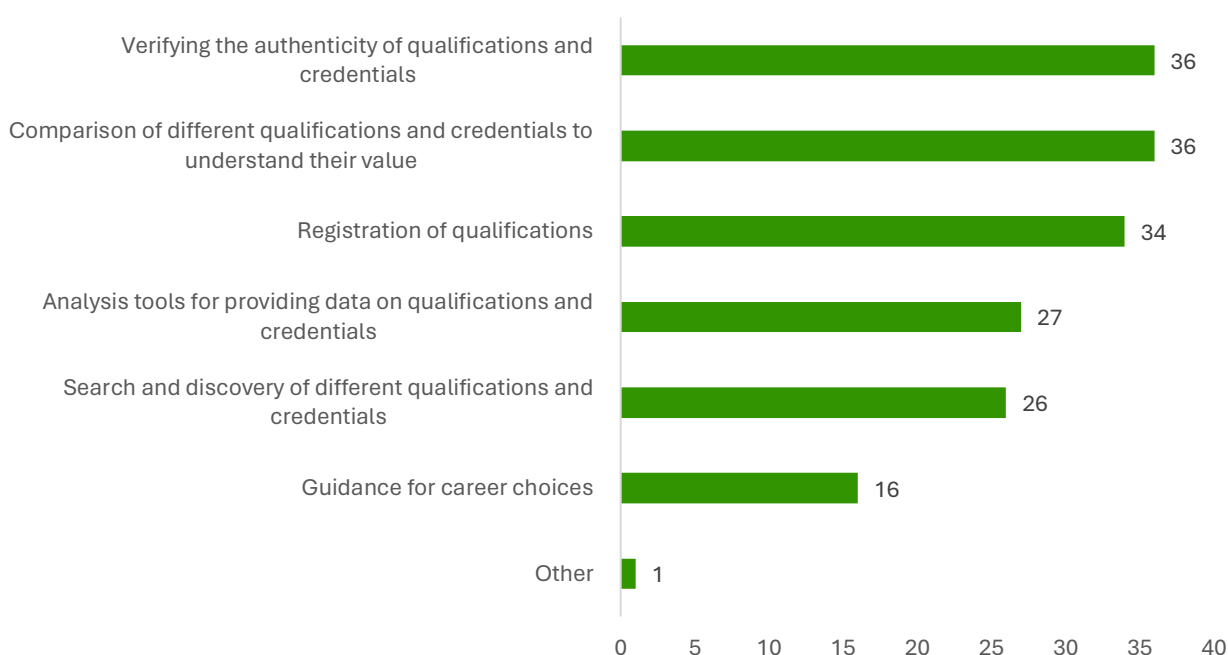
All survey respondents were asked to detail how their organisation would use the qualifications and credentials database(s). Depending on the organisational type (see 2.3 Survey and webinar metrics), they were additionally provided with a short list of examples. The answers were given in free-text format.

Due to the low number of overall respondents from (a) employer organisations (e.g. professional associations, chambers of commerce etc.) and companies and (b) education providers and higher education institutions, no responses were recorded from these two groups.

However, for the following three groups of organisations that made up most of the survey respondents (quality assurance/national qualifications body; national government ministry or other

governmental bodies; regional economic committees and other civil society organisations or other private organisations), a range of free text format responses were recorded.

These free-text answers provide a comprehensive overview of use-cases and highlight some of the most significant user requirements identified by those three aforementioned organisational groups.

All answers were sorted into 8 categories:

- Comparison and skill gap analysis
- Comparison to identify market needs
- Verification and validity
- Recognition
- Foreshadowing
- Informing policy
- Base-line use-cases
- Others

For (national) bodies of Quality Assurance and Qualifications the most frequently mentioned use-case relates to the facilitation of recognition, which was mentioned by 18 respondents. It is closely linked to the use-case of verification and validity, which was mentioned 12 times.

Survey respondents also mentioned the comparison of qualifications between countries for the purpose of analysing skill gaps (11) and for the purpose to identify and relate to market needs (3). Using this type of comparison but in a more complex manner to conduct foreshadowing exercises on skills needs and research trends was mentioned by (2) survey participants.

Identified as a more generic use-case of using the available data through QCP for informing policy was also mentioned by (2) respondents. Some respondents elaborated on how the available data through QCP could inform policy e.g. by assisting in the awarding of scholarships based on economic demographics or by providing comprehensive learner records, enabling learning pathways or 'progression' for all learners.

As base-line features of the platform, the registration of qualifications was mentioned by (2) respondents.

Several respondents from '(national) bodies of Quality Assurance and Qualifications' also mentioned elements that relate to user-requirements and functional-requirements, such as efficiency and trust in the QCP.

The answers by survey participants from the organisational type 'National Government Ministry (departments, committees or other governmental bodies)' mentioned the comparison for skill gap analysis and to identify labour market needs 5 times. They also mentioned verification, validation, and recognition use-cases, albeit less frequently (once each).

Many answers of his user group were focused on informing policy (8) and foreshadowing (3), where multiple respondents gave elaborate and concrete examples of how QCP data could be used. While these use-cases are very concrete and can broadly be categorised under the informing policy use-case, they show the advanced use-cases enabled through the QCP platform.

Monitoring performance of education providers and analysing the quality of these providers based on success rates was mentioned as a very concrete use-case. Providing both professional, as well as educational guidance for various sectors and education levels was another broad use-case highlighted by several respondents.

Just as the user group of (national) bodies of Quality Assurance and Qualifications, respondents from the user group of ''National Government Ministry (departments, committees, or other governmental bodies)' mentioned foreshadowing and trends analysis as an important use-case for them.

The user group of 'Regional Economic Community' provided an answer that covered the use-cases of identifying skill gaps, monitoring policy, as well as looking at analysing data for educational trends.

3.2.4   Desired scope

The section will describe the collected evidence on the stakeholders' opinion on the desired scope of the qualifications and credentials platform in terms of the covered education and training sectors, as well as the type of covered qualifications.

Results show that all education and training sectors are important for the stakeholders with TVET and higher education enjoying some priority (please see figure below). Crucially, around 40%, or 15, of the respondents indicated that all education and training sectors should be covered by qualifications and credentials platforms. Furthermore, the absolute majority of respondents would like to ensure that TVET and higher education are covered, while the plurality has also selected general education and adult education (17 and 14 responses, respectively). Other sectors were also mentioned, two times (companies, consular chambers, professional and regulatory bodies).

Figure 15. Education and training sectors that the respondents' organisation would like to include in the QCD (multiple-choice)
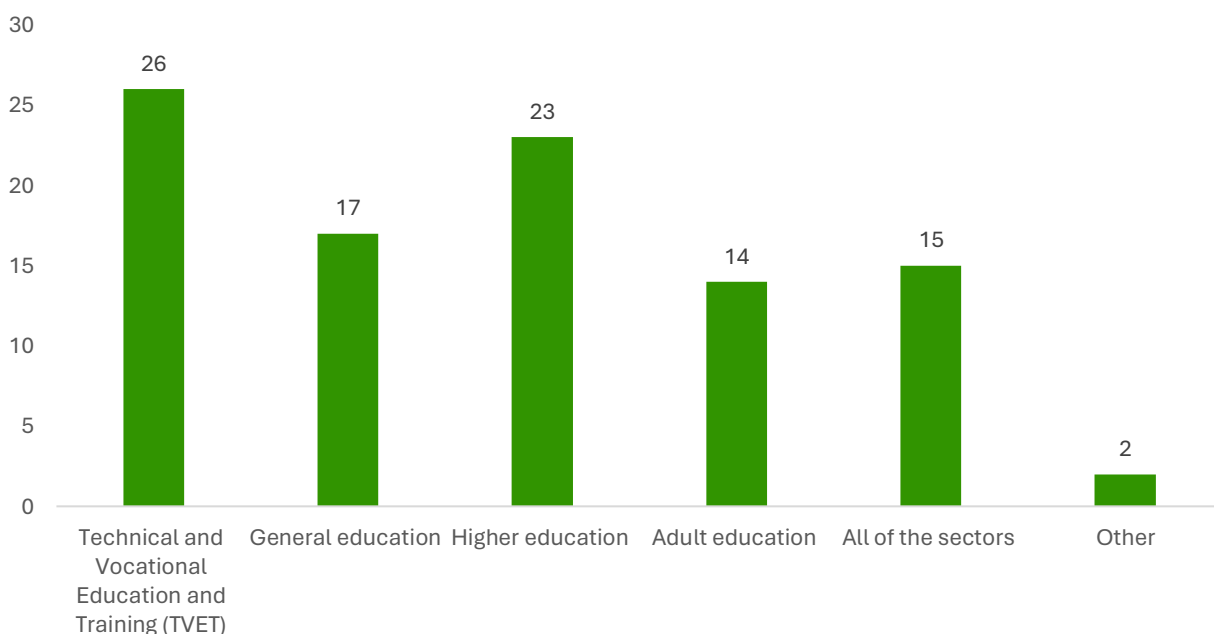

Similar to the sectors to be covered, respondents would prefer to cover a wider selection of different qualifications as well. Four types of qualifications stand out in particular, which we can see as the first preference for the survey respondents. These are qualifications from professional bodies or

industries (35 respondents have selected this item), certificates (35), diplomas (35) and degrees (34).

While differences are not substantial, micro-credentials, part or partial qualifications, international qualifications and other qualifications from outside the formal education system have been less frequently selected (between 29-19 times). Nonetheless, in the case of these items as well, around half of the respondents indicated a preference to be included in the qualifications and credentials databases. The figure below provides a comprehensive view.

Figure 16. Qualifications that the respondents' organisations would like to include in the QCD (multiple-choice)
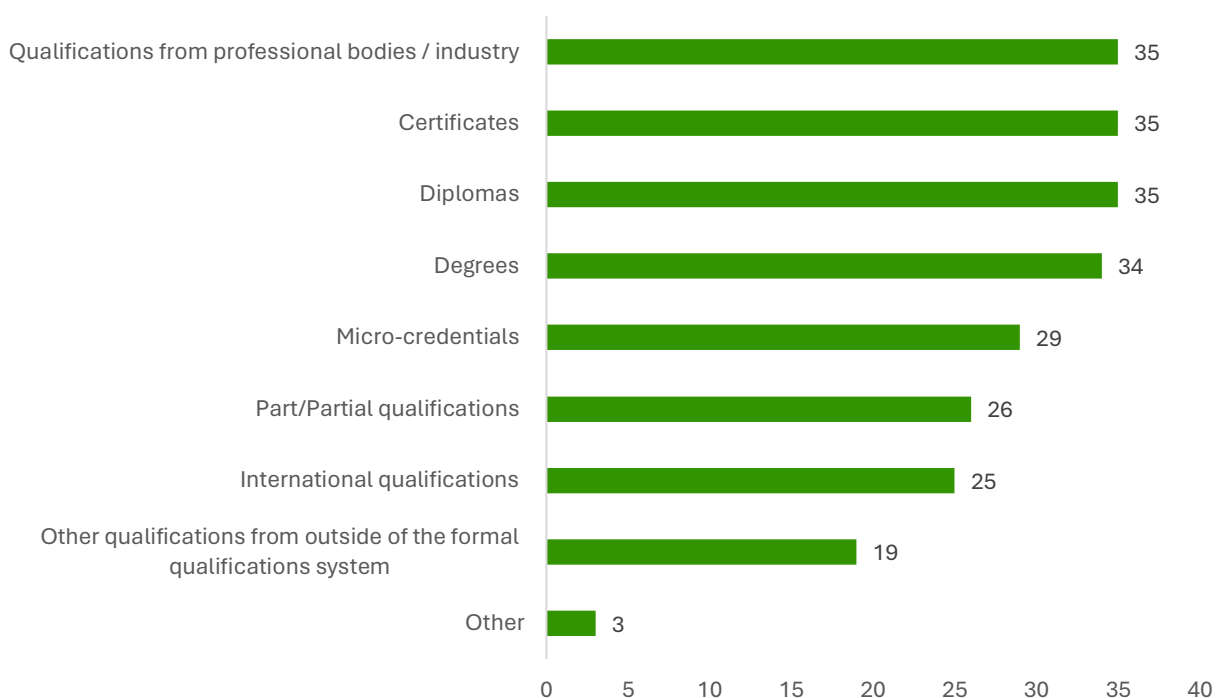
To summarise, stakeholders prefer to have a multi-faceted database. The emphasis on inclusivity is evident, with majority advocating for the coverage of all education and training sectors in qualifications and credentials databases. When it comes to preferred qualifications, stakeholders exhibit clear preferences. Certificates, diplomas, and degrees stand out as essential types of qualifications to be included, which is most likely motivated by the fact that these formal qualifications hold the most weight and recognition. However, the survey respondents also acknowledge the importance of including micro-credentials, part qualifications, and international credentials.

3.2.5   Stakeholder concerns and challenges

The survey has probed responses about various challenges and barriers to the success of ACQF QCP. These may be organised into three groups: three potentially hindering factors are seen as the most salient challenges, four that also have a potentially high impact and another that was ranked lowest. Nonetheless, even those that rank lower, a substantial percentage of the respondents think that the challenges may affect the success of the project to a large or very large extent.

The available technological infrastructure, the resource constraints, the lack of harmonisation between various educational systems and standards were seen as the three main potential barriers to stakeholders. In the case of these items, more than half of the respondents (56.8%, 52.6% and 51.4% respectively) think that this may hinder the adoption of a qualifications and credentials platform to a large extent. Furthermore, the large remaining share of the respondents think that this may be a hindrance to a large extent. Only a small proportion think that the state of the technological infrastructure and the lack of harmonisation may have a small impact or no impact at all.

Quality assurance issues of qualifications, the impact of external factors, the varied levels of NQF development and the existence of economic and social disparities have been assessed similarly. According to the stakeholders, these barriers have a potentially lesser negative impact than the first group discussed above. Still, it is important to note that in the case of these items, around a third (in case of quality assurance – 19 responses or 36.%) or a quarter thinks (in the case of the other two items) that these may hinder the QCP to a large extent.

The cultural and linguistic diversity is decidedly seen much less as a hindering factor. Around a quarter (10, 26.3%) believe that diversity may impede the achievement of the QCP at least to a large extent, while almost half (18, 47.4%) think that cultural and linguistic diversity may be a hindering factor only to a small extent.

Lastly, respondents mentioned 5 other possible challenges as well: the lack of a coordinated national QA approach, the lack of commitment and changing priorities of EU/ETF in the future, the lack of compliance of institutions, the lack of technical support, a lack of understanding the benefits of the qualifications framework. For more details, please see the figure below.

Figure 17. The extent to which barriers may hinder the achievement of ACQF QCP
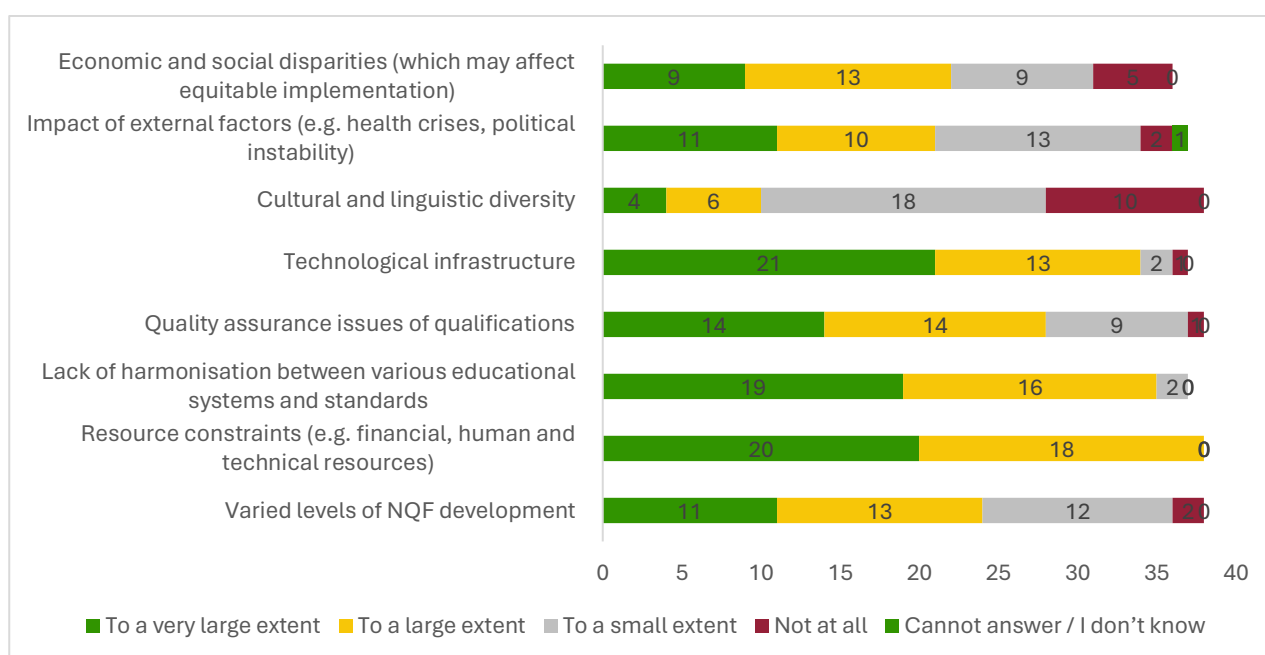
Subsequently, respondents were asked about the solutions that their organisations would like to see in order to address the discussed challenges. To summarise shortly, increased harmonisation efforts, capacity building and training, the provision of sufficient funding, better cooperation across countries and stakeholders, and awareness raising were the most salient topics.

The open-text answers can be summarised as follows:

Sector harmonisation and integration:

- **Harmonisation of qualification systems:** most frequently, respondents emphasised the need to align educational systems and qualifications across countries, since the harmonisation of these systems would ensure consistency and comparability across the board. In this respect, ACQF was mentioned as making an important contribution to addressing issues arising from the lack of harmonisation.
- **Cooperation between countries:** respondents also highlighted the importance of providing a fora discussing challenges, sharing experiences and debating possible solutions.
- **Increased collaboration** between regulatory bodies, providers and the labour market was suggested by a few respondents, as a means to ensure the relevance of the project as well as to counter some of the main.
- The establishment of transparent quality assurance systems and agencies was also suggested by a few respondents.

Continued technical assistance:

- **Capacity building:** one of the most mentioned solutions emphasised the importance of capacity-building efforts and a need for more such events. Strengthening human resources and technical expertise by holding training is crucial for successful database development and maintenance. This topic was the other most recurrent solution, aside from the efforts to harmonise various systems across the continent. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the ACQF workshops helped in clarifying grey areas and other emerging issues.
- **Support for NQFs:** the provision of resources, formation of National Qualifications Authorities, technical assistance, and partner mobilisation are essential to support NQFs across the continent. The trainings and capacity-building by ACQF was discussed here as an instrumental help.

Funding and resources:

- **Funding and resource availability:** adequate funding is necessary for sustained database operations. In multiple cases, respondents explain that resources are crucial for the development and operation of NQFs.
- **Technological infrastructure:** respondents highlighted the importance of reinforcing technological resources, increasing bandwidth, and accommodating the platform locally and regionally.

Advocacy and awareness:

- **Advocacy:** several respondents mentioned that securing buy-in, particularly the political will, is crucial for success.
- Raising **awareness about the importance of ACQF** among politicians, the civil society, industries and academics was regularly mentioned. Respondents underlined that comprehensive awareness-raising is essential. The production of communication materials, and usage of various lines of communication (general, targeted channels; the mobilisation of corporate social responsibility, promotion of careers, and involvement of companies were mentioned).

3.3 Other stakeholder perspectives

In the following, we summarise the open-text comments and suggestions on the additional feedback respondents provided for the ACQF QCP developers in terms of features and use cases. In addition to the stakeholder needs described above, the following desires and points were also mentioned by at least one of the respondents:

- The need for training national technicians was the most recurrent topic.
- Holding thematic meetings for the involved players, the formation of a coordination system was emphasised by 2 respondents.
- Language availability in English, French and Portuguese should be ensured. Similarly, another respondent underlined the importance of accessibility across various types of devices.
- Facilitation of skills relevant to the enhancement of livelihoods across the continent was suggested by a respondent.
- The standardisation of indicators and a flexible database structure would be needed.
- The incorporation of AI tools was mentioned.

Furthermore, the end of the survey included a wrap-up question, about any additional comments that respondents may have. The table summarises these answers across the countries. Below, we structure this by topics:

- **International coverage:** the continental scale in the application of qualifications databases was an often mentioned and positively seen aspect here. Easing barriers for users and ensuring interoperability was a clear added value of ACQF QCP.
- **Technical and other types of support:** a further added value of ACQF QCP was the support ACQF provides, especially in countries where a database does not yet exist. A few other respondents mentioned the technical involvement and support of the project as the primary need for the countries. On a different note, the continuation of ACQF activities, such as training programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, development of various materials was suggested.
- **Funding:** others highlighted the question of appropriate financing. A respondent explained that government grants are often not sufficient for the development and review of qualifications, as the process requires quite a lot of time to consult with stakeholders. Another respondent mentioned that the government should lead funding for the qualifications databases
- **Consultation and engagement:** other respondents noted the importance of multi-sectoral engagement during the implementation of ACQF QCP, to ensure that all relevant parties are included and this way, their buy-in may also be secured

Table 7. Additional comments and suggestions connected to ACQF QCP

Country	Response
Angola	The ACQF and QCP will be of added value to the member states to have a register of qualifications.
Botswana	Development and the review of qualifications is an expensive undertaking since it requires extensive consultation and engagement of stakeholders. Therefore, government grants alone cannot be adequate.
Cabo Verde	In terms of suggestions, I would highlight the need to continue to have multi-sectoral engagement in this process, involving governments, educational institutions, the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach to this process; Continue to promote training programmes and awareness-raising campaigns on the ACQF; Develop more educational materials, guidelines and practical tools to support the implementation of the ACQF; Establish effective governance systems to coordinate and monitor the implementation of NQFs at national, regional and continental level, ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders.
Cameroon	Need to extend activities to all stakeholders.
Guinea-Bissau	ACQF QCP should support the construction of national qualification databases in countries where they do not exist (Guinea-Bissau).
Guinea-Bissau	The current state of the databases is in the initial phase, with the support of the project to relaunch the technical and vocational education reset and the working group set up for the preparation of the NQF, a first draft of the Qualifications Database for Guinea Bissau has been drawn up with the support of various actors and we hope that the ACQF project will have a technical involvement and support.

Mozambique	International coverage in the application of the qualifications database.
Namibia	This is much needed to ensure centralised databases for the continent and the qualifications offered.
Sierra Leone	This idea is very great if achieved. It will ease a lot of barriers that students are faced with, especially for further studies.
South Sudan	Successful implementation should be a collective responsibility.
South Sudan	Our country needs technical support.
Uganda	The government needs to lead in funding the Qualifications Database.
Zimbabwe	Development partners and local industries need to buy in and find ways of mutual support.

Summary

Survey and stakeholder consultation findings

Activity 2 of the ACQF-II project involves a survey and webinars with representatives from priority and interested countries. The survey covers various aspects such as stakeholder needs, existing qualifications databases, challenges, desired features, and funding considerations. Two webinars were conducted to engage stakeholders and validate baseline analysis results. The survey and stakeholder consultation process yielded valuable insights into the status, needs, challenges, and perspectives surrounding qualifications and credentials databases (QCDs) across surveyed countries.

Status of qualifications and credentials databases

The development and implementation of QCDs vary among countries, with some having fully operational databases while others are still in the development or consultation stages. Countries with operational databases exhibit varying levels of maturity and coverage, with some having comprehensive databases covering multiple sectors, while others focus primarily on specific education and training areas.

The disparity in the status of QCDs highlights the need for tailored strategies and support mechanisms to address the unique challenges faced by each country in developing and maintaining their databases.

Organisational structures

The survey identified a range of institutions responsible for the operation and development of QCDs, including qualifications agencies, education ministries, TVET departments, and accreditation agencies. However, there is a lack of uniformity in institutional involvement across countries, suggesting potential issues related to clarity of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders. The diverse array of responsible institutions underscores the importance of establishing clear governance structures and coordination mechanisms to ensure effective database management and sustainability.

Main characteristics of current databases

QCDs primarily focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), with varying degrees of coverage for general education, higher education, and other sectors. The number of qualifications included in existing databases varies significantly among countries, ranging from a few dozen to several thousand, reflecting differences in database maturity, data collection methodologies, and institutional capacities.

Target groups, desired features and functionalities

Understanding stakeholder needs and usage patterns is crucial for informing the design and the different functionalities to ensure maximum utility and impact of the QCP. Stakeholders provided a broad overview of their main needs, expectations and desired features.

One of the main cross-cutting user needs is enabling the comparison of qualifications and credentials, and thus the check for authenticity and authority (verification and validation) of such qualifications and credentials across countries. This was highlighted by the user-needs and requested features of the platform from different perspectives. Having this core-feature would then enable a series of use cases such as co-development and harmonisation of qualifications and credentials, informed policy decisions on subjects such as skill gaps and career/educational guidance and the improvement of recognition of qualifications and credentials.

Desired scope

Stakeholders advocated for comprehensive databases covering all education and training sectors, with particular emphasis on TVET and higher education. Desired qualifications to be included ranged from certificates and diplomas to qualifications from professional bodies or industries, reflecting the diverse array of credentials valued by stakeholders. Ensuring a broad scope and inclusivity in database coverage is essential for capturing the full spectrum of qualifications and credentials relevant to stakeholders' needs and priorities.

Concerns and challenges

Key challenges identified included technological infrastructure limitations, resource constraints, lack of harmonisation between educational systems and quality assurance issues. Stakeholders emphasised the need for sector harmonisation, continued (technical) assistance through workshops and capacity-building events, funding allocation, advocacy, and awareness-raising efforts to address these challenges effectively. Proactively addressing these concerns is critical for overcoming barriers to database development, implementation, and sustainability, ultimately enhancing the value and impact of QCDs for stakeholders.

Recommendations for Activity 1

The development of the ACQF Qualifications and Credentials Platform should keep in mind the main objectives identified through the baseline analysis: enhance transparency, mutual understanding, and recognition of qualifications and credentials across AU Member States.

Based on the stakeholder analysis and the current status of national Qualifications and Credentials Databases, creating a QCP should have at its core to be a transparency instrument that supports national frameworks, while simultaneously allowing for cooperation. This would in effect enhance the quality and general policies around qualifications and credentials, it would facilitate educational and labour mobility through the portability of qualifications and credentials and lastly should support a more modular and lifelong process of education and training.

The analysis recommends that among the main features of any architecture should be:

- the easy registration and management of qualifications,
- search, comparison and visualisation features for qualifications,
- provision of credible and reliable (authoritative) data on qualifications and credentials to facilitate recognition procedure,
- accessibility for a wide range of user types,
- comprehensiveness, through covering the range of desired qualifications and education and training sectors,
- clarity, with regards to governance and the various roles and tasks for operating the QCP on the national and continental levels,
- efficiency in terms of operation, in order to ensure long-term sustainability,
- scalability, to accommodate currently existing qualifications databases of various sizes, as well as expected future use.

These core-features should be detailed in a technical manner based on this analysis report, transforming the user-needs and requirements and the current status quo, needs and expectations into concrete use-cases as a basis of an architectural design for the QCP.